

## **Council's new President pledges support for human rights defenders at organisational session**

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The incoming President of the Human Rights Council (the Council) – Polish Ambassador Mr Remigiusz Henczel – pledged to continue the efforts of his predecessors in ensuring full participation of civil society and human rights defenders in the work of the UN's main human rights body. He added that to make human rights a reality, the work of human rights defenders must be fully supported by the work of the Council.

These positive remarks were made during the Council's 7th organisational session (10 December) for the next cycle, which will start on 1 January 2013. The organisational session was the first meeting with the Council members newly elected by the General Assembly on 11 November 2012.

The new members are (by region):

- Africa: Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Sierra Leone
- Asia: Japan, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates
- Eastern Europe: Estonia, Montenegro
- Latin America and Caribbean: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela
- Western Europe and Others: USA, Germany, Ireland

The members leaving at the end of 2012 are (by region):

- Africa: Cameroun, Djibouti, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal
- Asia: Bangladesh, China, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia
- Eastern Europe: Hungary, Russian Federation
- Latin America and Caribbean: Cuba, Mexico, Uruguay
- Western Europe and Others: Belgium, Norway, USA

In her closing remarks as the outgoing President, Ambassador Dupuy Lasserre of Uruguay highlighted some of the successes and challenges of her 18-month term. She underscored the need for the Council to drive important 'unpoliticised messages' while involving a wide range of actors to promote and protect human rights. The President also highlighted the importance of strengthening the stance taken by the Council on reprisals to prevent intimidation against human rights defenders.

In terms of institutional strengthening, she made reference to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which enjoyed 100% attendance in its 1st cycle. This was a clear reference to the President's [recent letter to Israel](#), inviting the country to participate in the second cycle of the UPR, which is uncertain following Israel's decision of May 2012 to 'suspend its relationship with the Human Rights Council'.

In addition to the incoming President, Ambassador Henczel, representing the Eastern European Group, the Council also elected its new Bureau, composed of Vice-Presidents from the other four regional groups. They are:

- Mr. Luis Gallegos Chiriboga, Ambassador of Ecuador (Rapporteur)
- Mr. Cheikh Ahmed Ould Zahaf, Ambassador of Mauritania
- Ms. Iruthisham Adam, Ambassador of the Maldives
- Mr. Alexandre Fasel, Ambassador of Switzerland

It was notable that the Deputy High Commissioner used the organisational session to congratulate President Dupuy Lasserre – the first woman President of the Council – reflecting the important contribution she made during her term.

Though many States were complimentary in their statements, Belarus expressed concern about the election of a Polish diplomat as the next President of the Council and the 'overrepresentation' of EU members in

important mandates. This discontent was clearly influenced by Poland's leading role in the creation of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Belarus earlier this year.

ISHR delivered a statement requesting the incoming President to build on the efforts of President Dupuy Lasserre in ensuring the Council remains a forum where all voices can be heard, and in particular, in combating reprisals against those who cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms.

The Council's [draft annual programme of work](#) was circulated, and will be adopted on 14 January 2013 at the organizational meeting for the 15th session of the UPR. The draft programme of work of the Council's 22nd session in March 2013 is available on the OHCHR extranet and [here](#).

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