

EVALUATION OF UNHRC CANDIDATES FOR 2019-2022

This report, co-sponsored by UN Watch, Human Rights Foundation and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, evaluates the country candidates for the October 12, 2018 election of 18 new members to the UN Human Rights Council. Our evaluations apply the membership criteria established by UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251, which requires members to “uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights” and to “fully cooperate with the Council.” In particular, we examined (a) each candidate’s record of domestic human rights protection; and (b) its UN voting record. The report finds as follows:

UNQUALIFIED

Six candidates have poor records and fail to qualify:

Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Eritrea, Philippines, Somalia

QUESTIONABLE

Four candidates have problematic human rights and UN voting records:

Burkina Faso, Fiji, India, Togo

QUALIFIED

Only eight candidate countries are qualified to be council members:

**Argentina, Austria, Bahamas, Bulgaria, Czech Republic,
Denmark, Italy, Uruguay**

The absence of competition this year in all five regional slates undermines the very premise and rationale for holding elections. Nevertheless, this report emphasizes to UN member states that they have the legal right—and moral obligation—to refrain from voting for Unqualified candidates, even if those happen to be running on closed slates.

Instead, as detailed in the report, during the ballot they can actually defeat such candidacies, thereby freeing up the process for qualified alternatives to come forward. In regard to candidate countries deemed Questionable, they should, at a minimum, be asked to commit to redress the shortcomings identified in this report.

AFRICAN GROUP

CLOSED SLATE: 5 CANDIDATES FOR 5 SEATS
Replacing Burundi, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Kenya & Togo

FH: Freedom House; RSF: Reporters Sans Frontières Press Freedom Index

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Burkina Faso	Partly Free	Hybrid Regime	Fairly Good	Mixed	Questionable
Cameroon	Not Free	Authoritarian Regime	Bad	Negative	Unqualified
Eritrea	Not Free	Authoritarian Regime	Very Bad	Negative	Unqualified
Somalia	Not Free	N/A	Very Bad	Negative	Unqualified
Togo	Partly Free	Authoritarian Regime	Problematic	Mixed	Questionable

ASIAN GROUP

CLOSED SLATE: 5 CANDIDATES FOR 5 SEATS
Replacing Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Philippines, South Korea & UAE

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Bahrain	Not Free	Authoritarian Regime	Very Bad	Mixed	Unqualified
Bangladesh	Partly Free	Hybrid Regime	Bad	Negative	Unqualified
Fiji	Partly Free	Hybrid Regime	Problematic	Mixed	Questionable
India	Free	Flawed Democracy	Bad	Negative	Questionable
Philippines	Partly Free	Flawed Democracy	Bad	Negative	Unqualified

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP

CLOSED SLATE: 3 CANDIDATES FOR 3 SEATS

Replacing Ecuador, Panama & Venezuela

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Argentina	Free	Flawed Democracy	Problematic	Positive	Qualified
Bahamas	Free	N/A	N/A	Positive	Qualified
Uruguay	Free	Full Democracy	Fairly Good	Positive	Qualified

WESTERN EUROPEAN AND OTHERS GROUP

CLOSED SLATE: 3 CANDIDATES FOR 3 SEATS

Replacing Belgium, Germany & Switzerland

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Austria	Free	Full Democracy	Good	Positive	Qualified
Denmark	Free	Full Democracy	Good	Positive	Qualified
Italy	Free	Flawed Democracy	Fairly Good	Positive	Qualified

EASTERN EUROPEAN GROUP

CLOSED SLATE: 2 CANDIDATES FOR 2 SEATS

Replacing Georgia & Slovenia

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Bulgaria	Free	Flawed Democracy	Bad	Positive	Qualified
Czech Republic	Free	Flawed Democracy	Fairly Good	Positive	Qualified

METHODOLOGY

The presence of gross and systematic abusers of human rights on the UN Human Rights Council contradicts its own charter. According to UNGA Resolution 60/251, which established the Council in 2006, General Assembly members are obliged to elect states to the Council by considering “the candidates’ contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto.” The resolution further provides that consideration ought to be given to whether the candidate can meet membership obligations (a) “to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights” and (b) to “fully cooperate with the Council.”

Guided by these criteria, this report evaluates each candidate’s suitability for election to the Human Rights Council by examining its record of human rights protection at home — and its record of human rights promotion at the UN. Under the criteria established by UNGA Resolution 60/251, it is clear that the UN should not elect any country to the Council which has either a poor record of respecting the human rights of its own people, or which is likely to use its Council membership by voting to frustrate the protection of human rights victims or to undermine the principles of individual human rights.

Citing these criteria, in June 2017 the Netherlands on behalf of 47 countries—including the U.S., UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada—issued a joint statement to further HRC membership requirements.¹ They pledged to “strive to ensure competitive HRC membership elections,” and to “engage in voting based on human rights considerations consistent with GA resolution 60/251.” The stated goal was to “help strengthen the Council’s effectiveness and credibility.”

However, that pledge has not resulted in any change to the HRC election process. In fact, this year there is no competition whatsoever in any of the regional slates.

The country evaluations in this report are based on information, ratings and analysis from the following sources:

- *The Economist Democracy Index (2017)*, which considers a country’s electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, government functioning, political participation, and political culture, and ranks it as: Full Democracy, Flawed Democracy, Hybrid Regime or Authoritarian Regime.
- *Reporters Sans Frontières Worldwide Press Freedom Index (2018)*, which measures the degree of freedom that journalists and news organizations enjoy in each country, and the efforts made by state authorities to respect and ensure respect for this freedom, ranking each country as Good, Fairly Good, Problematic, Bad or Very bad.
- *Freedom in the World (2018)*, the annual survey by Freedom House that measures political rights and civil liberties worldwide, ranking countries as: Free, Partly Free or Not Free.
- *Voting record at the UN General Assembly*, examining countries by how they voted at the UN on ten different thematic and country-specific human rights proposals, and classifying their

¹ See Joint Statement by the Netherlands on behalf of 47 countries, *Human Rights Council*, 35th Session, June 23, 2017, available at www.unwatch.org/joint-statement-improving-unhrc-membership/.

voting records accordingly as either Positive, Negative, or Mixed. Countries were credited with one point for voting to support human rights, debited one point for opposing human rights and given no points for abstaining or being absent. Countries who scored between 4 to 10 are ranked as having Positive voting records; those scoring 0 to 3 are Mixed; and those scoring below zero are Negative.

CALL TO ACTION

OPPOSE UNQUALIFIED CANDIDATES

On October 12, 2018, the UN General Assembly's 193 member states will be asked to fill 18 of the 47 Human Rights Council seats. Slots open each year as members complete their three-year terms.

We call upon member states to refrain from voting in favor of **Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Eritrea, the Philippines and Somalia**. These candidates' records — on respecting human rights at home and in UN voting — fail to meet the UN criteria for Council membership.

We also call on **Burkina Faso, Fiji, India and Togo** to commit to improving their human rights and UN voting records before they can be deemed suitable.

CLOSED SLATES DEFEAT PURPOSE OF ELECTIONS

Regrettably, there is no competition in any of the five regional groups this year. Closed slates are typically the product of backroom deals fixing an equal number of candidates and available seats. The result deprives UN member states of the opportunity to exercise the responsibilities given to them by the 2006 UNGA resolution creating the Council.

Because of the poor records of many of this year's candidates, this election also threatens to further weaken the Council, which still struggles to improve on the reputation of its widely disparaged predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights.

PROCEDURE FOR OPPOSING UNQUALIFIED CANDIDATES ON CLOSED SLATES

Many UN member states mistakenly assume that their task is simply to ratify the pre-selections of the closed slates fixed by regional groups. The truth, however, is that nothing obliges any country to vote for any candidate, even if they appear on a non-competitive list. Moreover, it is equally true that every candidate, including those on closed slates, must receive the affirmative votes of 97 countries, being an absolute majority of the GA membership.

Accordingly, to allow the Human Rights Council to live up to the ideals expressed in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we urge UN member states to oppose all unqualified states in the secret ballot. For example, even though the African Group submitted a closed slate, UN member states should fulfill their duties under UNGA Resolution 60/251 by refraining to vote for Cameroon, Eritrea and Somalia.

This would allow other, better qualified candidates to come forward. In order to successfully block an unqualified candidate, Rule 94 of the UNGA Rules of Procedure provides that a majority of states must vote against a candidate country on three successive ballots. As the Rule explains, "after the third inconclusive ballot, votes may be cast for any eligible person or Member." This would open the process to other states not already on the ballot. Moreover, by casting write-in votes for the best qualified alternatives eligible, the UNGA could thereby convince hesitating governments that they would have a realistic prospect, thus encouraging them to present their candidacy.

ANALYSIS OF “UNQUALIFIED” CANDIDATES

Following is our analysis of six unqualified candidates: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Eritrea, The Philippines and Somalia.

BAHRAIN

Bahrain’s Human Rights Record

Bahrain commits serious human rights violations, including:

- Arbitrary killings by security forces
- Torture of detainees
- Harsh and potentially life-threatening prison conditions
- Arbitrary arrest
- Holds political prisoners
- Unlawful interference with privacy
- Restrictions on freedom of expression
- Restrictions on freedom of the press
- Restrictions on freedom of association
- Restrictions on freedom of movement, including arbitrary revocation of citizenship

Discussion

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy ruled by King Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa, a Sunni Muslim.² Though the majority of Bahrain’s population is Shia, political life is dominated by Sunnis.³ The king has power over all branches of government. He appoints cabinet ministers and members of the upper house of the National Assembly. Only members of the lower house are elected.⁴ Critics of the government accuse it of redrawing electoral districts in a manner designed to keep out the opposition.⁵ Moreover, Al-Wefaq, the main opposition party has refused to participate in the National Assembly since 2011 due to the government’s crackdown on pro-democracy activists.⁶

In recent years, the government has engaged in draconian policies to suppress and ultimately eradicate the opposition. Al-Wefaq’s secretary general, Ali Salman, has been detained—arbitrarily, according to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention—since 2014, and is now serving a nine-year sentence for incitement.⁷ Al-Wefaq itself was recently dissolved by court order and its assets confiscated for allegedly inciting terrorism.⁸

² U.S. Dep’t of State, Bureau of Democracy, H.R. and Lab., Country Reports on Human Rights Practices Bahrain 1 (2017) [hereinafter *State Department Report on Bahrain*];

³ *Id.* at 27.

⁴ *Freedom in the World 2017: Bahrain*, FREEDOM HOUSE (2017), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/bahrain>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*; *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 8.

⁸ *Id.* at 26.

In February 2016, another opposition leader, Ibrahim Sharif, was charged with “inciting hatred against the regime,” for tweeting criticism of the government. Though he was released, the government continues to threaten him with criminal prosecution for his criticism.⁹ Sharif’s secular political society, the National Democratic Action Society Wa’ad, was dissolved by the government in May 2017.¹⁰ Furthermore, on June 4, 2017, the Ministry of Information Affairs indefinitely suspended al-Wasat, the only independent newspaper in Bahrain, after it reported on protests in Morocco.¹¹

In April 2017, King Hamad ratified a constitutional amendment allowing military courts to try civilians accused of threatening the security of the state.¹² The UN Human Rights Committee expressly criticized this amendment in its recent review of Bahrain.¹³ In addition, in April 2018, seven UN experts deplored a military court’s imposition of the death penalty on four men charged with terrorism, following coerced confessions and a trial lacking due process.¹⁴

In May 2017, police violently suppressed a protest outside the home of Shia Cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim, killing five protesters.¹⁵ The Court had revoked Qassim’s citizenship in 2016, indicted him for money laundering, and sentenced him to a one-year suspended prison term. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Hussein criticized Bahrain’s response to the protests and called on the government to launch an independent investigation into the deaths.¹⁶ According to the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, since 2012, Bahrain has revoked the citizenship of at least 738 nationals, including many human rights defenders and activists.¹⁷

Bahrain also has clamped down on freedom of speech and freedom of association, and punished dissidents. Activist Nabeel Rajab, head of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, was sentenced to jail time in July 2017 for criticizing the government.¹⁸ He was given an additional five years in February 2018 for other anti-government statements.¹⁹ Women’s rights activist Ebtisam al-Sayegh was detained and interrogated multiple times in 2017, including upon her return from attending a UN Human Rights Council session. According to al-Sayegh, during one of her interrogations, she was beaten, stripped and sexually assaulted, and her family was threatened.²⁰ Other prisoners also reported torture and ill-treatment.²¹

⁹ *Freedom in the World 2017: Bahrain*, *supra* note 5; *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 19.

¹⁰ World Report 2018: Events of 2017, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 60 (2018) [hereinafter *Human Rights Watch Report on Bahrain 2017*], <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/bahrain>; *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 26.

¹¹ *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 17; *Human Rights Watch Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 11.

¹² *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 14.

¹³ Concluding observations of the Human Rights Comm. On the initial report of Bahrain, ¶¶ 12-13, UN Doc. CCPR/C/BHR/CO/1 (July 26, 2018).

¹⁴ Bahrain: UN rights experts condemn military court convictions, cite torture allegations, Office of the High Commissioner (April 30, 2018),

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23010&LangID=E>.

¹⁵ *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 2.

¹⁶ Zeid calls for investigation of protester deaths in Bahrain, Office of the High Commissioner (June 2, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21684&LangID=E>.

¹⁷ *Bahrain: Hundreds Stripped of Citizenship*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (July 27, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/27/bahrain-hundreds-stripped-citizenship>.

¹⁸ *Human Rights Watch Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 11; *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 16-17.

¹⁹ *Bahrain: 5 More Years for Jailed Activist*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Feb. 22, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/22/bahrain-5-more-years-jailed-activist>.

²⁰ *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 3; *Human Rights Watch Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 11.

²¹ *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 3.

In June 2017, UN rights experts sharply criticized Bahrain for resorting to “torture, arbitrary detention, unfounded convictions, the stripping of citizenship, the use of travel bans, intimidation, including death threats, and reprisals for cooperating with international organizations,” as means of curbing dissent.²² In recent concluding observations, both the Human Rights Committee and the Committee Against Torture criticized Bahrain for frequent use of torture and ill-treatment in prisons, and as a means of eliciting confessions.²³

There have been other cases of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearances. For example, in October 2016, Sayed Alawi Hussein Alawi, a telecommunications employee was forcibly disappeared for several weeks and was incommunicado. In October 2017, Alawi was charged with security-related crimes and his case transferred to a military court.²⁴

Bahrain’s UN Voting Record

Mixed: At the General Assembly, Bahrain backed human rights abusers when it supported a resolution denying the right to level sanctions against such regimes, and by voting to delay the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against LGBT. Bahrain abstained on resolutions that spoke out for victims of Russian aggression in Ukraine and Georgia. Bahrain’s voting record is mixed rather than negative because it supported resolutions speaking out for human rights victims in North Korea, Syria, Iran, and Myanmar.

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh’s Human Rights Record

Bangladesh commits serious human rights violations, including:

- Extrajudicial killings
- Torture
- Arbitrary detention
- Forced disappearances by government forces
- Restrictions on freedom of the speech and the press
- Restrictions on NGOs
- Lack of freedom to participate in the political process
- Corruption
- Violence and discrimination against women
- Violence and discrimination against LGBT
- Violence and discrimination based on religion, caste, or tribe
- Trafficking in persons
- Child labor and other violations of worker’s rights
- Widespread impunity for security forces

²² Bahrain must end worsening human rights clampdown, UN experts say, Office of the High Commissioner (June 16, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21762&LangID=E>.

²³ Concluding observations of the Human Rights Comm. On the initial report of Bahrain, *supra* note 14, at ¶¶ 36-37; Concluding observations on the second and third periodic reports of Bahrain, ¶¶ 8-9, UN Doc. CAT/C/BHR/CO/2-3 (May 29, 2017).

²⁴ *State Department Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 3, at 11-12; *Human Rights Watch Report on Bahrain*, *supra* note 11.

Discussion

While Bangladesh is known for receiving large numbers of Rohingya Muslims fleeing ethnic cleansing in neighboring Burma (Myanmar), its treatment of those refugees and its overall record on human rights are problematic.

In August 2017, some 646,000 Rohingya crossed into Bangladesh, more than doubling the refugee population in the country.²⁵ The government initially refused the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access to these new refugees, and for much of the year, restricted UNHCR's access only to registered refugees, a small fraction of the actual number of Rohingya in the country.²⁶ While Bangladesh offers the refugees some protection, it does not grant them asylum, and imposes restrictions that limit their ability to develop economically.²⁷ Furthermore, in November 2017, Burma and Bangladesh announced an agreement to repatriate the refugees, sparking serious concerns that refugees' rights to non-refoulement would be violated and they would be forcibly returned.²⁸

Officially, Bangladesh is a democracy governed by the ruling Awami League (AL) party. However, the main opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) has had no representation in the government since it boycotted the 2014 elections to protest election irregularities.²⁹ The other major opposition party, Jamaat-e-Islami, has been deprived of legal status since 2012 when the Supreme Court canceled its registration.³⁰ Leaders in both parties are routinely subjected to arrests and harassment.³¹

Several laws limiting free speech are used to prosecute members of the opposition, journalists and civil society.³² In 2016, BNP opposition leader Khaleda Zia and two journalists were charged with sedition.³³ According to Human Rights Watch, there were at least 30 assaults on journalists in 2017 and one murder of a journalist—Abdul Hakim Shimul in February 2017.³⁴ Two journalists were detained in September due to their reporting on the Rohingya crisis.³⁵ In August 2018, UN human rights experts called on the government to release photographer Sahidul Alam, who was arrested and allegedly tortured after critical reporting on a student protest.³⁶ Dozens of Bangladeshi bloggers are in hiding or exile due to a fear of physical reprisals for their reporting.³⁷

²⁵ U.S. Dep't of State, Bureau of Democracy, H.R. and Lab., Country Reports on Human Rights Practices Bangladesh 16-17 (2017) [hereinafter *State Department Report on Bangladesh*].

²⁶ *Id.* at 17.

²⁷ *Id.* at 20.

²⁸ World Report 2018: Events of 2017, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 65 (2018) [hereinafter *Human Rights Watch Report on Bangladesh 2017*], <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/bangladesh>; *Rohingya crisis: Bangladesh and Myanmar agree repatriation timeframe*, BBC (Jan. 16, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42699602>.

²⁹ *State Department Report on Bangladesh*, *supra* note 26, at 21; *Freedom in the World 2018: Bangladesh*, FREEDOM HOUSE (2018), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/bangladesh>.

³⁰ *State Department Report on Bangladesh*, *supra* note 26, at 22.

³¹ *Freedom in the World 2018: Bangladesh*, *supra* note 30.

³² *Id.*; *State Department Report on Bangladesh*, *supra* note 26, at 12.

³³ *State Department Report on Bangladesh*, *supra* note 26, at 12.

³⁴ *Human Rights Watch Report on Bangladesh*, *supra* note 29.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ Bangladesh: UN human rights experts urge immediate release of photographer Shahidul Alam, Office of the High Commissioner (August 13, 2018), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23451&LangID=E>.

³⁷ *Freedom in the World 2018: Bangladesh*, *supra* note 30.

The government also restricts the rights of opposition members to freedom of assembly and association.³⁸

Bangladesh's security forces are known to commit extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture. The government frequently justifies extrajudicial killings claiming the suspect died in a "gunfight." Local human rights agencies estimated that some 160 individuals were killed extrajudicially in 2017. In one case, the family of Mazharul Islam claimed he was tortured to death after being arrested. Hospital records allegedly showed injuries to multiple parts of the victim's body.³⁹

One local human rights group reported 60 cases of enforced disappearance during the year. In August 2016, the sons of three former opposition politicians who had been executed, disappeared. One of them, Humam Quader Chowdhury, resurfaced seven months later, but the other two remain missing.⁴⁰ It is suspected that journalist Utpal Das and professor Mubasher Hasan were forcibly disappeared during the year for periods of more than one month.⁴¹

In February 2017, the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, whose request to visit the country has so far been denied,⁴² called on the government to halt the practice of enforced disappearances.⁴³ In April, Swedish Radio published a secretly recorded interview with a senior member of the security forces who admitted to routine instances of murdering suspects and then disposing of the bodies. In July, a judicial inquiry concluded that enforced disappearances occurred and ordered the police to take action.⁴⁴ The government has not responded to a request for a visit from the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances.

The resignation of the Chief Justice in July 2017 raises serious questions about the independence of the judiciary in Bangladesh. The Chief Justice claims he was forced to resign for his role in overturning a 2014 constitutional amendment which had given parliament the right to remove judges.⁴⁵

Bangladesh's UN Voting Record

Negative: At the General Assembly, Bangladesh voted for a resolution denying countries the right to sanction regimes that abuse human rights, and voted to delay the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against LGBT. While Bangladesh supported the resolution on Myanmar, it failed to support resolutions speaking out for human rights victims in North Korea, Syria and Iran.

³⁸ *State Department Report on Bangladesh*, *supra* note 26, at 15-16.

³⁹ *Id.* at 2.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 3.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 12.

⁴² *Id.* at 3.

⁴³ UN expert group urges Bangladesh to stop enforced disappearances, Office of the High Commissioner (Feb. 24, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21220&LangID>.

⁴⁴ *State Department Report on Bangladesh*, *supra* note 26, at 4.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 9; Amnesty International Report 2017/2018, The State of the World's Human Rights: Bangladesh, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 87 (2018), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/bangladesh/report-bangladesh/>.

CAMEROON

Cameroon's Human Rights Record

Cameroon commits serious human rights violations, including:

- Arbitrary and unlawful killings
- Disappearances by security forces
- Torture and abuse by security forces
- Arbitrary detention
- Harsh and life-threatening prison conditions
- Violations of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly
- Periodic government restrictions on internet access
- Trafficking in persons
- Criminalization and arrest of LGBT
- Violations of worker's rights
- Corruption

Discussion

Cameroon is ruled by President Paul Biya of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) who has governed the country since 1982.⁴⁶ Though Cameroon holds elections, irregularities are commonplace, including bribery, gerrymandering, and government control of the electoral commission. According to Freedom House, "corruption is systemic and bribery is commonplace in all sectors."⁴⁷

In addition, the government uses a variety of tactics to harass and suppress the opposition. The opposition group Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) was banned in January 2017. In February 2017, the government banned a rally by the main opposition party—Social Democratic Front (SDF). In October 2017, Biya critic Aboubakar Siddiki of the Cameroon's Patriotic Salvation Movement was sentenced to 25 years in prison for attempting to incite a revolution.⁴⁸

Since late 2016, there is a growing separatist movement in the country's anglophone region, a response to the Francophone government's discriminatory policies and its heavy-handed tactics against protests by Anglophone lawyers and teachers. The conflict has been marked by violence and atrocities on both sides.⁴⁹ According to the UN, the fighting has forced some 20,000 Cameroonians to flee to Nigeria.⁵⁰ Another 160,000 are internally displaced.⁵¹ Government forces are accused of numerous violations, including massacring civilians, rape, and burning villages.⁵² A recent report by Human Rights Watch

⁴⁶ *Freedom in the World 2018: Cameroon*, FREEDOM HOUSE (2018), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/cameroon>.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Cameroon: Killings, Destruction in Anglophone Regions, Government and Separatists Abuse Civilians*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (July 19, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/19/cameroon-killings-destruction-anglophone-regions>.

⁵⁰ Peter Zongo, 'This is a genocide': villages burn as war rages in blood-soaked Cameroon, THE GUARDIAN (May 30, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/may/30/cameroon-killings-escalate-anglophone-crisis>.

⁵¹ *Cameroon: Killings, Destruction in Anglophone Regions*, *supra* note 50.

⁵² Peter Zongo, 'This is a genocide', *supra* note 51.

charges government forces with killing unarmed civilians, including older women and individuals with physical and mental disabilities, arson attacks in at least 20 villages, and mass arrests.⁵³

According to the U.S. State Department's country report on Cameroon for 2017, in just a few days between September 28 and October 2, 2017, government forces used excessive force against Anglophone protesters, killing at least 40.⁵⁴ Other government tactics against the protesters have included arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and sexual abuse.⁵⁵ In June 2018, Amnesty International published a report detailing widespread torture by government forces.⁵⁶ Recent reviews of the country by the Human Rights Committee and the Committee Against Torture expressed concerns about these issues.⁵⁷

Several UN officials have expressed alarm about the worsening situation in the country, including Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and former High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Hussein.⁵⁸ In her opening address to the 39th session of the Human Rights Council, incoming High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet criticized both the government and armed groups in connection with the violence.⁵⁹

Journalists in Cameroon are subjected to harassment and worse. In January 2017, Deutsche Welle journalists were threatened with sanctions if they covered the anglophone protests and a radio station was shut down after airing a debate on the protests. In December 2017, Cameroonian-American author Patrice Nganang, was detained and deported for criticizing President Biya. Two journalists were criminally charged for their reporting activities—Mancho Bibixy for calling for secession, and Ahmed Abba for his reporting on Boko Haram.⁶⁰

Cameroon's UN Voting Record

Negative: At the General Assembly, Cameroon voted for a resolution denying countries the right to sanction regimes that abuse human rights, and voted to delay the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against LGBT. Cameroon abstained on resolutions that spoke out for victims of human rights abuses in North Korea, Iran and Myanmar, and for victims of Russian aggression in Ukraine and Georgia.

⁵³ *Cameroon: Killings, Destruction in Anglophone Regions*, *supra* note 50.

⁵⁴ U.S. Dep't of State, Bureau of Democracy, H.R. and Lab., Country Reports on Human Rights Practices Cameroon 2 (2017) [hereinafter *State Department Report on Cameroon*].

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 2-4, 9.

⁵⁶ *Cameroon security forces torturing English speakers*, *Amnesty says*, CNN (June 12, 2018),

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/11/africa/cameroon-anglophone-torture-amnesty-intl/index.html>.

⁵⁷ Concluding observations of the Human Rights Comm. On the fifth periodic report of Cameroon, ¶¶ 25-28, 33-34, UN Doc. CCPR/C/CMR/CO/5 (Nov. 30, 2017); Concluding observations of the Comm. Against Torture on the fifth periodic report of Cameroon, ¶¶ 9-14, 31-32, 35-36, UN Doc. CAT/C/CMR/CO/5 (Dec. 18, 2017).

⁵⁸ UN human rights chief deeply alarmed by reports of serious rights breaches in Cameroon, Office of the High Commissioner (July 25, 2018),

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23404&LangID=E>; Press briefing notes on Cameroon, Office of the High Commissioner (Oct. 6, 2017),

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22204&LangID=E>; *see also* Cameroon: human rights must be respected to end cycle of violence – UN experts, Office of the High Commissioner (Nov. 17, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22409&LangID=E>.

⁵⁹ Opening statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, Office of the High Commissioner (Sep. 10, 2018),

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23518&LangID=E>.

⁶⁰ *Freedom in the World 2018: Cameroon*, *supra* note 47.

ERITREA

Eritrea's Human Rights Record

Eritrea commits serious human rights violations, including:

- Arbitrary executions
- Enforced disappearances and incommunicado detention
- Torture, and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment
- Harsh prison conditions
- Arbitrary arrest
- Denial of fair public trial
- Arbitrary interference with privacy
- Restrictions on freedom of speech and press
- Restrictions on internet freedom and academic freedom
- Restrictions on freedom of assembly, association, and religion
- Restrictions on freedom of movement
- Lack of free and fair elections
- Corruption
- Restrictions on international NGOs
- Violence against women and girls
- Human trafficking
- Criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct
- Forced labor

Discussion

Eritrea is an authoritarian regime ruled by President Isaias Afwerki, head of the country's sole political party—the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). Eritrea has not held national elections since it became independent from Ethiopia in 1993.⁶¹ Though the constitution, ratified in 1997, calls for an elected 150-seat National Assembly, this assembly has not met since 2002.⁶² Any opposition groups must operate from abroad, as the PFDJ is the only legally recognized political party in Eritrea.⁶³

Eritrea is the subject of an annual Human Rights Council resolution condemning “in the strongest terms the reported systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations” committed by the government in a climate of “generalized impunity.”⁶⁴ The resolution itemizes numerous human rights abuses including: arbitrary detention, torture, lack of democracy and free press, and indefinite military or national service. In her recent report, Sheila Keetharuth, the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea criticized the Eritrean government for having “shown little willingness that it would tackle such [human rights] abuses.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ U.S. Dep't of State, Bureau of Democracy, H.R. and Lab., Country Reports on Human Rights Practices Eritrea 2 (2017) [hereinafter *State Department Report on Eritrea*]; *Freedom in the World 2018: Eritrea*, FREEDOM HOUSE (2018), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/eritrea>.

⁶² *Freedom in the World 2018: Eritrea*, *supra* note 62.

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/38/15 (July 6, 2018).

⁶⁵ Eritrea: UN expert says embracing human rights vital to shape successful future, Office of the High Commissioner (June 26, 2018), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23262&LangID=E>.

According to the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea, Eritrean government forces have committed, *inter alia*, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and incommunicado detention, arbitrary killings, and torture on a wide scale with impunity since independence, and these abuses constitute crimes against humanity.⁶⁶ Detainees are routinely subjected to various forms of torture and harsh treatment, and many die in custody.⁶⁷ Those targeted by the government for such abuses include army and national service evaders, political opponents, and members of certain ethnic and religious groups.⁶⁸

Eritrea does not have freedom of the press.⁶⁹ All independent media outlets were shut down in 2001 in a government crackdown in which seven independent newspapers were closed and many journalists were arrested.⁷⁰ One source reports that fifteen of these journalists are still in prison.⁷¹ Another source reports that at least seven of the journalists died in custody.⁷² Human Rights Watch has called Eritrea “one of the leading jailers of journalists in Africa.”⁷³ The Special Rapporteur on Eritrea has documented more than 90 arrests of journalists in Eritrea since 1997, including two arbitrary arrests in April 2018.⁷⁴ Access to the internet is also extremely limited.

Eritrea does not recognize the right to freedom of assembly with past protests ending in mass arrests.⁷⁵

Eritrea also does not respect freedom of religion. The government recognizes only four faiths (Islam and three strands of Christianity), and those who practice any other faith risk arrest and detention.⁷⁶ In May 2017, news sources reported that 170 Christians were arrested in a government crackdown on unrecognized faiths. Among those arrested were some 30 young mothers being held at the notoriously harsh prison Nakura, while approximately 50 of their collective children were left behind without a parent.⁷⁷

In March 2018, Eritrean authorities arbitrarily arrested hundreds of people for protesting the death in custody of the 93 year-old Haji Musa Mohamednur, former director of an Islamic school, for refusing to carry out government orders. The government carried out similar mass arrests when Mohamednur was arrested in October 2017.⁷⁸

⁶⁶ Report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in Eritrea, ¶¶ 59-95, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/47 (May 9, 2016); *State Department Report on Eritrea*, *supra* note 62, at 2.

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 2-3.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 10.

⁷⁰ Salem Solomon, *Life in Eritrea's News Desert*, FOREIGN POLICY (Aug. 28, 2018), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/28/life-in-eritreas-news-desert/>.

⁷¹ *Freedom in the World 2018: Eritrea*, *supra* note 62.

⁷² Salem Solomon, *Life in Eritrea's News Desert*, *supra* note 71.

⁷³ Felix Horne, *Mystery Shrouds Rare Protest in Eritrea*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Nov. 3, 2017), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/03/mystery-shrouds-rare-protest-eritrea>.

⁷⁴ Eritrea: UN rights expert urges end to crippling media restrictions, Office of the High Commissioner (May 2, 2018), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23022&LangID=E>.

⁷⁵ *Freedom in the World 2018: Eritrea*, *supra* note 62.

⁷⁶ *Id.*; *State Department Report on Eritrea*, *supra* note 62, at 12.

⁷⁷ Samuel Smith, *160 Christians Arrested During Eritrea's Fresh Crackdown on Christianity*, THE CHRISTIAN POST (June 28, 2017), <https://www.christianpost.com/news/160-christians-arrested-during-eritreas-fresh-crackdown-on-christianity-189960/>.

⁷⁸ Eritrea: UN expert says more arrests, detentions after elderly school chief dies in custody, Office of the High Commissioner (March 14, 2018), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22823&LangID=E>; Oral Updates on

Eritrea has used its war with neighboring Ethiopia as an excuse to create a militarized state, and to exploit its citizens through forced conscription into the military or national service.⁷⁹ Though the law only requires 18 months of service, in practice many are forced to remain in the military or national service for longer periods — and sometimes forever — under threats of detention, torture or punishment of their families.⁸⁰ These Eritreans work for nominal pay and are denied the freedom to resign, take other employment, or freely travel, and often are denied promotions and salary increases.⁸¹ Anyone attempting to escape this fate risks arbitrary arrest, torture, and/or execution. Eritrea has become notorious for its policy of shooting to wound or kill Eritreans attempting to flee the country.

Furthermore, several UN human rights mechanisms, including the COI on Eritrea and CEDAW, have expressed concern over widespread sexual violence against women and girls in Eritrea's military training camps, including rape and forced sexual slavery.⁸²

Eritrea's UN Voting Record

Negative: At the General Assembly, Eritrea backed human rights abusers through a resolution denying the right to sanction such regimes, and by voting to delay the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against LGBT. Eritrea abstained or did not vote on resolutions that spoke out for victims of human rights abuses in North Korea and Myanmar, and voted against resolutions speaking out for human rights victims in Iran and the Ukraine.

THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines' Human Rights Record

The Philippines commits serious human rights violations, including:

- Extrajudicial killings
- Torture and abuse of prisoners
- Harsh and life-threatening prison conditions
- Warrantless arrests and disregard of due process
- Political prisoners
- Killings of and threats against journalists
- Official corruption and abuse of power
- Threats of violence against human rights activists
- Violence against women
- Forced labor

DPRK and Eritrea, Office of the High Commissioner (March 14, 2018),

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23548&LangID=E>.

⁷⁹ *Human Rights Situation in Eritrea, Submission to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (April 27, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/27/human-rights-situation-eritrea>.

⁸⁰ *State Department Report on Eritrea*, *supra* note 62, at 22.

⁸¹ *Id.* at 22-23; Salem Solomon, *Life in Eritrea's News Desert*, *supra* note 71.

⁸² *State Department Report on Eritrea*, *supra* note 62, at 18.

Discussion

While the 2016 presidential elections in which Robert Duterte was elected were generally considered to be open and competitive, they were marked by dozens of violent episodes and some corruption.⁸³ Freedom House reports that in the Philippines “corruption and cronyism are rife” and a small number of families hold a disproportionate amount of political power.⁸⁴

In November 2017, UN human rights experts called on The Philippines government to carry out prompt, impartial investigations into the high number of killings in President Duterte’s anti-drug campaign.⁸⁵ Although the numbers vary based on the source, according to Freedom House, Duterte’s War on Drugs resulted in the killing of more than 12,000 people during the 18 month period from July 2016 to December 2017.⁸⁶ The US State Department cites the statistic from local Philippines law enforcement agencies which reported approximately 4,000 drug-related deaths in connection with anti-drug operations in that same period.⁸⁷

In one case on June 30, 2017, police killed Ozamiz City Mayor Reynaldo Parojinog, his wife, and 10 others in anti-drug raids.⁸⁸ Though the operation was criticized, the Senate has not opened an inquiry into the incident because the mayor was not detained in a government facility. In another incident in September 2017, 13 police officers were videotaped robbing a house during a drug raid.⁸⁹

The Philippines Commission of Human Rights reports routine abuse of prisoners by police and security forces, including use of torture.⁹⁰ Government investigations of abuse and corruption among security forces are ineffective. The Office of the Ombudsman received complaints concerning 229 cases of law enforcement human rights abuses in the first eight months of 2017, but all of the cases remained open as of September, and there were no convictions against high-ranking police or military officials.⁹¹

According to Freedom House, The Philippines is one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists with two reporters having been murdered in 2017.⁹² The government uses various legal tools to suppress criticism, including Executive Order 608 which restricts journalists’ access to information, the Human Security Act which allows the wiretapping of journalists and the crime of libel.⁹³ President Duterte’s public attacks on individuals and organizations who criticize his policies also have a chilling effect on free speech.⁹⁴ At least one journalist expressed concern for his personal safety after being singled out for criticism by Duterte.⁹⁵

⁸³ *Freedom in the World 2018: The Philippines*, FREEDOM HOUSE (2018), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/philippines>.

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ UN Experts urge Philippines to stop attacks and killings in anti-drug campaign, Office of the High Commissioner (Nov. 23, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22434&LangID=E>.

⁸⁶ *Freedom in the World 2018: The Philippines*, *supra* note 84.

⁸⁷ U.S. Dep’t of State, Bureau of Democracy, H.R. and Lab., Country Reports on Human Rights Practices The Philippines 2 (2017) [hereinafter *State Department Report on The Philippines*].

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.* at 9.

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 4.

⁹¹ *Id.* at 9.

⁹² *Freedom in the World 2018: The Philippines*, *supra* note 84.

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ *State Department Report on The Philippines*, *supra* note 88, at 16-17.

⁹⁵ *Id.* at 18.

The Philippines is also extremely dangerous for civil society activists. In December 2017, 10 activists were killed by government agents in three separate incidents within 48 hours.⁹⁶ In March 2018, the government filed a “suspected terrorist” hit list with a Manila Court, listing the names of many civil society activists. Some on the list have already been detained or disappeared.⁹⁷ UN human rights experts expressed deep concern about this list, which also included the name of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, who had criticized the government.⁹⁸

At least two high-profile Duterte critics have been targeted by the government. Philippines’ Senator Leila De Lima was arrested in February 2017 and remains in prison on politically motivated charges related to her criticism of President Duterte’s War on Drugs.⁹⁹ De Lima’s detention has been widely condemned by human rights groups and others who have called for her immediate release.¹⁰⁰ President Duterte is also believed to be behind the May 2018 removal of Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno. She was removed after Duterte threatened her and called her an “enemy” for voting against several Duterte proposals.¹⁰¹ The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers said the incident raises serious questions about the independence of the judiciary in the Philippines.¹⁰²

The Philippines’ UN Voting Record

Negative: At the General Assembly, the Philippines backed human rights abusers through a resolution denying the right to sanction such regimes. The Philippines voted against resolutions speaking out for victims of human rights violations in Syria and Myanmar, and against resolutions speaking out for the victims of Russian aggression in the Ukraine and Georgia. Furthermore, it abstained on the General Assembly resolution speaking out for human rights victims in Iran.

⁹⁶ *Freedom in the World 2018: The Philippines*, *supra* note 84.

⁹⁷ Peter Molnar and Anna Su, *The Philippines’ Human Rights Abuses*, US NEWS AND WORLD REPORT (Aug. 3, 2018), <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2018-08-03/the-brutal-personal-costs-of-the-philippines-human-rights-abuses>.

⁹⁸ The Philippines: UN experts urge further action to remove names on Government’s “terror list,” Office of the High Commissioner (Aug. 20, 2018), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23466&LangID=E>.

⁹⁹ *State Department Report on The Philippines*, *supra* note 88, at 17.

¹⁰⁰ *Philippines: Drop Charges Against Duterte Critic*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Feb. 14, 2018),

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/14/philippines-drop-charges-against-duterte-critic>; *Philippines: Detained Duterte critic must be freed immediately*, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (Feb. 23, 2018), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/02/philippines-detained-duterte-critic-must-be-freed-immediately/>; *Keeping Senator De Lima in prison without charge is unacceptable, say DROI Chair Panzeri and MEP*, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (Feb. 23, 2018), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180223IPR98532/keeping-senator-de-lima-in-prison-without-charge-is-unacceptable>.

¹⁰¹ *Philippines Duterte tells UN human rights expert: ‘Go to hell,’* REUTERS (June 3, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-duterte-un/philippines-duterte-tells-u-n-human-rights-expert-go-to-hell-idUSKCN1HZ063>.

¹⁰² Judicial independence in Philippines is under threat, says UN human rights expert, Office of the High Commissioner (June 1, 2018), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23163&LangID=E>.

SOMALIA

Somalia's Human Rights Record

Somalia commits serious human rights violations, including:

- Killing of civilians by security forces
- Disappearances
- Torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment
- Arbitrary or politically motivated arrest and detentions
- Child soldiers
- Restrictions on free speech, free press and freedom of association
- Abuse of internally displaced persons
- Disruption and seizure of humanitarian assistance
- Lack of free and fair elections
- Trafficking in persons
- Widespread violence against women and girls, including rape and FGM
- Criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct
- Forced labor

Discussion

Somalia is a fractured territory, comprised of regions controlled by at least four different groups—the internationally supported national government, the al-Shabaab terrorist group, the semi-autonomous government in the Puntland region and the separatist government in the Somaliland region.¹⁰³

Even in the area controlled by the national government, there have never been direct elections. The recent parliamentary elections, concluded in February 2017, saw delegates voted in by clan elders. The elections were characterized by numerous irregularities, including vote-buying, intimidation, threats, violence and kidnapping.¹⁰⁴ This was followed by an indirect presidential election, in which the newly-elected Parliament selected Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmaajo as president.¹⁰⁵

The clan-based electoral process prevents ordinary citizens from participating in the political process.¹⁰⁶ In addition, with the so-called “4.5” formula, it gives disproportionate representation in parliament to the four largest clans, and marginalizes all other clans, giving them only a collective 0.5 share of seats.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the government lacks the ability to implement its laws even in areas under its nominal control.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ *Freedom in the World 2018: Somalia*, FREEDOM HOUSE (2018), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/somalia>.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Dep't of State, Bureau of Democracy, H.R. and Lab., Country Reports on Human Rights Practices Somalia 26 (2017) [hereinafter *State Department Report on Somalia*].

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

¹⁰⁶ *Freedom in the World 2018: Somalia*, *supra* note 104.

¹⁰⁷ *Id.*; *State Department Report on Somalia*, *supra* note 105, at 28.

¹⁰⁸ *Freedom in the World 2018: Somalia*, *supra* note 104.

Arbitrary arrests and killings are routinely committed by all actors in Somalia, including government security forces.¹⁰⁹ Al-Shabaab continues to abduct people, and pirates continue to hold hostages.¹¹⁰ Government-affiliated forces are accused of torture, rape, and excessive force against journalists, demonstrators and detainees, sometimes resulting in death or injury.¹¹¹

A UN report published at the end of 2017 documented over 2,000 civilian deaths between January 1, 2016 and October 14, 2017. Though 60% of the deaths were attributed to al-Shabaab, 11% were attributed to State actors. The report also noted that Somalia's intelligence and security agency routinely disregards human rights law while carrying out arrests and detentions.¹¹²

Several groups operating in Somalia, primarily al-Shabaab but also government forces, use child soldiers. Al-Shabaab abducts children to increase its numbers before certain operations and subjects its child recruits to various forms of abuse, including harsh training, executing other children, serving as human shields and suicide bombers, and planting bombs.¹¹³ In May 2018, the UN Independent Expert commented that the use of children in armed conflict is "a grave violation of the children's rights," and called for the immediate release of all child soldiers.¹¹⁴

Women in Somalia are vulnerable to many forms of violence. They are subjected to rape and other sexual violence, including by government forces. Internally displaced persons and members of minority clans are the most vulnerable. Gang rape is a particular problem in urban areas.¹¹⁵ Cases of rape in drought-affected areas have been on the rise with 300 cases of rape per month in the first half of 2017 (and over 900 cases in the month of June 2017 alone).¹¹⁶ In addition, Somalia has the highest rate of Female Genital Mutilation in the world: 98 percent. At least three girls have died this year from hemorrhaging as a result of the procedure.¹¹⁷

Somalia's civilian judiciary is nonfunctional, strongly influenced by corruption and clan-based politics, and not widely respected.¹¹⁸ As a result, military courts try many cases not legally within their jurisdiction, and in proceedings not compliant with international standards for due process.¹¹⁹ Freedom of the press in Somalia is severely limited, though less so in government controlled areas. According to the website Reporters Without Borders, Somalia is among the worst countries for press freedom, with a ranking of 168 out of 180.¹²⁰ In Somaliland journalists were fined and arbitrarily

¹⁰⁹ *State Department Report on Somalia*, *supra* note 105, at 2-6.

¹¹⁰ *Id.* at 3.

¹¹¹ *Id.* at 4.

¹¹² Somalia conflict exacting terrible toll on civilians – UN report Al Shabaab responsible for most civilian casualties, Office of the High Commissioner (Dec. 11, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22520&LangID=E>.

¹¹³ *State Department Report on Somalia*, *supra* note 105, at 15-16.

¹¹⁴ Somalia: UN expert urges action to stop children being kidnapped and used as fighters, Office of the High Commissioner (May 4, 2018),

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23039&LangID=E>.

¹¹⁵ *State Department Report on Somalia*, *supra* note 105, at 32.

¹¹⁶ Alecia Richards, *In Somali drought, women fighting sexual predators as well as hunger*, CNN (July 14, 2017), <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/14/africa/somalia-drought-violence-against-women/index.html>.

¹¹⁷ Kate Hodal, *Somalia under renewed Scrutiny over FGM after two more young girls die*, THE GUARDIAN (Sep. 17, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/17/somalia-under-renewed-scrutiny-over-female-genital-mutilation-after-two-more-young-girls-die>.

¹¹⁸ *State Department Report on Somalia*, *supra* note 105, at 8; *Freedom in the World 2018: Somalia*, *supra* note 104.

¹¹⁹ *State Department Report on Somalia*, *supra* note 105, at 9-10; *Freedom in the World 2018: Somalia*, *supra* note 104.

¹²⁰ Reporters Without Borders Rankings, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> (last visited Sept. 17, 2018).

arrested for defamation and other crimes. Between January and May 2017, five journalists were detained in south-central Somalia, 17 were detained in Somaliland, and 11 journalists were injured (nine by al-Shabaab and two in Puntland).¹²¹ On April 2, 2017, television journalist Hanad Ali Guled was abducted and tortured.¹²² On July 26, 2018, Somali cameraman Abdirizak Kasim Iman was shot dead in Mogadishu.¹²³

Somalia's UN Voting Record

Negative: At the General Assembly, Somalia backed human rights abusers through a resolution denying the right to sanction such regimes. Somalia also failed to support human rights victims, as it abstained or did not vote on resolutions on North Korea, Syria, Iran, Myanmar, Ukraine and Georgia.

OTHER CANDIDATES

While this report focuses in detail on the above Unqualified candidates which should be opposed, the information on candidates whose records are Qualified or Questionable were examined by the indicated metrics on pages 2-3.

In regard to **Italy**, while the country's record on human rights and UN voting meets the criteria for a Qualified candidate, we note recent statements by Interior Minister Matteo Salvini concerning the UN human rights system, which appear less than fully consistent with a bid to join the UNHRC as a member.

After new UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said that the UN wishes to send a team to Italy over reports of migrants facing attacks and racism, Mr. Salvini said:

“The UN is an organization that costs billions of euros, to which Italy gives over 100 million every year in contributions, and we will weigh with our allies on the usefulness of continuing to give these 100 million euros to fund waste, embezzlement and theft for a body that wants to give lessons to Italians, and that also has countries that engage in torture and (still have) the death penalty. If I were the UN, I would have half a world to send inspectors to before Italy. Go look for racism elsewhere, not in Italy.”¹²⁴

At the same time, the foreign ministry of Italy has reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to the promotion of human rights in the UN system, and that it will continue to strongly pursue an open and inclusive approach to human rights, focusing on cooperation with civil society.

¹²¹ *State Department Report on Somalia*, *supra* note 105, at 19.

¹²² *Id.*

¹²³ *Somali cameraperson shot dead in Mogadishu*, COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS (July 31, 2018), <https://cpi.org/2018/07/somali-cameraperson-shot-dead-in-mogadishu.php>.

¹²⁴ *Italy 'to weigh cutting UN funding' says Salvini*, ANSA, (Sept. 10, 2018), http://www.ansa.it/english/news/2018/09/10/italy-to-weigh-cutting-un-funding-says-salvini_ecf723c5-5c7a-4ed0-9a93-5435dd070b7d.html; tweet by Italy's Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini (@matteosalvini), TWITTER (Sept. 10, 2018, 7:04 AM), <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1039152693833609216>.