



UN Human Rights Council

Why in News

Recently, the **United States announced that it would rejoin the [United Nations \(UN\) Human Rights Council](#)** that it left in 2018.

- The USA will return to the Council as an observer with the aim of seeking election as a full member.

Key Points

▪ About:

- The Human Rights Council is **an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system** responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of [human rights](#) around the world.

▪ Formation:

- The Council was **created by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006**. It **replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights**.
- The **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) serves as the Secretariat** of the Human Rights Council.
- **OHCHR is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.**

▪ Members:

- It is made up of **47 United Nations Member States** which are elected by the UN General Assembly (UNGA).
 - The UNGA takes into account the candidate States' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.
- The Council's Membership is based on equitable geographical distribution. Seats are distributed as follows:
 - African States: 13 seats
 - Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
 - Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
 - Western European and other States: 7 seats
 - Eastern European States: 6 seats
- Members of the Council **serve for a period of three years** and are **not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms**.

▪ Procedures and Mechanisms:

- **Universal Periodic Review: UPR** serves to **assess the human rights situations in all United Nations Member States**.
- **Advisory Committee:** It **serves as the Council's "think tank"** providing it with expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues.

- **Complaint Procedure:** It **allows individuals and organizations to bring human rights violations to the attention** of the Council.
 - **UN Special Procedures:** These are **made up of [special rapporteurs](#)**, special representatives, independent experts and working groups that monitor, examine, advise and **publicly report on thematic issues or human rights situations in specific countries.**
- **Issues:**
- **Related to the Membership:** A key concern for some critics has been the **composition of Council membership**, which sometimes **includes countries widely perceived as human rights abusers.**
 - **China, Cuba, Eritrea, Russia and Venezuela**, all of which have been accused of human rights abuses.
 - **Disproportionate Focus:** USA pulled out of the Agency in 2018 due to its disproportionate focus on Israel, which has received by far the largest number of critical council resolutions against any country.
- **India and UN Human Rights Council:**
- Recently, a group of **Special Rapporteurs to the United Nations (UN)** has written to the Indian government **[expressing concerns over the draft Environment Impact Assessment \(EIA\) notification 2020.](#)**
 - In 2020, India's **National Human Rights Commission** submitted its mid-term report to the Council as a part of the third round of the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.**
 - India **was elected to the Council** for a period of three years beginning 1st January 2019.

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