

21 June 2022

Mr António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
United Nations Headquarters, New York
Open letter

Dear Secretary-General,

Appointment of next UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The post of High Commissioner for Human Rights is critical to the promotion and protection of human rights globally, particularly at a time when human rights standards and mechanisms face enormous pressure from powerful governments. This role is key for the implementation of the Call to Action for Human Rights and Our Common Agenda.

The undersigned organisations represent and work closely with human rights defenders, victims of violations and affected communities, as well as with the UN. In this capacity, we write to you regarding the process for appointing the next High Commissioner, as well as the key qualifications and qualities required for the position.

The post of High Commissioner should be filled by someone of high moral standing and personal integrity, and who is independent and impartial and possesses competency and expertise in the field of human rights. It requires a human rights champion who is courageous and principled. Your nominee should have a proven record of effective public advocacy, as well as demonstrated experience working with defenders and victims of violations. The post requires a strong commitment to addressing discrimination, inequality, oppression and injustice in all its forms, as well as combating impunity and pursuing redress and accountability for all human rights violations and abuses, including those committed by the most powerful governments. The High Commissioner's role is to be the world's leading human rights advocate, as distinct from the role of a diplomat or political envoy. Demonstrating solidarity with victims and publicly calling out abuses should take precedence over friendly dialogue with governments.

The process of nominating the next High Commissioner is critical to identifying the most qualified candidate and ensuring the credibility of their appointment. This process should be open, transparent and merit-based. It should involve wide and meaningful consultation with independent human rights organisations and human rights defenders. Given that High Commissioner Bachelet's mandate will end on 31 August 2022, it is imperative that this process move quickly.

Human rights are primary values, legal obligations, and indispensable for peace, security and sustainable development. It is vital that the next High Commissioner be a compelling leader for human rights within the UN system and throughout the world. In addition to identifying an outstanding candidate through a consultative process, we urge you to vigorously defend the independence of the Office of the High Commissioner, including through adequate resourcing. For our part, we pledge to support the High Commissioner and the Office of the High Commissioner in their principled and good faith efforts to promote and protect human rights worldwide.

We look forward to your response and to meaningful civil society engagement with this process.

Yours faithfully,

1. Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran
2. Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel
3. Advocates for International Development
4. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
5. All Human Rights for All in Iran
6. Amnesty International
7. Arab NGO Network for Development
8. ARTICLE 19
9. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
10. Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani People in Iran (AHRAZ)
11. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
12. Center for Economic and Social Rights
13. Center for International Environmental Law
14. Center for Reproductive Rights
15. Centre for Civil and Political Rights
16. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)
17. Child Rights Connect
18. Citizen, Democracy and Accountability
19. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
20. Colombian Commission of Jurists
21. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
22. Conectas Direitos Humanos
23. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
24. Dominican Leadership Conference
25. Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM)
26. Environmental Defender Law Center
27. Franciscans International
28. Front Line Defenders
29. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
30. Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
31. Gulf Centre for Human Rights
32. Haiti Rehabilitation Foundation
33. Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights
34. HIV Legal Network
35. Human Rights Activists in Iran
36. Human Rights House Foundation
37. Human Rights Law Centre
38. Human Rights Watch
39. ILGA World (The International Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Intersex Association)
40. Impact Iran
41. Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH)
42. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
43. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
44. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
45. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
46. Iran Human Rights

47. JASS/Just Associates
48. Just Fair
49. Kenya Human Rights Commission
50. Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva (KMMK-G)
51. Law & Society Trust Sri Lanka
52. Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
53. Make Mothers Matter (MMM)
54. MINBYUN – Lawyers for a Democratic Society
55. Minority Rights Group International (MRG)
56. Open Society Foundations
57. Plan International
58. Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos, PROVEA
59. Siamak Pourzand Foundation
60. United Nations Association – UK
61. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
62. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
63. World Uyghur Congress