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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 21 June 2022 from the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations has the honour to refer to the candidature of Belgium to the Human Rights Council for the term 2023–2025, at the elections to be held during the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution [60/251](#), the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations has the further honour to transmit herewith the voluntary pledges and commitments reaffirming that the promotion and protection of human rights are a priority of the foreign policy of Belgium (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations would be grateful to the President of the General Assembly if the present note and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 117 (c) of the preliminary list.

* [A/77/50](#).



Annex to the note verbale dated 21 June 2022 from the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Belgium to the Human Rights Council, 2023–2025

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

1. The Kingdom of Belgium has the pleasure to hereby present its candidacy for a seat on the Human Rights Council for the period 2023–2025.
2. Belgium is strongly committed to multilateralism and to all three pillars of the Charter of the United Nations. It is a fervent proponent of international cooperation, of an international order based on the rule of law and of promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction.
3. The foreign policy of Belgium aims to enhance the positive correlation between peace and security, development and human rights, which are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Belgium is committed to the promotion and protection of human rights as essential conditions for achieving peace, security and development, as illustrated by its efforts in advancing human rights during its 2019–2020 Security Council mandate.
4. Having served on the Human Rights Council in previous terms, most recently from 2016 to 2018, Belgium has demonstrated its strong commitment to the Council and its mechanisms, in particular by its vice-presidency in 2016 and membership of the Working Group on Situations in 2018. As an observer State, Belgium has also consistently and actively participated in the Council's activities in a constructive manner. It wishes to contribute further to a dynamic and effective Council.
5. Therefore, Belgium is applying for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2023–2025.

I. Four thematic areas

6. In the context of its candidacy for the Human Rights Council, Belgium will focus on four thematic areas:

A. Strengthening accountability and the rule of law

7. Belgium is a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court and its independence and is one of the main initiators of a proposal for a multilateral treaty for mutual legal assistance and extradition for national-level prosecution of the most serious international crimes.
8. Together with its partners, Belgium will continue to put the question of the death penalty on the agenda of the Council in order to generate a substantive debate on the issue from a human rights perspective and to move forward the goal of universal abolition.
9. As a founding member of the Council of Europe, Belgium has consistently advocated a strong role for regional organizations and arrangements in the promotion and protection of human rights. Convinced of the importance and added value of well-developed regional human rights systems in reinforcing universal human rights standards, Belgium will continue to advocate within the Council in favour of regional

organizations or arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights and in favour of advancing cooperation between international and regional human rights mechanisms.

10. As founder and Co-Chair of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, in Geneva, Belgium will continue to call attention to the plight of children affected by armed conflict.

B. Promoting civic space and protecting human rights defenders

11. Without the participation of civil society and human rights defenders in the work of the Human Rights Council, the Council is not able to fulfil its mandate. Therefore, Belgium will promote their active and meaningful participation in the work of the Council.

12. Together with its partners, Belgium will also continue its efforts to prevent and combat all forms of intimidation and reprisals against civil society actors who engage with United Nations representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights.

13. There can be no realization of rights without the space to defend those rights. In standing up for civic space, Belgium will promote the right to freedom of expression and opinion, which is essential for the fulfilment and enjoyment of a wide range of other human rights.

C. Enhancing equality and countering discrimination, with particular attention to women and girls

14. Since gender equality and the human rights of women and girls are a long-standing priority, Belgium will promote the implementation of the rights of women and girls in all their diversity. Particular attention will be paid to strengthening participation, combating gender-based violence and realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

15. As member of the Equal Rights Coalition, Belgium will continue to engage against violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons and to support the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

16. In its steadfast resolve to address the scourge of racism, Belgium will continue to draw attention to the plight of all victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

D. Promoting all human rights, civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights in their indivisibility and interdependence

17. Together with its partners, Belgium will continue to put the issue of extreme poverty and human rights on the agenda of the Human Rights Council.

18. As Co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Decent Work for Sustainable Development, Belgium will continue to promote decent work and social protection for all and respect for international labour standards.

19. Guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, its Sustainable Development Goals and the central principle of leaving no one behind, Belgium will

promote the link between human rights and development as well as the human rights-based approach to development, encompassing all human rights.

II. Promoting and protecting human rights in the Human Rights Council and across the United Nations

20. Belgium pledges to:

- Remain strongly committed to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide, a basic condition for peace and development;
- Remain committed to the universality, inalienability, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights for all;
- Cooperate with all States to promote and protect human rights for all;
- Support the Human Rights Council in its tasks of addressing situations of violations of human rights, serving as a forum for dialogue on thematic issues, contributing to the prevention of human rights violations and responding promptly to human rights emergencies;
- Uphold its standing invitation to all special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council and facilitate country visit requests as effectively as possible, respond in a timely manner to special procedure communications and urgent appeals and endeavour to ensure the integrity and independence of the system of special procedures;
- Continue its full engagement with the universal periodic review mechanism by ensuring effective follow-up to recommendations accepted during its review, formulating thoughtful recommendations to other States and supporting projects, through international cooperation, that contribute to the implementation of recommendations and the participation of stakeholders in the universal periodic review process;
- Continue to cooperate fully with the treaty bodies, continue its strong support for the treaty body system, which is at the heart of the global human rights framework and plays a fundamental role in promoting and protecting human rights at the national level, and continue to protect and promote the independence of the treaty body system while reviewing ways to improve its efficiency and effectiveness;
- Continue to provide political and financial support to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights while respecting and preserving its independence;
- Continue to provide contributions to activities aimed at the promotion and protection of human rights, including contributions to relevant funds of the United Nations;
- Continue to support the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict;
- Continue to support the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict and to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict;
- Strive to create a safe and enabling environment for civil society and to support, through its diplomatic work and development cooperation, an independent civil society working to advance human rights;

- Protect and promote the rights of the child, in particular children affected by armed conflict;
- Continue its endeavours to ensure that international efforts to combat terrorism will be undertaken in full respect for human rights;
- Advocate the right to freedom of religion or belief, including the freedom to change or abandon one's religion and the right not to profess any religion;
- Continue to promote the effective implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and to advocate a European Union framework on business and human rights based on those principles;
- Work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to further a rights-based approach to the 2030 Agenda;
- Maintain its efforts to put human rights at the heart of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) recovery and promote international solidarity and cooperation.

III. Strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights at the national level

21. While recognizing that no State has a perfect human rights record, Belgium acknowledges the responsibility of members elected to the Human Rights Council to meet the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and to cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms.

22. The promotion and protection of human rights is an integral part not only of the foreign policy of Belgium but also of its national policy, and this within all its governments. In this respect, it must be recalled that Belgium is a unique federal State and that its federalism is based on cooperation. There is no hierarchical distinction between federal laws and the laws of federated entities. Federated entities may cooperate with one another in certain spheres and, where appropriate, with the federal authorities. Such cooperation may be arranged through formal agreements.

23. Belgium has several sectoral bodies with specialized mandates for the protection and promotion of human rights, at both the federal level and the level of the federated entities, such as the Federal Institute for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, Unia (the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Action against Racism), the National Commission for the Rights of the Child and the Data Protection Authority.

24. Since its previous voluntary pledges and commitments, Belgium has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) (in 2016), the Invalidity, Old-Age and Survivors' Benefits Convention, 1967 (No. 128) (in 2017), the Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Convention, 1969 (No. 130) (in 2017), the Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988 (No. 167) (in 2016), the Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No. 170) (in 2017), the Working Conditions (Hotels and Restaurants) Convention, 1991 (No. 172) (in 2017), the Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175) (in 2016), the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) (in 2018) and the Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) (in 2019).

25. Belgium also ratified or acceded to eight United Nations human rights instruments and accepted the right of individual complaint under these instruments. At present, Belgium is one of the States with no overdue reports to the treaty bodies. In addition, Belgium accepted, as pledged previously, the amendment to article 8 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial

Discrimination, the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the amendments to articles 17 (7) and 18 (5) of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (in 2016).

26. Belgium pledges to do its utmost to ratify as soon as possible the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), the Convention on Access to Official Documents and the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (Protocol 207).

27. To fulfil its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, Belgium has adopted or is developing a number of national action plans, such as:

(a) The sixth national action plan to combat gender-based violence (2021–2025), developed in line with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence;

(b) The fourth national action plan on women, peace and security (2022–2026);

(c) The fourth national action plan to combat trafficking in human beings (2021–2025);

(d) An action plan for an LGBTQI+-friendly Belgium (2021–2024);

(e) A second national action plan to implement the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;

(f) A national action plan against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.
