



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEPAL**



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OHCHR welcomes new Human Rights Council

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, has welcomed the decision by Member States at the General Assembly on 15 March to establish the United Nations Human Rights Council.

In a statement, the High Commissioner described the decision as “a historic opportunity to improve the protection and promotion of fundamental freedoms of people around the world.” She said that it responded “to the hope that the global community could come together and create a strong institution at the heart of the international human rights system”.

The new Human Rights Council will replace the existing Commission on Human Rights. Based in Geneva, the Council will start work on 19 June. The 62nd session of the Commission will resume on Monday 20 March, when the agenda will be finalised. The mandate of the Commission on Human Rights will end on 16 June.

In addition to retaining some of the best elements of the Commission on Human Rights, such as the system of independent investigators and the broad participation of civil society, the new Human Rights Council will display some significant features, including that candidates for membership will have to make commitments on human rights; elected members will be first in line for scrutiny under a universal periodic review of their human rights records; and members that commit gross and systematic violations of human rights may be suspended. Members will also be required to commit to cooperate with the Council and its various mechanisms.

The method of electing members of the Human Rights Council also represents a major improvement over the Commission on Human Rights. Election to the Council will require an absolute majority of UN member States: of the 191 members, at least 96 must support a state's membership by secret ballot. This threshold is much higher than the 28 or fewer votes required by a country to attain membership in the Commission, and will allow countries to block the election of egregious rights violators.

Ian Martin, the Representative of the High Commissioner in Nepal said today

“I want to make it absolutely clear that the mandate of OHCHR-Nepal is not affected by the creation of the Human Rights Council or the close of the Commission on Human Rights. We will continue to operate under the two-year agreement signed in April 2005 between the High Commissioner and the Government of Nepal for the protection and promotion of human rights in Nepal.”