



**EVALUATION OF 2009-2012 UN HUMAN
RIGHTS COUNCIL CANDIDATES**
JOINT REPORT BY FREEDOM HOUSE AND UN WATCH
PRESENTED AT UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, MAY 5, 2009

Background

On May 12, 2009, the UN General Assembly will elect 18 new Human Rights Council members. Twenty countries are candidates. However, each is not competing against all of the others, but rather only against the ones from the same UN regional group.

In this year's election, all but two regional groups have submitted the same amount of candidates as available seats. The Asian Group has 5 countries vying for 5 available seats, the Latin American and Caribbean Group ("GRULAC") has 3 countries vying for 3 available seats, and the Western European and Others Group ("WEOG") has 3 countries vying for 3 available seats. This does not mean that the candidate countries for these groups will automatically be elected; in order to become a Council member a country must receive the votes of at least 97 of the 192 General Assembly member states (an absolute majority).

Competition between the candidates exists only in the African Group, where 6 countries are vying for 5 available seats and in the Eastern European Group, where 3 countries are vying for 2 available seats.

Methodology

According to Resolution 60/251, General Assembly members are supposed to elect Council by "tak[ing] into account the candidates' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto." The resolution also provides that consideration ought to be given to whether the candidate can meet the obligations of Council membership, which include (a) "to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights" and (b) to "fully cooperate with the Council."

Guided by these criteria, Freedom House and UN Watch evaluated each candidate's suitability for election to the Human Rights Council by examining its record of human rights protection at home and its record of human rights promotion at the UN, based on the following sources of information and analysis:

- Its rating in [Freedom in the World 2009](#), an annual survey by Freedom House that measures political rights and civil liberties worldwide, ranking countries as free, partly free, or not free;

- Its rating in [The Economist 2008 Democracy Index](#), which considers a country's electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, government functioning, political participation, and political culture, and ranks it as a full democracy, a flawed democracy, a hybrid regime, or an authoritarian regime;
- Its rating in [Freedom of the Press 2009](#), an annual survey by Freedom House that examines the legal, political and economic environments in which journalists work in order to assess the degree of print, broadcast, and internet freedom in every country in the world, ranking each as free, partly free, or not free;
- Its ranking in the [2008 Worldwide Press Freedom Index by Reporters Sans Frontières](#), which measures the degree of freedom that journalists and news organizations enjoy in each country, and the efforts made by state authorities to respect and ensure respect for this freedom; and
- Its voting record on key human rights proposals, which are classified as positive, negative or mixed based on the following assessments:
 - UN Watch analysis of 2007-2008 votes at the Human Rights Council;
 - Democracy Coalition Project (DCP) analysis of 2008 votes at the UN General Assembly.

Ratings

Based on the above assessment of each country's record of human rights protection at home and of its UN voting record, we find that 7 candidate countries are qualified for election to the Human Rights Council; 8 candidates have poor records and are not qualified to be Council members; and 5 countries fall somewhere in between, with qualifications that are questionable.

Qualified: Belgium, Hungary, Mauritius, Mexico, Norway, United States, Uruguay

Questionable: Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Senegal

Not Qualified: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Russia, Saudi Arabia

For supporting information, see the charts below.

Description of Human Rights and Voting Records of Not Qualified Countries

i. Cameroon

Human Rights Record

Cameroon receives a Not Free ranking by Freedom House with a score of a 6 out of a worst possible 7 for both political rights and civil liberties. Executive power is highly centralized in the hands of President Biya, who has held power since 1982, denying Cameroon's citizens the right to participate in their government in a meaningful way. President Biya secured a constitutional amendment that removed term limits and allowed him to stand for reelection in 2011. Free expression is extremely limited as government officials maintain the power to ban newspapers based on a claimed threat to public order. Judicial harassment, arrests, detentions, and torture of journalists have engendered fear and self-censorship. Courts are weakened by extensive political influence and corruption and various intelligence agencies operate with impunity. Torture, ill-treatment of detainees, and indefinite administrative or pretrial detention are routine. There is widespread violence and discrimination against women, who often are denied inheritance and property rights.

UN Voting Record

Cameroon has a mixed record of voting at the United Nations on human rights issues. Cameroon voted for the General Assembly resolution reiterating the obligation of states on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions but abstained on resolutions condemning the human rights situations in Iran, Myanmar and North Korea. It voted for the resolution on "combating defamation of religions" at the Human Rights Council, which places dangerous and unnecessary restrictions on both fundamental freedoms of expression and religion.

ii. Djibouti

Human Rights Record

Djibouti receives a Partly Free ranking by Freedom House with a score of a 5 out of a worst possible 7 for both political rights and civil liberties. Executive power remains highly concentrated in the hands of the ruling party, which has traditionally used the advantage of state resources to maintain itself in government. Despite constitutionally mandated protections, freedom of speech is not upheld in practice and journalists engage in self-censorship. Freedom of assembly is not fully respected and political candidates and union leaders have complained of harassment by the authorities. Local human rights groups do not operate freely. The courts are not independent of the government and are subject to political influence and corruption. Security forces often make arrests without a proper decree from a judicial magistrate and have physically abused prisoners and detainees. Women continue to suffer serious discrimination under customary practices related to inheritance and other property matters, divorce, and the right to travel. Female genital mutilation remains widespread.

UN Voting Record

Djibouti has a negative record of voting at the United Nations on human rights issues. It abstained or was absent from votes on resolutions at the General Assembly calling for a moratorium on the death penalty, reiterating the obligation of states on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and condemning the human rights situations in Iran,

Myanmar, and North Korea. It voted for the resolution on “combating defamation of religions. It voted for the resolution on “combating defamation of religions” at the Human Rights Council, which places dangerous and unnecessary restrictions on both fundamental freedoms of expression and religion.

iii. Bangladesh

UN Voting Record

It voted for the resolution on “combating defamation of religions” at the Human Rights Council, which places dangerous and unnecessary restrictions on both fundamental freedoms of expression and religion.

iv. China

Human Rights record

China qualified as one of Freedom House’s “most repressive societies” in 2008, with a record of suppressing nearly all fundamental political rights and civil liberties. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) keeps tight control on political power, depriving Chinese citizens of the right to elect their leaders, participate in political opposition, or hold their government to account. Freedoms of the press, religion, and association are severely restricted. Expectations that CCP leaders might enact significant democratic reforms, or even make gestures toward improved human rights, during its year as the host of the Olympic Games proved unfounded. Instead, the government increased restrictions on online writers, human rights lawyers, democracy activists, migrant workers, and individuals seeking to petition the central government over abuses by local officials. Religious and ethnic minorities, particularly Tibetans, Uighur Muslims, underground Christians, and Falun Gong adherents, were subjected to stepped-up restrictions on religious practice, arrests, and abuse in custody, including several high-profile deaths. Serious violations of women’s rights continue, including domestic violence, human trafficking, and the use of coercive methods to enforce the one-child policy.

UN Voting Record

China boasts one of the worst records within the UN system when it comes to human rights issues. In 2008 China voted against resolutions at the General Assembly calling for a moratorium on the death penalty and against resolutions condemning the human rights situations in Iran, Myanmar, and North Korea. At the same time, China voted for resolutions on “combating defamation of religions” at both the GA and the Human Rights Council, which places dangerous and unnecessary restrictions on both fundamental freedoms of expression and religion.

v. Saudi Arabia

Human Rights Record

Saudi Arabia qualified as one of Freedom House’s “most repressive societies” in 2008, with a record of suppressing nearly all fundamental political rights and civil liberties. The kingdom is an authoritarian monarchy in which all political power is held by the royal family and in which the Koran and the Sunna (the guidance set by the deeds and sayings of the prophet Muhammad) serve as the country’s constitution. Political parties and the participation of citizens in political life are forbidden. Freedom of the press, expression, and association are strictly limited. Religious freedom does not exist in Saudi Arabia. All Saudis are required by law to be Muslims, and the government prohibits the public practice of any religions other than Islam. Women are not treated as equal members of society and their rights are severely limited.

UN Voting Record

Saudi Arabia has a negative record of voting at the United Nations on human rights issues. Saudi Arabia voted against resolutions at the General Assembly calling for a moratorium on the death penalty and condemning the human rights situations in Iran. It voted for the resolution on “combating defamation of religions,” at both the GA and the Human Rights Council, which places dangerous and unnecessary restrictions on both fundamental freedoms of expression and religion.

vi. Azerbaijan

Human Rights Record

Azerbaijan receives a Not Free ranking by Freedom House with a score of a 6 out of a worst possible 7 for both political rights and civil liberties. Political control of the country remains highly centralized by President Ilham Aliyev and the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, who further marginalized the political opposition and other institutions of democratic accountability in 2008. Elections since the early 1990s, including the 2003 election which brought Ilham Aliyev to power, replacing his father, have been considered neither free nor fair by international observers. Press freedom is severely restricted and in November 2008, the authorities announced their intention to discontinue local radio broadcasts of key international news services, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), and Voice of America. Freedom of association is restricted and arbitrary arrest and detention are common, particularly for members of the political opposition. Police abuse of suspects during arrest and interrogation reportedly remains commonplace, with torture sometimes used to extract confessions.

UN Voting Record

Azerbaijan has a negative record of voting at the United Nations on human rights issues. Azerbaijan voted for resolutions at the General Assembly calling for a moratorium on the death penalty and reiterating the obligation of states on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions but voted against resolutions condemning the human rights situations in Myanmar and Iran. It voted for the resolution on “combating defamation of religions” at both the GA and the Human Rights Council, which places dangerous and unnecessary restrictions on both fundamental freedoms of expression and religion.

vii. Russian Federation

Human Rights Record

Russia receives a Not Free ranking by Freedom House with a score of a 6 out of a worst possible 7 for political rights and a 5 out of a worst possible 7 for civil liberties. Since 2004, Russian citizens have not been able to exercise their right to participate in government due to the virtual elimination of influential political opposition parties within the country and the further concentration of executive power. This trend continued in 2008, as outgoing president Vladimir Putin manipulated the 2008 presidential election to install a designated successor—Dmitry Medvedev—and retain real power for himself as the new prime minister. Freedom of the press is severely limited and both journalists and human rights defenders critical of the government continue to be harassed, beaten, and even killed with near impunity. Freedoms of association and assembly are increasingly curtailed and a 2006 law imposing onerous reporting and registration requirements on NGOs remains in effect. The justice sector continues to be plagued by problems resulting from a lack of independence and professionalism. Racially-motivated

violence is increasing, with racist and neo-Nazi attacks leading to no fewer than 87 murders and 378 injuries in 2008 alone.

UN Voting Record

Russia has a negative record of voting at the United Nations on human rights issues. Russia voted for the resolution at the General Assembly calling for a moratorium on the death penalty, but voted against resolutions condemning the human rights situations in Iran, Myanmar and North Korea. It voted for the resolution on “combating defamation of religions” at both the GA and the Human Rights Council, which places dangerous and unnecessary restrictions on both fundamental freedoms of expression and religion.

viii. Cuba

Human Rights Record

Cuba qualified as one of Freedom House’s “most repressive societies” in 2008, with a record of suppressing nearly all fundamental political rights and civil liberties. The country is a one-party state, with the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) controlling all government entities from the national to the local level. All political organizing outside the PCC is illegal. Political dissent, whether spoken or written, is a punishable offense, and dissidents frequently receive years of imprisonment for seemingly minor infractions. Freedom of the press is sharply curtailed and the government considers the independent press to be illegal. Independent journalists are subjected to ongoing repression, including terms of hard labor and assaults by state security agents. Freedom of association is severely restricted and the unauthorized assembly of more than three people, even for religious services in private homes, is punishable by law with up to three months in prison and a fine. Freedom of movement and the right to choose one’s residence and place of employment are severely restricted and attempting to leave the island without permission is a punishable offense.

UN Voting Record

Cuba has a very negative record of voting at the United Nations on human rights issues. Cuba voted against resolutions condemning the human rights situations in Iran, Myanmar and North Korea. It voted for the resolution on “combating defamation of religions” at both the GA and the Human Rights Council, which places dangerous and unnecessary restrictions on both fundamental freedoms of expression and religion.

UN Watch and Freedom House are nongovernmental organizations that monitor human rights mechanisms at the UN and advocate for greater promotion of human rights worldwide.

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Candidates from the African Group (for 5 seats)

To replace Cameroon, Djibouti, Mauritius, Nigeria, and Senegal

COUNTRY	FH RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RANKING	ECONOMIST RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR HRC MEMBERSHIP
Cameroon	Not Free	Not Free	129	Authoritarian Regime	Mixed	Not Qualified
Djibouti	Partly Free	Not Free	124	Authoritarian Regime	Negative	Not Qualified
Kenya	Partly Free	Partly Free	97	Hybrid Regime	Mixed	Questionable
Mauritius	Free	Free	47	Full Democracy	Mixed	Qualified
Nigeria	Partly Free	Partly Free	131	Authoritarian Regime	Negative	Questionable
Senegal	Partly Free	Partly Free	86	Hybrid Regime	Negative	Questionable

Candidates from the Asian Group (for 5 seats)

To replace Bangladesh, China, Jordan, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia

COUNTRY	FH RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RANKING	ECONOMIST RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR HRC MEMBERSHIP
Bangladesh	Partly Free	Not Free	136	Hybrid Regime	Negative	Not Qualified
China	Not Free	Not Free	167	Authoritarian Regime	Negative	Not Qualified
Jordan	Partly Free	Not Free	128	Authoritarian Regime	Mixed	Questionable
Kyrgyzstan	Partly Free	Not Free	111	Hybrid Regime	Mixed	Questionable
Saudi Arabia	Not Free	Not Free	161	Authoritarian Regime	Negative	Not Qualified

Candidates from the Latin American and Caribbean Group (for 3 seats)

To replace Cuba, Mexico and Uruguay

COUNTRY	FH RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RANKING	ECONOMIST RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR HRC MEMBERSHIP
Cuba	Not Free	Not Free	169	Authoritarian Regime	Negative	Not Qualified
Mexico	Free	Partly Free	140	Flawed Democracy	Positive	Qualified
Uruguay	Free	Free	43	Full Democracy	Positive	Qualified

Candidates from the Western European and Others Group (for 3 seats)

To replace Canada, Germany and Switzerland

COUNTRY	FH RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RANKING	ECONOMIST RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR HRC MEMBERSHIP
Belgium	Free	Free	7	Full Democracy	Positive	Qualified
Norway	Free	Free	1	Full Democracy	Positive	Qualified
United States	Free	Free	36	Full Democracy	Positive	Qualified

Candidates from the Eastern European Group (for 2 seats)

To replace Azerbaijan and Russia

COUNTRY	FH RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RANKING	ECONOMIST RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR HRC MEMBERSHIP
Azerbaijan	Not Free	Not Free	150	Authoritarian Regime	Negative	Not Qualified
Hungary	Free	Free	23	Flawed Democracy	Positive	Qualified
Russia	Not Free	Not Free	141	Hybrid Regime	Negative	Not Qualified