Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

The United Nations Human Rights Council: Background and Policy Issues

Updated January 26, 2022

Congressional Research Service
https://crsreports.congress.gov
RL33608

CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

SUMMARY

RL33608

January 26, 2022

Luisa Blanchfield
Specialist in International Relations

Michael A. Weber
Analyst in Foreign Affairs

The United Nations Human Rights Council: Background and Policy Issues

Over the years, many Members of Congress have demonstrated an ongoing interest in the role and effectiveness of the United Nations (U.N.) Human Rights Council (Council). The Council is the primary intergovernmental body mandated with addressing human rights on a global level. In October 2021, the United States was elected to serve as a Council member; its three-year term began on January 1, 2022.

Background

The U.N. General Assembly established the Human Rights Council in 2006 to replace the Commission on Human Rights, which was criticized for its ineffectiveness in addressing human rights violations and abuses and for the number of widely perceived human rights abusers that served as its members. Over the years, many governments and observers have expressed serious concerns with the Council's perceived disproportionate attention to Israel and apparent lack of attention to other pressing human rights situations. In particular, some criticize the inclusion of the "human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories" (a reference to Israeli actions) as a permanent item on the Council's agenda. Some are also concerned that countries widely perceived as human rights abusers, such as China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, have served (or are serving) as Council members. On the other hand, supporters argue that the Council is an improvement over the previous commission. They contend that the Council's Universal Periodic Review process, which aims to evaluate each member state's fulfillment of its human rights obligations, is a useful means for addressing human rights issues. Many observers are encouraged by the Council's increased attention to human rights situations in countries such as Burma, Iran, North Korea, and Syria.

U.S. Policy and Selected Issues

Over the years, U.S. policymakers have debated U.S. participation in and funding of the Council. The George W. Bush Administration voted against the General Assembly resolution creating the Council and did not run for membership (as it had as a member of the previous Commission on Human Rights); it also decided to withhold U.S. funding to the organization in FY2008 under a provision enacted by Congress. Conversely, the Obama Administration supported the overall purpose of the Council and decided that it was better to work from within as a member to improve Council effectiveness. The Obama Administration was also critical of the Council's focus on Israel, sometimes boycotting debates on the issue. The United States was elected to the Council in 2009 and in 2012. In October 2016, it was elected for a third term, which began in January 2017. The United States remained a member during the Trump Administration until mid-2018, when it withdrew. It resumed Council membership under the Biden Administration.

Some Members of Congress maintain an ongoing interest in the credibility and effectiveness of the Council. Some are particularly critical of both the Council's focus on Israel and lack of competitive Council elections. Some Members have proposed or enacted legislation calling for U.S. withdrawal; at the same time, others have introduced legislation urging the Council to address specific human rights situations. Most recently, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260), prohibits Council funding unless the Secretary of State determines that U.S. participation is important to the national interest of the United States, and that the Council is taking steps to remove Israel as a permanent agenda item and ensure the integrity of Council elections (a similar provision was enacted in previous fiscal years). The Trump Administration withheld U.S. contributions to the Council under this provision from FY2018 through FY2020. The Biden Administration fully funded the Council in FY2021; its FY2022 budget request includes funding to pay U.S. arrears to the Council that accumulated during this period. Members of Congress may consider the following issues related to the Council:

- the benefits and drawbacks of U.S. membership;
- how, if at all, to address the Council's apparent disproportionate focus on Israel; and
- concerns that the Council's work is increasingly influenced by countries that do not fully subscribe to international human rights norms and mechanisms.

Contents

Introduction 1
Background 1
Council Structure and Selected Policy Issues 2
Mandate and Role in the U.N. System 2
Membership and Elections 3
Meetings and Leadership 4
Universal Periodic Review 4
Special Procedures 6
Israel as a Permanent Agenda Item 6
Budget 6
U.S. Policy 7
Biden Administration Policy 8
Congressional Actions 8
Selected Policy Issues 9
U.S. Membership 9
U.S. Funding 9
Alternatives to the Council 10
Focus on Israel 11
Rising Influence of Other U.N. Member States 11
The Council and U.S. Human Rights Situations 13

Figures

Figure 1. Human Rights Council Membership by Regional Group 3

Figure A-1. Human Rights Council Special Sessions 15

Appendixes

Appendix. Special Sessions of the Human Rights Council 15

Contacts

Author Information 16

Introduction

The United Nations (U.N.) Human Rights Council (Council) is the primary intergovernmental body that addresses human rights worldwide. In June 2018, the Trump Administration announced that the United States would withdraw its membership, citing concerns with the Council's disproportionate focus on Israel, ineffectiveness in addressing human rights situations, impact on U.S. sovereignty, and lack of reform. Under the Biden Administration, the United States reengaged with the Council as an observer and ran for membership in the October 2021 election. The United States was elected to the Council on October 14, 2021, and began its three-year term on January 1, 2022. Previously, the Trump Administration withheld funding to the Council under a provision included in Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations acts. President Biden has fully funded the Council, and his FY2022 budget request includes funds to pay remaining U.S. Council arrears.[1]

Members of Congress may continue to consider the Council's role and effectiveness, including

- What role, if any, should the Council play in international human rights policy and in addressing specific human rights situations?
- Is the Council an effective mechanism for addressing human rights worldwide? If not, what reform measures might improve the Council and how can they be achieved?
- What role, if any, might the United States play in the Council, or in other U.N. human rights mechanisms, moving forward?

This report provides background on the Council, including its current mandate and structure, as well as Administration policy and congressional actions. It also highlights policy issues of possible interest to Congress, including the debate over U.S. membership, U.S. funding of the Council, alternatives to the Council in U.N. fora, the Council's focus on Israel, and the possible increased influence of other countries in Council activities.

Background

The U.N. Commission on Human Rights was the primary intergovernmental policymaking body for human rights issues before it was replaced by the U.N. Human Rights Council in 2006. Created in 1946 as a subsidiary body of the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the commission's initial mandate was to establish international human rights standards and develop an international bill of rights.[2] During its existence, the 53-member commission played a key role in developing a comprehensive body of human rights treaties and declarations, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Over time, its work evolved to address specific human rights violations and complaints, as well as broader human rights issues. It developed a system of special procedures to monitor, analyze, and report on country-specific human rights violations, as

[1] For more information on congressional withholding provisions and Biden Administration policy, see the "U.S. Policy" section.

[2] ECOSOC is a principal organ of the United Nations that serves as the central forum for discussing and making recommendations related to international economic and social issues. It is composed of 54 member governments. One of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights' notable successes was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on December 10, 1948.

well as thematic cross-cutting human rights abuses such as racial discrimination, religious intolerance, and denial of freedom of expression.[3]

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, controversy developed over the human rights records of some commission members that were widely perceived as systematic violators of human rights.[4] These instances significantly affected the commission's credibility. Critics, including the United States, claimed that countries used their membership to deflect attention from their own human rights violations by questioning the records of others. Some members were accused of bloc voting and excessive procedural manipulation to prevent debate of their human rights violations. In 2001, the United States was not elected to the commission, whereas widely perceived human rights violators such as Pakistan, Sudan, and Uganda were elected.[5] In 2005, the collective impact of these and other controversies led U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to propose the idea of a new and smaller 47-member Human Rights Council to replace the commission.

Council Structure and Selected Policy Issues

In 2006, as part of broader U.N. reform efforts, the U.N. General Assembly approved resolution 60/251, which dissolved the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and created the Human Rights Council in its place. This section provides an overview of Council structure and selected policy issues and concerns that have emerged over the years.

Mandate and Role in the U.N. System

The Council is responsible for "promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all."[6] It aims to prevent and combat human rights violations, including gross and systematic violations, and to make recommendations thereon; it also works to promote and coordinate the mainstreaming of human rights within the U.N. system. As a subsidiary of the General Assembly, it reports directly to the Assembly's 193 members. It receives substantive and technical support from the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), an office within the U.N. Secretariat currently headed by Michelle Bachelet of Chile.[7] The Council is a political body; each of its members has different human rights preferences, domestic considerations, and foreign policy priorities. Its decisions,

[3] For more information on U.N. and other multilateral human rights issues, see CRS In Focus IF10861, *Global Human Rights: Multilateral Bodies & U.S. Participation*, by Michael A. Weber.

[4] The commission was composed of 53 members elected by members of the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Countries served three year terms with no term limits.

[5] The George W. Bush Administration and many in Congress were generally considered to be frustrated and disappointed by the election outcome. The House of Representatives adopted a Foreign Relations Authorization Act amendment that linked payment of U.S. arrears to the U.N. regular budget with the United States regaining a seat on the commission. The Bush Administration, however, stated it would not link U.S. payment of U.N. dues and arrears to the outcome of the commission elections.

[6] U.N. document, A/RES/60/251, March 15, 2006.

[7] OHCHR's mandate is to promote and protect human rights worldwide through international cooperation, and through the coordination and streamlining of human rights efforts within the U.N. system. The Office is funded by a combination of assessed contributions to the U.N. regular budget and voluntary contributions from governments and others. In mid-2018, then-National Security Adviser John Bolton stated that the United States would withhold U.S. assessed funding to OHCHR. The Administration withheld $18.9 million in FY2018, $20.25 million in FY2019; and $20.15 million in FY2020. There is no legislative authority for this withholding. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11457, *United Nations Issues: U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, by Luisa Blanchfield and Michael A. Weber.

resolutions, and recommendations are not legally binding. At the same time, Council actions sometimes hold political weight and represent the Council's human rights perspectives and priorities.

Membership and Elections

The Council comprises 47 members apportioned by geographic region as follows: 13 from African states; 13 from Asian states; 6 from Eastern European states; 8 from Latin American and Caribbean states; and 7 from Western European and other states (**Figure 1**). Members are elected for a period of three years and may not hold a Council seat for more than two consecutive terms. If a Council member commits "gross and systematic violations of human rights," the General Assembly may suspend membership with a two-thirds vote of members present.[8] All U.N. members are eligible to run for a seat on the Council. Countries are nominated by their regional groups and elected by the General Assembly through secret ballot with an absolute majority required. The most recent election was held in October 2021; the next election is scheduled for late 2022.

Figure 1. Human Rights Council Membership by Regional Group

Africa (13)	Asia-Pacific (13)	Eastern European (6)	Latin American & Caribbean (8)	Western European and Other (7)
Benin (2024)	China (2023)	Armenia (2022)	Argentina (2024)	Finland (2024)
Cameroon (2024)	India (2024)	Lithuania (2024)	Bolivia (2023)	France (2023)
Cote d'Ivoire (2023)	Indonesia (2022)	Montenegro (2024)	Brazil (2022)	Germany (2022)
Eritrea (2024)	Japan (2022)	Poland (2022)	Cuba (2023)	Luxembourg (2024)
Gabon (2023)	Kazakhstan (2024)	Russia (2023)	Honudras (2024)	Netherlands (2022)
Gambia (2024)	Malaysia (2024)	Ukraine (2023)	Mexico (2023)	United Kingdom (2023)
Libya (2022)	Marshall Islands (2022)		Paraguay (2024)	United States (2024)
Malawi (2023)	Nepal (2023)		Venezuala (2022)	
Mauritania (2022)	Pakistan (2023)			
Namibia (2022)	Qatar (2024)			
Senegal (2023)	Republic of Korea (2022)			
Somalia (2024)	United Arab Emirates (2024)			
Sudan (2022)	Uzbekistan (2023)			

Source: U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Note: Dates represent year of term end and are based on the results of the October 2021 election.

A key concern for some critics has been the composition of Council membership, which sometimes includes countries widely perceived as human rights abusers. Many view the lack of competitiveness in Council elections as a key reason for this dynamic. In some elections, countries have run unopposed after regional groups nominated the exact number of countries required to fill Council vacancies. For instance, in the October 2021 election members from all five regional groups ran unopposed after regional groups nominated the exact number of countries required to fill Council vacancies. (This follows a similar pattern as previous elections; in 2020, just one regional group held a competitive election.)[9] Such circumstances limit the number of choices and can serve to guarantee the election of nominated members regardless of

[8] The General Assembly voted to reinstate Libya in November 2011.

[9] The circumstances were similar in the 2019 election, when members from two regional groups ran unopposed. In 2018, all five regional groups were unopposed.

their human rights records.[10] On the other hand, supporters contend that the Council's election process is an improvement over that of the commission. They emphasize that some countries widely viewed as the most egregious violators of human rights, such as Belarus, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Syria, were pressured not to run or were defeated in Council elections because of the new membership criteria and process. Many also highlight the General Assembly's March 2011 decision to suspend Libya's membership as an example of improved membership mechanisms.[11]

More broadly, some Council observers have expressed concern that the Council's closed ballot elections in the General Assembly may make it easier for countries with questionable human rights records to be elected to the Council. To address this issue, some experts and policymakers have proposed requiring open ballots in Council elections to hold countries publicly accountable for their votes.[12] Some have also suggested lowering the two-thirds vote threshold to make it easier to remove a Council member.[13]

Meetings and Leadership

The Council is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and meets for three or more sessions per year for a total of 10 or more weeks. It can hold special sessions on specific human rights situations or issues at the request of any Council member with the support of one-third of the Council membership. Since 2006, the Council has held 48 regular sessions and 33 special sessions. Nine of its special sessions have focused on Israel and/or the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip (referred to as "Occupied Palestinian Territory"). (See the **Appendix** for a list of special sessions.)

The Council president presides over the election of four vice presidents representing regional groups in the Council. The president and vice presidents form the Council bureau, which is responsible for all procedural and organizational matters related to the Council. Members elect a president from among bureau members for a one-year term.

Universal Periodic Review

All Council members and U.N. member states are required to undergo a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) that examines a member's fulfillment of its human rights obligations and commitments.[14] The review is an intergovernmental process that facilitates an interactive dialogue between the country under review and the UPR working group, which is composed of the 47 Council members and chaired by the Council president. Observer states and stakeholders, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), may also attend the meetings and present information. During the first review, the UPR working group makes initial recommendations, with subsequent reviews focusing on the implementation of previous recommendations. The full Council is

[10] Examples of countries elected to the Council with what many view as poor human rights records include China, Cameroon, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, among others. Most recently, see Dulcie Leimbach, "China and Russia Win Human Rights Council Seats, but the Saudis Get Rejected," PassBlue, October 13, 2020, and "UN: Noncompetitive Rights Council Election Aids Abusers," *Human Rights Watch,* October 12, 2021.

[11] Libya's membership was suspended on March 1, 2011; it was reinstated on November 1 of the same year.

[12] For more information, see the "U.S. Policy" section.

[13] "The U.N. Human Rights Council's lousy election," *The Economist,* December 18, 2018.

[14] Such obligations might include human rights treaties ratified by the country concerned, voluntary pledges and commitments made by the country (e.g., national human rights policies or programs), and applicable international humanitarian law.

responsible for addressing any cases of consistent noncooperation with the review. The United States underwent its first UPR in November 2010 and its second in May 2015; during both sessions, the United States presented its human rights record and countries both praised and criticized U.S. human rights activities.[15] The most recent U.S. UPR was held on November 9, 2020. The U.S. delegation, which included representatives from the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services, expressed support for the UPR process and presented a report outlining human rights situations in the United States.[16] Many countries praised the United States' human rights record, while countries also raised concerns about several issues, including U.S. nonratification of human rights agreements and incidents of police brutality and racial injustice.[17]

Perspectives on the effectiveness of the UPR are mixed. Overall, many governments, observers, and policymakers support the Council's UPR process. They maintain that it provides an important forum for governments, NGOs, and others to discuss and bring attention to human rights situations in specific countries that may not otherwise receive international attention. Some countries have also reportedly made commitments based on the outcome of the UPR process.[18] Many NGOs and human rights groups operating in various countries also reportedly use UPR recommendations as a political and diplomatic tool for strengthening human rights. At the same time, some human rights experts have been critical of UPR. Many are concerned that the submissions and statements of governments perceived to be human rights abusers are taken at face value rather than being challenged by other governments. Some also contend that the process gives these same countries a platform to criticize countries that may have generally positive human rights records. Many experts have also expressed concern regarding some member states' rejection of UPR recommendations and nonparticipation in the UPR process.[19]

[15] During U.S. UPRs, a number of governments and NGOs spoke on the human rights situation in the United States. They also made recommendations to the U.S. delegation regarding specific aspects of the U.S. UPR reports and other related issues. In the United States' initial response to the first review, then-State Department Legal Adviser Harold Koh acknowledged that many of the recommendations "fit well" with the Obama Administration's policy and could be implemented "in due course." He stated that other recommendations, however, were purely political and could not be taken seriously. Still others warranted "fuller discussions" within the U.S. government and among civil society. For the 2015 review, governments focused on the implementation of the accepted recommendations and the development of human rights situations in the United States.

[16] Department of State, "The United States Presents its Universal Periodic Review National Report," November 9, 2020, and "Remarks at the United States' Third Universal Periodic Review," by Robert A. Destro, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Assistant Secretary November 9, 2020.

[17] Documents related the review, including the U.S. national report, a preliminary list of questions, and reports from stakeholders are available at "U.N. Human Rights Council - Universal Periodic Review - United States of America," at https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/USindex.aspx.

[18] For example, a 2014 study found that "48 percent of recommendations were either fully or partially implemented, while only half of the implementation period had already passed. In other words, almost 48 percent of [UPR] recommendations 'triggered' an action at mid-term, suggesting that the commitments made at the UPR are not simply lip-service to human rights, but that they do result in action on the ground." (For further discussion, see "Beyond Promises: UPR Impact on the Ground," *UPR Info*, April 2014.)

[19] For example, North Korea's rejection of the recommendations made by the UPR Working Group in 2009 alarmed many governments and human rights advocates. Some experts also disagreed with Israel's 2012 decision to disengage from the Council and not participate in the 2013 UPR process. More recently, some observers have expressed concern regarding China's efforts to influence its UPR and related events (see "UN: China Responds to Rights Review with Threats," *Human Rights Watch*, April 1, 2019).

Special Procedures

The Council maintains a system of special procedures that are created and renewed by members. Country mandates allow for special rapporteurs to examine and advise on human rights situations in specific countries, including Cambodia, North Korea, and Sudan.[20] Under thematic mandates, special rapporteurs analyze major global human rights issues, such as arbitrary detention, the right to food, and the rights of persons with disabilities. The Council also maintains a complaint procedure for individuals or groups to report human rights abuses in a confidential setting.

Israel as a Permanent Agenda Item

Israel is the only country to have its actions scrutinized as part of the Council's permanent agenda. In June 2007, Council members adopted a resolution to address the Council's working methods. In the resolution, Council members included the "human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories" as a permanent part of the Council's agenda.[21] At the time the agenda item was adopted, many U.N. member states and Council observers, including the United States, strongly objected to the Council focusing so closely on human rights violations by Israel.[22] A U.N. spokesperson subsequently noted then-U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's "disappointment" with the Council's decision to "single out only one specific regional item, given the range and scope of allegations of human rights violations throughout the world."[23] Over the years, the United States and other like-minded Council members have made unsuccessful efforts to reverse the Council's decision, particularly during the Council's five-year review in 2011.[24]

Budget

The Human Rights Council is funded primarily through the U.N. regular budget, of which the United States is assessed 22%. Approved Council funding for the 2021 regular budget calendar year was $22.31 million, which was similar to the 2020 funding level of $22.22 million. The Council also receives extrabudgetary (voluntary) funding to help cover the costs of some of its activities, including staff postings and Council trust funds and mechanisms. For 2021, such

[20] There are over 40 thematic mandates and 13 country mandates. A list of each is available at http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx.

[21] See Item 7 under "C. Framework for the programme of work," in Human Rights Council resolution 5/1, June 18. 2007. Also listed under Item 7 are "Human rights violations and implications of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and other occupied Arab territories," and "Right to self-determination of the Palestinian people." The Institution building resolution was subsequently adopted by the U.N. General Assembly. Examples of other permanent agenda items include Organizational and Procedural Matters (Item 1); Human Rights Situations that Require the Council's Attention (Item 4); Universal Periodic Review (Item 6); and Technical Assistance and Capacity Building (Item 10).

[22] For a summary of U.N. member state views at the time, see U.N. press release, "Human Rights Council Hears Praise and Criticism About Adopted Text on Institution Building of Council," June 19, 2007.

[23] Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, June 21, 2007.

[24] In June 2011, the General Assembly adopted resolution 65/281, which was the result of a review on the work and functioning of the Council after five years, by a vote of 154 in favor, 4 against (including the United States). The resolution included procedural changes to the Council's work, such as moving the start of its yearly membership cycle, creating an office of the Council President, modifying UPR speaking procedures, and establishing future review mechanisms. The outcome of the five-year review was criticized by the United States and others for not sufficiently addressing the Council's lack of effectiveness. The United States stated that the review did not yield "even minimally positive results," which forced it to "disassociate" itself from the outcome. U.S. representatives expressed concern about (1) the Council's focus on Israel, particularly the continued inclusion of a permanent item on the Council's agenda, and (2) the Council's inability to address the "critical problem" of Council membership.

contributions was estimated at $14.52 million, similar to the 2020 level of $14.27 million.[25] (For more information on U.S. funding to the Council, see the "U.S. Policy" section below.)

U.S. Policy

Most U.S. policymakers have generally supported the Council's overall purpose and mandate; however, many have also expressed concern regarding its effectiveness in addressing human rights issues—leading to ongoing disagreements as to whether or not the United States should be a member of or provide funding for the Council. For example

- Under **President George W. Bush**, the United States voted against the Assembly resolution creating the Council and did not run for a seat, arguing that the Council lacked mechanisms for maintaining credible membership. (The Administration also withheld Council funding in FY2008 under a provision enacted by Congress in 2007.)
- Conversely, **President Obama** supported U.S. membership and Council funding, maintaining that it was better to work from within to improve the body; the United States was elected as a Council member in 2009, 2012, and 2016.[26] Under President Obama, the United States consistently opposed the Council actions related to Israel and sought to adopt specific reforms during the Council's five-year review in 2011.[27]
- In 2018, **President Trump** withdrew the United States from Council membership, citing concerns about the Council's impact on U.S. sovereignty and its disproportionate focus on Israel. The Trump Administration also withheld funding from the Council as authorized by annual appropriations laws.
- Under **President Biden,** the United States resumed Council funding and was elected to a Council seat in 2021 (see the "Biden Administration Policy" section for more information).

Congressional perspectives on the issue have been mixed, with some Members advocating continued U.S. participation and others opposing it. A key concern among many Members of Congress is the Council's focus on Israel. During the past several fiscal years, Congress has enacted a provision in annual State-Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPS) legislation that prohibits Council funding unless the Secretary of State determines that U.S. participation is important to the national interest of the United States and that the Council is

[25] A detailed explanation of the Human Rights Council budget can be found in Part VI, Section 24 of the proposed program budget for 2021 (U.N. document, A/75/6 [§24] under component subprogram (4) Support for the Human Rights Council, its subsidiary bodies and mechanisms).

[26] The United States did not run for election in 2014 due to term limits.

[27] In June 2011, the General Assembly adopted resolution 65/281, which was the result of a review on the work and functioning of the Council after five years, by a vote of 154 in favor, 4 against (including the United States). The resolution included procedural changes to the Council's work, such as moving the start of its yearly membership cycle, creating an office of the Council President, modifying UPR speaking procedures, and establishing future review mechanisms. The outcome of the five-year review was criticized by the United States and others for not sufficiently addressing the Council's lack of effectiveness. The United States stated that the review did not yield "even minimally positive results," which forced it to "disassociate" itself from the outcome. U.S. representatives expressed concern about (1) the Council's focus on Israel, particularly the continued inclusion of a permanent item on the Council's agenda, and (2) the Council's inability to address the "critical problem" of Council membership.

taking steps to remove Israel as a permanent agenda item. (For more information, see the "Congressional Actions" section.)

Biden Administration Policy

The Biden Administration announced in February 2021 that the United States would reengage with the Human Rights Council as an observer and run for a seat in the 2021 election. The United States was elected to a Council seat on October 14, 2021, and began its three-year term on January 1, 2022. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has acknowledged that the Council is a "flawed body in need of reform," while arguing that it is better to work from within to encourage meaningful change.[28] He has stated that the United States would work to address the Council's flaws, including its "disproportionate attention on Israel and the membership of several states with egregious human rights records."[29] The Biden Administration fully funded the Council in FY2021, and its FY2022 budget request includes funds to pay U.S. arrears to the Council that accumulated from FY2018 to FY2020.[30] Congress has yet to enact final FY2022 appropriations.

The United States will participate as a full Council member at the Council's 49th regular session, which will be held from February 22 to April 1, 2022. Prior to its election, the United States during the Biden Administration was a Council observer, working to advance country-specific and thematic actions to promote human rights for women and girls, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons, indigenous persons, members of ethnic and religious minority groups, older persons, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups.[31]

Congressional Actions

Congress maintains an ongoing interest in the credibility and effectiveness of the Council in the context of human rights promotion, U.N. reform, and concerns about the Council's focus on Israel. Over the years, some Members have proposed or enacted legislation expressing support for or opposition to the Council, prohibiting U.S. Council funding, or supporting Council actions related to specific human rights situations. Most recently, Section 7048(c) of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260), requires that no funds appropriated by the act be made available for the Council unless the Secretary of State determines and reports to the committees on appropriations that participation in the Council is in the national interest of the United States, and that the Council is taking significant steps to remove Israel as a permanent agenda item and ensure integrity in the election of Council members. (Similar language was included in previous fiscal years' appropriations laws.) In addition, Congress has enacted some Council-related provisions in the context of country-specific human rights situations.[32]

[28] Department of State, "U.S. Decision To Reengage with the UN Human Rights Council," February 8, 2021.

[29] Department of State, "Election of the United States to the UN Human Rights Council," October 14, 2021.

[30] The budget also includes a request to pay arrears to OHCHR, as well as an additional $3 million for five new overseas Foreign Service positions to support the State Department's reassertion of U.S. engagement on human rights issues. (Congressional Budget Justification, Appendix I, Department of State, FY2022, p. 133.)

[31] See, for example, "Key Outcomes at the 48th Session of the UN Human Rights Council," Fact Sheet, Department of State Office of the Spokesperson, October 12, 2021.

[32] For instance, Division F of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6), states that funds may be made available to the Sri Lankan government only if the Secretary of State certifies to Congress that the Sri Lankan government is, among other things, supporting a credible justice mechanism in compliance with Human Rights Council resolution 30/1 (October 2015).

Selected Policy Issues

Congressional debate regarding the Human Rights Council has generally focused on a recurring set of policy issues.

U.S. Membership

In general, U.S. policymakers are divided as to whether the United States should serve as a member of the Council. Supporters of U.S. participation contend that the United States should work from within the Council to build coalitions with like-minded countries and steer the Council toward a more balanced approach to addressing human rights situations. Council membership, they argue, places the United States in a position to advocate for its human rights policies and priorities. Supporters also maintain that U.S. leadership in the Council has led to several promising Council developments, including increased attention to human rights situations in countries such as Iran, Mali, North Korea, and Sudan, among others. Some have also noted that the number of special sessions addressing Israel has decreased during periods when the United States was on the Council. In addition, some supporters are concerned that U.S. withdrawal might lead to a possible leadership gap and countries such as China and Russia could gain increased influence in the Council.[33]

Council Observer Status

When considering U.S. membership, Members of Congress may take into account the role of Council observer, a status that the United States could hold as a non-Council member. Observer states are not eligible to vote in the Council, but they may participate in the UPR process and attend and participate in regular and special sessions of the Council. The ability of the United States to promote its human rights agenda within the U.N. framework may be significantly affected by changing to an observer status. Many Council members might be interested in U.S. statements and policies, but the United States' inability to vote may diminish its influence on the work of the Council.

Opponents contend that U.S. membership provides the Council with undeserved legitimacy. The United States, they suggest, should not be a part of a body that focuses disproportionately on one country (Israel) while ignoring countries that are widely believed to violate human rights.[34] Critics further maintain that the United States should not serve on a body that would allow human rights abusers to serve as members. Many also suggest that U.S. membership on the Council provides countries with a forum to criticize the United States, particularly during the UPR process.[35]

U.S. Funding

Over the years, policymakers have debated to what extent, if any, the United States should fund the Council. Some Members have supported fully funding the Council, while others have proposed that the United States withhold a proportionate share of its assessed contributions (22%)

[33] See the "Rising Influence of Other U.N. Member States" section for information on this issue.

[34] See, for instance, Brett Schaefer, Heritage Foundation, "The U.N. Human Rights Council Does Not Merit U.S. Membership," March 12, 2017; Michael Oren, "Why the United States Should Withdraw from the U.N. Human Rights Council," *Newsweek*, March 10, 2017; Ambassador Nikki Haley, "Why We're Leaving the So-Called Human Rights Council," *Wall Street Journal,* June 19, 2018.

[35] Some were particularly concerned with the Obama Administration's mention of Arizona immigration law S.B. 1070 in the United States UPR report. See, for instance, Brett D. Schaefer, "U.S. Targeted by Human Rights Abusers at Its Universal Periodic Review," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 3050, November 5, 2010.

from the U.N. regular budget, which is used to fund the Council. Most recently, FY2017 through FY2021 State-Foreign Operations acts have placed conditions on U.S. funding to the Council, and the Trump Administration subsequently withheld about $7.5 million from U.S. contributions to the U.N. regular budget from FY2018 through FY2020. The Biden Administration's FY2022 budget request includes funding to pay U.S. arrears to the Council that accumulated from FY2018 to FY2020.[36]

Legislating to withhold Council funds in this manner is a largely symbolic policy action because assessed contributions finance the entire U.N. regular budget and not specific parts of it. The United States had previously withheld funding from the Council in 2008, when the George W. Bush Administration withheld a proportionate share of U.S. Council funding from the regular budget under a law that required the Secretary of State to certify to Congress that funding the Council was in the best national interest of the United States.[37]

Alternatives to the Council

Some observers and policymakers have argued that the United States can pursue its human rights objectives in multilateral fora other than the Human Rights Council. Specifically, some have suggested that the United States focus on the activities of the General Assembly's Third Committee, which addresses social, humanitarian, and cultural issues, including human rights.[38] Others recommend that the United States increase its support for OHCHR, as well as the Council's independent experts who address country-specific and functional human rights issues. Other U.S. policymakers have proposed addressing human rights in the U.N. Security Council, which has sometimes engaged on issues that involve grave violations of human rights, particularly in conflict areas.[39]

Supporters of the Council argue that some proposed alternatives do not carry the same level of influence or attention on human rights as the Human Rights Council, particularly since bodies such as the General Assembly and Security Council do not focus exclusively on human rights issues. Opponents of U.S. withdrawal have also pointed to the Council's track record of marshaling country-specific investigations and commissions of inquiry, and contend that unlike the proposed alternatives, the Council includes unique mechanisms to address human rights issues, such the complaint procedure and UPR process.[40]

---

[36] The withholdings included $7.85 million in FY2020, $7.53 million in FY2019, and $7.67 in FY2018. The Administration also withheld funding from OHCHR during the same time period.

[37] Similar to current provisions, in FY2008 and FY2009 foreign operations appropriations bills, Congress specified that none of the funds appropriated in either bill would be made available for U.S. contributions to the Council unless (1) the Secretary of State certified to the appropriations committees that funding the Council was "in the national interest of the United States" or (2) the United States was a member of the Council. The Bush Administration did not provide certification in FY2008 and the United States withheld Council funding.

[38] During the Trump Administration, the State Department reported that it began to "engage with the United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee to address serious human rights violations, abuses, and crises around the world." ("U.S. Engagement in the U.N. General Assembly Third Committee, Fact Sheet," Department of State, December 7, 2018.)

[39] For example, in April 2017, then-U.S. Permanent Representative Nikki Haley held the Security Council's first ever thematic debate on human rights issues, where she stated: "The traditional view has been that the Security Council is for maintaining international peace and security, not for human rights. I am here today asserting that the protection of human rights is often deeply intertwined with peace and security. The two things often cannot be separated."

[40] See, for instance, Kenneth Roth, "Nikki Haley Should Help Fix the U.N. Human Rights Council, Not Abandon It," *Foreign Policy*, June 5, 2017; and Testimony of Ted Piccone, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Multilateral International Development, Multilateral Institutions, and International Economic, Energy, and

Focus on Israel

The Council's ongoing focus on Israel has continued to concern some Members of Congress. In addition to singling out Israel for scrutiny on the Council's permanent agenda, other Council actions—including resolutions, reports, and statements by some Council experts—have generated significant congressional interest for what many view as an apparent bias against Israel.[41] Some Members of Congress expressed alarm regarding a March 2016 Council resolution that requested OHCHR produce a database of all business enterprises that have "directly and indirectly, enabled, facilitated and profited from the construction and growth of the (Israeli) settlements."[42] The United States strongly opposed the resolution and voted against it.[43] On February 12, 2020, OHCHR published the database. Then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed "outrage" that OHCHR would publish the document and called on other U.N. members to reject it.[44] Some Members of Congress also opposed the publication of the database.[45] In May 2021, the Council established an open-ended commission of inquiry in the wake of that month's Israel-Gaza conflict.[46] The Biden Administration stated that it "deeply regrets" the establishment of the commission, noting that such actions "do not contribute to peace."[47] Some experts suggest that the Council's focus on Israel is at least partially the result of its membership composition.[48]

Rising Influence of Other U.N. Member States

Many experts have raised concerns that the Human Rights Council's work is increasingly influenced by countries that do not fully subscribe to international human rights norms and

---

Environmental Policy, *Assessing the United Nations Human Rights Council*, 115th Cong., 1st session, May 25, 2017.

[41] Council experts are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. They are often referred to as special rapporteurs, heads of fact-finding missions, or heads of commissions of inquiry, among other titles.

[42] See U.N. Human Rights Council resolution 31/36, March 22, 2016, paragraph 17; and paragraphs 96 and 117 of Human Rights Council Document, A/HRC/22/63, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of the Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, February 7, 2013.

[43] The Trump Administration stated its firm opposition to the creation of a database and would not provide any information to it. It maintained that the database falls far outside the scope of the Human Rights Council's mandate and drains "precious resources that could be used to promote and protect human rights around the world." ("U.S. Explanation of Votes on Item 7 Resolutions," Statement by William J. Mozdzierz, Head of the U.S. Delegation, Human Rights Council 34th Session, March 24, 2017.) In October 2017, the United States stated it was "deeply disturbed" by comments from current U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory, Michael Lynk, who called for economic boycotts against Israel.

[44] See, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, "U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Database Report Release" Department of State, February 12, 2020, and "Department of State Guidance to U.S. Companies Regarding the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Database Report Release," March 2, 2020.

[45] For example, in the 116th Congress, H.R. 5595, the Israel Anti-Boycott Act, sought to prohibit some businesses from cooperating with information collection efforts connected to the database.

[46] U.N. document, A/HRC/RES/S-30/1, May 27, 2021. The Council mandated the commission "to investigate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law leading up to and since 13 April 2021, and all underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict, including systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity."

[47] U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, "Press Statement: UN Human Rights Council Session on the Israeli-Palestinian Situation," May 27, 2021.

[48] For a discussion on the apparent lack of competitiveness in Council elections, see the "Council Structure and Selected Policy Issues" section.

mechanisms. Some maintain that authoritarian governments use the Council as a platform to garner support for novel interpretations of these norms that in effect privilege principles of "noninterference" and strong conceptions of state sovereignty, as a means of shielding themselves from international scrutiny.[49] These efforts may also aim to undermine the idea that human rights are universal and indivisible, suggesting instead that they are context-dependent, or that some rights are subordinate to others.

Analysts view the People's Republic of China (PRC, or China) under Xi Jinping, in particular, as having taken a more proactive role in attempting to shape global human rights norms and institutions in recent years, including in the Human Rights Council.[50] China's normative agenda with regard to human rights has been described as "statist" and "development-first" in that it prioritizes the role of governments as opposed to civil society and individual rights-holders, and privileges the right to development in particular.[51] In 2017, China's first ever solo-sponsored Human Rights Council resolution, for instance, was entitled "The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights" and was viewed by some observers as suggesting that respect for human rights is predicated on development conditions.[52] China has supported a number of other resolutions since 2016 that critics argue were intended to undermine the legitimacy of civil society organizations and human rights defenders and discourage the practice of publicly criticizing and pushing for investigations of rights abuses by individual countries—which China views as constituting interference in internal affairs—and instead promote state-led "mutually beneficial cooperation."[53] Consistent with these efforts, the Council in June 2020, for instance, adopted a China-sponsored resolution on "mutually beneficial cooperation" that was criticized by human rights advocates. The resolution included language that governments have the "inalienable right" to develop their own political, social, and other systems "without interference from any other State or non-State actor," and featured PRC-favored phraseology on "mutually beneficial cooperation" and "building a community of shared future for human beings."[54]

Beyond this normative work, analysts contend that China has used a variety of tactics to undermine the participation of independent human rights organizations and blunt criticism of

[49] Authoritarian governments may view universal human rights norms as inherently threatening to their hold on power. For example, a document allegedly circulated internally within the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) in 2013 criticized the promotion of "universal values" as an attempt to weaken the CPC's leadership, alongside six other perceived ideological threats, including "Western constitutional democracy" and civil society. ChinaFile, "Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation," November 8, 2013.

[50] Ted Piccone, "China's Long Game on Human Rights at the United Nations," *Brookings Institution,* September 2018; Yu-Jie Chen, "China's Challenge to the International Human Rights Regime," *NYU Journal of International Law and Politics,* vol. 51 (January 2019), pp. 1179-1222.

[51] Yu-Jie Chen, "China's Challenge to the International Human Rights Regime." See also Andréa Worden, *China at the UN Human Rights Council: Conjuring a "Community of Shared Future for Humankind"?* National Bureau of Asian Research Special Report #87, August 2020.

[52] See U.N. Document A/HRC/RES/35/21. The resolution, which was adopted, was opposed by the United States for suggesting "that development goals could permit countries to deviate from their human rights obligations and commitments." See U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, "Explanation of Position on Resolution on the Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of all Human Rights," June 22, 2017. China has sponsored similar resolutions in subsequent years.

[53] Ted Piccone, "China's Long Game on Human Rights at the United Nations."

[54] U.N. Document A/HRC/RES/43/21. The resolution passed with a vote of 23 to 16, with 8 abstentions. China, as a then-Council observer, did not participate in the vote. In the words of one human rights advocate, the resolution "seeks to reposition international human rights law as a matter of state-to-state relations, ignores the responsibility of states to protect the rights of the individual, treats fundamental human rights as subject to negotiation and compromise, and foresees no meaningful role for civil society." Sophie Richardson, "China's Influence on the Global Human Rights System," Brookings Institution, September 2020.

human rights in China and other countries, both at Council and within the U.N. human rights system more broadly.[55] Some have expressed worry regarding China's April 2020 appointment to the Council's Consultative Panel, which plays a key role in the selection of independent experts to lead country and thematic human rights mandates.[56]

Other governments are also viewed as having taken action within the Council to undermine human rights norms. Russia, which was elected to rejoin the Council in October 2020 after having last been a member in 2016, has in the past arguably sought to undermine the universality of these norms by promoting respect for subjective and context-specific "traditional values."[57] Resolutions considered problematic by some human rights experts have consistently been supported by other authoritarian governments such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Cuba, and have often also garnered support across a broad range of other countries, including democracies such as India and Indonesia. Supporting countries may share ideological common ground on these matters, may vote as they do in the interest of ensuring positive bilateral ties with the sponsoring government(s), or may act on the basis of a combination of these motivations.[58]

The United States opposed resolutions perceived as undermining international human rights norms during previous periods as a Council member,[59] and U.S. policymakers have taken some other steps in recent years to address these concerns. In early 2020, the Trump Administration created a Special Envoy for U.N. Integrity within the State Department to broadly address the influence of China, Russia, and other actors within the United Nations. More recently, President Biden's FY2022 budget requested $9.4 million for a new Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel within the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO) to support the State Department's efforts to, in part, develop and implement a strategic approach to competition across the U.N. system, including through cooperation with allies and partners.[60]

The Council and U.S. Human Rights Situations

Some Members of Congress have demonstrated an ongoing interest in Council activities related to human rights situations in the United States. Over the years, Council (and previous Commission) members have examined various U.S. human rights issues, including use of the death penalty (1997), the situation of detainees in Guantanamo Bay (2006), human rights and U.S. counterterrorism practices (2007), and the human rights of migrants (2007). The two most

[55] Andréa Worden, *China at the UN Human Rights Council: Conjuring a "Community of Shared Future for Humankind"?*; Rana Siu Inboden, "China at the UN: Choking Civil Society," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 32, no. 3 (July 2021), pp. 1254-135.

[56] See, for example, Eleanor Albert, "China Appointed to Influential UN Human Rights Council Panel," *The Diplomat*, April 8, 2020. The Consultative Group, composed of five members nominated by regional groups, makes recommendations to the Council President through its public report. For more information, see https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/SP/Pages/BasicInformationSelectionIndependentExperts.aspx.

[57] Alexander Cooley, "Countering Democratic Norms," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 26, no. 3 (July 2015), pp. 49-63.

[58] Countries that have frequently voted in favor of the discussed China-supported resolutions include Bangladesh, Bolivia, Burundi, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Vietnam, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Iraq, Nigeria, and the Philippines. Ted Piccone, "China's Long Game on Human Rights at the United Nations."

[59] For instance, in March 2018, prior to the Trump Administration's withdrawal from the Council, the State Department stated that the United States had defended the integrity of U.N. human rights mechanisms by opposing China's resolution on "mutually beneficial cooperation." See U.S. State Department, "Key Outcomes of U.S. Priorities at the UN Human Rights Council's 37th Session," March 23, 2018.

[60] Congressional Budget Justification, Appendix 1: Department of State Diplomatic Engagement, FY2022, p. 134. See also the description of the office at https://www.state.gov/key-topics-bureau-of-international-organization-affairs/.

recent Council special rapporteurs to visit the United States focused on the human rights of indigenous people and human rights and extreme poverty (both in 2017). With few exceptions, the United States has generally cooperated with such activities, even if it did not agree with the outcome of the findings.[61] In a departure from previous U.S. policy, the Biden Administration announced in July 2021 that the United States would issue "a formal, standing invitation to all U.N. experts who report and advise on thematic human rights issues."[62] (Standing invitations indicate that countries will always accept requests to visit from all Council special procedures.) In addition to facilitating visits from special rapporteurs, the Council has adopted resolutions addressing human rights issues in the United States, including a June 2020 resolution on "violent practices perpetrated by law enforcement agencies," in response to the May 2020 death of George Floyd in police custody.[63]

In general, congressional responses to Council involvement in domestic human rights issues are mixed. Some policymakers have been critical of Council activities regarding U.S. human rights situations, arguing that members should focus on the actions of widely perceived human rights abusers instead of those with comparatively strong human rights records. Others contend that U.S. cooperation with Council mechanisms sets an example for other countries, improves U.S. credibility worldwide, and can be an effective accountability mechanism.

[61] For example, the United States disagreed the findings of Council experts on Guantanamo Bay, counter-terrorism, and the human rights of migrants. More recently, in 2018 a Council expert published a report on extreme poverty in the United States and recommended that the government "decriminalize being poor," "acknowledge the plight of the middle class," and "acknowledge the damaging consequences of extreme inequality" (U.N. document, A/HRC/38/33/Add.1.) Then-U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley expressed disappointment with the report and said that it "categorically misstated the progress the United States has made in addressing poverty," (Letter from Ambassador Nikki Haley to Senator Bernard Sanders, June 21, 2018).

[62] Statement by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, "U.S. Leadership on Human Rights and Ending Systemic Racism," July 13, 2021. According to OHCHR, the invitation was formalized on October 19, 2021.

[63] In June 2020, the Council adopted resolution 43/1, which, among other things, "condemns the continuing racially discriminatory and violent practices perpetrated by law enforcement agencies against Africans and people of African descent, in particular which led to the death of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 in Minnesota ... and condemns the structural racism in the criminal justice system." The resolution, also requests that U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights prepare a report on "systemic racism, violations of international human rights law against Africans and people of African descent by law enforcement agencies, especially those incidents that resulted in the death of George Floyd and other Africans and people of African descent, to contribute to accountability and redress for victims." (U.N. document, A/HRC/RES/43/1, June 19, 2020, adopted without a vote).

Appendix. Special Sessions of the Human Rights Council

Figure A-1. Human Rights Council Special Sessions

Session	Subject	Dates
1st	Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory	July 5-6, 2006
2nd	Grave situation of Human Rights in Lebanon caused by Israeli Military Operations	Aug. 10-11, 2006
3rd	Israeli Military Incursions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories	Nov. 15, 2006
4th	Human Rights Situation in Darfur	Dec. 12-13, 2006
5th	Human Rights Situation in Myanmar (Burma)	Oct. 2, 2007
6th	Violations Stemming from Israeli Incursions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory	Jan. 24, 2008
7th	Negative Impact on the Realization of the Rights to Food of the Worsening of the World Food Crisis, Caused inter alia by the Soaring Food Prices	May 22, 2008
8th	Situation of the Human Rights in the East of the DRC	Nov. 28, 2008
9th	The Grave Violations of Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory including the recent aggression in the occupied Gaza Strip	Jan. 9, 2009
10th	The Impact of the Global Economic and Financial Crises on the Universal Realization and Effective Enjoyment of Human Rights	Feb. 20, 2009
11th	The human rights situation in Sri Lanka	May 26, 2009
12th	The human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and East Jerusalem	Oct. 15-16, 2009
13th	Support to the recovery process in Haiti: A Human Rights approach	Jan. 27, 2010
14th	The situation of human rights in Cote d'Ivoire since the elections on 28 November 2010	Dec. 23, 2010
15th	The situation of human rights in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Feb. 25, 2011
16th	The situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic	Apr. 29, 2011
17th	The situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic	Aug. 22, 2011
18th	The human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic	Dec. 2, 2011
19th	The deteriorating human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the recent killings in El-Houleh	June 1, 2012
20th	Situation of human rights in the Central African Republic and technical assistance in the field of human rights	Jan. 20, 2013
21st	The human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem	July 23, 2014

Session	Subject	Dates
22nd	The human rights situation in Iraq in light of abuses committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups	Sept. 1, 2014
23rd	The terrorist attacks and human rights abuses and violations committed by the terrorist group Boko Haram	April 1, 2015
24th	Preventing further deterioration of the human rights situation in Burundi	Dec. 17. 2015
25th	The deteriorating situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the recent situation in Aleppo	Oct. 21, 2016
26th	The human rights situation in South Sudan	Dec. 14, 2016
27th	Human rights situation of the minority Rohingya Muslim population and other minorities in the Rakhine Sate of Myanmar	Dec. 5, 2017
28th	The deteriorating situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem	May 18, 2018
29th	The human rights implications of the crisis in Myanmar	Feb. 12, 2021
30th	The grave human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem	May 27, 2021
31st	The serious human rights concerns and situation in Afghanistan	Aug. 24, 2021
32nd	The human rights implications of the ongoing situation in the Sudan	Nov. 5, 2021
33rd	The grave human rights situation in Ethiopia	Dec. 17, 2021

Source: U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Author Information

Luisa Blanchfield
Specialist in International Relations

Michael A. Weber
Analyst in Foreign Affairs

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.