

ELECTING THE 2016-2018 MEMBERS OF THE U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Presented at United Nations Headquarters, New York, October 28, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report evaluates the country candidates for the October 28, 2015 election of 18 new members to the U.N. Human Rights Council. Our evaluations applied the membership criteria established by UNGA 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 U.N. voting record. The report finds as follows:

UNQUALIFIED

9 candidates have poor records and fail to qualify:

Burundi, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Pakistan, Togo, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela.

QUESTIONABLE

3 candidates have problematic human rights and/or U.N. voting records:

Cote d’Ivoire, Kenya, and Philippines.

QUALIFIED

Only 9 out of the 21 candidate countries are qualified to be council members:

Bahamas, Belgium, Georgia, Germany, Mongolia, Panama, Slovenia, South Korea, and Switzerland.

The absence of competition this year in three out of the five regional slates is unfortunate, undermining the very premise and rationale for holding elections. Nevertheless, this report reminds U.N. member states that they have the right to refrain from voting for an Unqualified candidate, 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.

EVALUATION OF 2016-2018 UNHRC CANDIDATES

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AFRICAN GROUP

CLOSED SLATE: 5 CANDIDATES FOR 5 SEATS

Replacing Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, and Sierra Leone

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

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Burundi	Not Free	Authoritarian Regime	Not Free	Difficult Situation	Mixed	Unqualified
Cote d'Ivoire	Partly Free	Authoritarian Regime	Partly Free	Noticeable Problems	Mixed	Questionable
Ethiopia	Not Free	Authoritarian Regime	Not Free	Difficult Situation	Negative	Unqualified
Kenya	Partly Free	Hybrid Regime	Partly Free	Noticeable Problems	Negative	Questionable
Togo	Partly Free	Authoritarian Regime	Not Free	Noticeable Problems	Negative	Unqualified

ASIAN GROUP

CONTESTED: 7 CANDIDATES FOR 5 SEATS

Replacing Japan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, South Korea, and UAE

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Kyrgyzstan	Partly Free	Hybrid Regime	Not Free	Noticeable Problems	Negative	Unqualified
Laos	Not Free	Authoritarian Regime	Not Free	Very Serious Situation	Negative	Unqualified
Mongolia	Free	Flawed Democracy	Partly Free	Noticeable Problems	Mixed	Qualified
Pakistan	Partly Free	Hybrid Regime	Not Free	Difficult Situation	Negative	Unqualified
Philippines	Partly Free	Flawed Democracy	Partly Free	Difficult Situation	Mixed	Questionable
South Korea	Free	Full Democracy	Partly Free	Noticeable Problems	Positive	Qualified
UAE	Not Free	Authoritarian Regime	Not Free	Difficult Situation	Mixed	Unqualified

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP

CONTESTED: 4 CANDIDATES FOR 3 SEATS

Replacing Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Bahamas	Free	N/A	Free	N/A	Positive	Qualified
Ecuador	Partly Free	Hybrid Regime	Not Free	Noticeable Problems	Negative	Unqualified
Panama	Free	Flawed Democracy	Partly Free	Noticeable Problems	Mixed	Qualified
Venezuela	Partly Free	Hybrid Regime	Not Free	Difficult Situation	Negative	Unqualified

WESTERN EUROPEAN AND OTHERS GROUP

CLOSED SLATE OF 3 CANDIDATES FOR 3 SEATS

Replacing Germany, Ireland, and United States of America

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Belgium	Free	Full Democracy	Free	Good Situation	Positive	Qualified
Germany	Free	Full Democracy	Free	Good Situation	Positive	Qualified
Switzerland	Free	Full Democracy	Free	Good Situation	Positive	Qualified

EASTERN EUROPEAN GROUP

CLOSED SLATE: 2 CANDIDATES FOR 2 SEATS

Replacing Estonia and Montenegro

COUNTRY	FH RATING	ECONOMIST RATING	FH PRESS FREEDOM	RSF RATING	UN VOTING RECORD	SUITABILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP
Georgia	Partly Free	Hybrid regime	Partly Free	Noticeable problems	Positive	Qualified
Slovenia	Free	Flawed democracy	Free	Satisfactory situation	Positive	Qualified

METHODOLOGY

The presence of systematic abusers on the Human Rights Council, notwithstanding the justifications that many often make, 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 U.N.

Under the criteria established by UNGA Resolution 60/251, it is clear that the U.N. 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.

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

- *The Economist Democracy Index (2014)*, 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 (2015)*, 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 Situation, Satisfactory Situation, Noticeable Problems, Difficult Situation, or Very Serious Problems.
- *Freedom in the World (2015)*, the annual survey by Freedom House that measures political rights and civil liberties worldwide, ranking countries as: Free, Partly Free, or Not Free.
- *Freedom of the Press (2015)*, an annual survey by Freedom House that examines the legal, political and economic environments in which journalists work in order to assess the degree of print, broadcast, and internet freedom in every country in the world, ranking each as Free, Partly Free, or Not Free.
- *United Nations Votes (2014-2015 resolutions of UNGA and UNHRC)*, examining countries by how they voted on key human rights proposals, classifying their voting records accordingly as either Positive, Negative or Mixed.

CALL TO ACTION

OPPOSE UNQUALIFIED CANDIDATES

On October 28, 2015, the U.N. 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 **Burundi, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Pakistan, Togo, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela**. These candidates' records—on respecting human rights at home and in U.N. voting—fail to meet the minimal U.N. criteria for Council membership.

We also call on **Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, and the Philippines** to commit to changing their human rights and/or U.N. voting records before they can be deemed suitable.

CLOSED SLATES DEFEAT PURPOSE OF ELECTIONS

Regrettably, there is no competition in three out of the five regional groups: the African Group, the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG), and the Eastern European Group. Closed slates are the product of backroom deals fixing an equal number of candidates and available seats. The result deprives U.N. 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 establish a reputation superior to its widely disparaged predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights.

PROCEDURE FOR OPPOSING UNQUALIFIED CANDIDATES ON CLOSED SLATES

Many U.N. 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 U.N. Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we urge U.N. 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 Burundi and Ethiopia.

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 throw their hat in the ring.

AMERICA CANNOT SUBMIT CANDIDACY FOR 2016

For the first time since 2009, when President Obama engaged with the UNHRC and the United States became a member, the U.S. will not be a member for 2016. Countries that complete two three-year terms are obliged to go off for at least one year.

ANALYSIS OF “UNQUALIFIED” CANDIDATES

Following is our detailed analysis of 7 out of the 9 unqualified candidates: Burundi, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Laos, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela. The records of Kyrgyzstan and Togo are summarized in the charts above.

BURUNDI

HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

The government of Burundi has been cited for gross human rights abuses, including:

- Widespread disregard for the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association;
- Severely politicized judicial system that lacks independence;
- Rampant corruption;
- Extrajudicial killings and torture of detainees, particularly members of opposition parties;
- Harsh and even life-threatening prison conditions;
- Prolonged pretrial detention of detainees, often without formal charges;
- Widespread sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination;
- Trafficking of women and girls;
- Discrimination against LGBT;
- Discrimination against persons with disabilities;
- Discrimination against persons with albinism;
- Forced child labor, and other disregard for labor rights;
- Failure of police, public prosecutors and judges to address cases of government corruption and human rights abuse in a timely manner, resulting in widespread impunity for government officials, with bribery or threats influencing investigative and judicial officials;
- Harassment and intimidation of journalists and rights activists who criticize the government.

Excessive police force against demonstrations this year in Burundi claimed the lives of 58, with no repercussions. On August 3, 2015, prominent human rights activist Pierre Claver Mbonimpa was shot, in an apparent attempt to silence civil society.

U.N. VOTING RECORD

Mixed: Burundi voted against a resolution in the General Assembly that spoke out for human rights victims in Iran, though it supported the resolution on Syria. Burundi backed human rights abusers through a resolution denying the right to sanction such regimes.

ECUADOR

HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

Ecuador has been cited for severe violations of human rights, including:

- Suppression of dissent and civil society;
- Highly censored media;
- Lack of judicial independence;
- Restrictions on freedom of speech, press, and association;
- Violation of freedom of assembly, particularly against human rights activists, including indigenous groups protesting laws affecting their lands;
- Excessive force against protesters, denial of due process in detaining them;
- Excessive force and isolated unlawful killings by security forces;
- Prison overcrowding;
- Arbitrary arrest and detention;
- Delays and denial of due process;
- Violence and discrimination against women, children, minority groups, and LGBT;
- Trafficking in persons;
- Lack of progress in women's rights;
- Child labor.

President Correa has led Ecuador's shift into one of Latin America's most authoritarian countries. He is seeking to scrap term limits, and to expand state control of the media.

Since 2013, Ecuador stepped up censorship of media. New regulatory bodies under a 2013 law targeted independent media with sanctions, fines, and forced corrections and retractions. President Correa and his administration intensified verbal and legal attacks against the media and civil society.

The government removed "*Intag, Indefension*," a documentary critical of Correa's government that was produced in 2012 and posted to YouTube in 2013. Investigative articles are routinely suppressed.

Journalist Manuela Picq was arbitrarily and violently arrested in August 2015 after taking part in protests against President Correa's government.

In March 2014, Ecuador sentenced a university student to four years in prison for trying to enter a public broadcast television station in an effort to speak to the public. Another student was sentenced to two years for serving as an accomplice.

The Ecuadorian government repeatedly tries to silence NGOs by shutting them down, and prohibiting any legal defense. For example, the Pachamana Foundation was forced to close in 2013 after collecting more than 700,000 signatures on a petition against oil exploration in the Amazonian Yasuni National Park.

Political interference often ensures impunity of officials in the security services and elsewhere in government who commit abuses.

Ecuador is ranked Partly Free by Freedom House with a 3 out of a worst possible 7 for overall freedom, civil liberties, and political rights. Ecuador ranks as Not Free in Freedom House's freedom of the press index.

U.N. VOTING RECORD

Negative: Ecuador voted against resolutions in the General Assembly that spoke out for human rights victims in Syria, Iran, and North Korea. Ecuador backed human rights abusers by voting for a resolution that denies the right to sanction such regimes.

ETHIOPIA

HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

The government of Ethiopia has been cited for gross human rights abuses, including:

- Restrictions on freedom of expression and the press;
- Restrictions on freedom of association, including through arrests;
- Politically motivated trials;
- Harassment and intimidation of opposition members and journalists;
- Arbitrary killings;
- Torture and mistreatment of detainees by security forces;
- Harsh and even times life-threatening prison conditions;
- Arbitrary arrest and detention;
- Detention without charge and lengthy pretrial detention;
- Overburdened judiciary tainted by political influence;
- Infringement on citizens' privacy rights, including illegal searches;
- Restrictions on academic freedom;
- Restrictions on freedom of assembly, association, and movement;
- Interference in religious affairs;
- Limits on citizens' ability to change their government through free and fair elections;
- Police, administrative, and judicial corruption;
- Violence and societal discrimination against women and abuse of children;
- Female genital mutilation;
- Trafficking in persons;
- Discrimination in society against persons with disabilities;
- Discrimination against persons based on their sexual orientation and against persons with HIV/AIDS;
- Limits on worker rights;
- Forced child labor;
- Forced displacement.

The government continued restrictions on activities of NGOs imposed by the Charities and Societies Proclamation. Leaders of the opposition and other peaceful protesters have repeatedly been harassed, and detained without charge. Their applications to hold demonstrations are repeatedly denied. In April and May of 2015, protests in the Oromia region were met with a disproportionately violent response from police and security personnel, with more than a dozen victims killed from live ammunition, and many more wounded victims and citizens in custody without being charged.

The 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation is used as a censorship tool to prevent journalists, reporters and bloggers from writing about opposition groups. Journalists face a choice of self-censorship or self-imposed exile abroad. Telephone calls are often monitored and web pages blocked by the Ethiopian government. Six owners of private Ethiopian newspapers were charged in August 2014 after being continually harassed for publishing their papers.

More than 200,000 indigenous people of the Lower Omo Valley suffered from forced displacement as Ethiopia continues to harvest sugar plantations on their land. They are not properly compensated and journalists are barred from going to the area to report on the issue. Similarly, in the Gambella, 1.5 million people were relocated as a result of the government's "villagization program" without adequate compensation and access to basic resources such as food and water. Violence and arbitrary arrests enabled the forced relocation.

"Homosexual conduct" is forbidden under Ethiopian law. Those charged can face 15 years in prison.

Freedom House ranks Ethiopia as Not Free, with 6 out of a worst possible 7 for overall freedom, civil liberties, and political rights.

U.N. VOTING RECORD

Negative: Ethiopia refused to condemn human rights violations in Syria, Iran and North Korea, abstaining on General Assembly resolutions on these situations. Ethiopia voted in favor of a resolution condemning embargoes that target human rights abusers. At the Human Rights Council, Ethiopia abstained on resolutions addressing human rights violations in Belarus and Syria. Ethiopia voted in favor of a resolution that aimed to restrict the ability of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights to choose its own personnel.

LAOS

HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

The government of Laos has been cited for gross human rights abuses, including:

- Systematic violations to the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association, and right to privacy;
- Government restrictions on academic freedom;
- Local restrictions on religious freedom;
- Denies citizens the ability to change their government through free and fair elections;
- Harsh prison conditions;
- Corruption in the police and judiciary;
- Lack of due process, arbitrary arrest and detention;
- Abuse of prisoners and detainees;
- Trafficking in persons;
- Societal discrimination based on sexual orientation and against persons with HIV/AIDS;
- Government restrictions on worker rights;
- Refusal to prosecute officials who commit abuses, impunity for police and security forces.

Laos has failed to uphold international standards regarding the detention and disappearances of political prisoners, freedom of speech and civil society assembly, the treatment of prisoners in alleged drug treatment centers, and labor rights.

In December 2012, Sombath Somphone disappeared under mysterious circumstances after being stopped at a police checkpoint. As a civil society activist, Somphone has not been heard from since and calls from human rights groups demanding his whereabouts and release have been ignored. Additionally, nine other individuals are missing and government involvement in their disappearance is likely.

The media in Laos remains under strict censorship by the government, which employs laws with vague language that severely impede on freedom of speech and freedom of the press. As a result, the law allows government officials to repress anyone who publicly criticizes the government. In September 2014, the government adopted a law against Internet freedoms that prohibits, amongst other things, the safety of anonymity on the Internet.

Somsanga Drug Detention Center serves as an example of many such camps that detain children and adults without lawful representation and jurisdictional process. Detainees are often poor and homeless people whom the government prefers to keep off the streets and out of sight. It fails to offer prisoners any sort of drug rehabilitation program. According to Human Rights Watch, the conditions are so intolerable that one detainee said “some people think that to die is better than staying there.”

Labor rights are controlled by the government, with the Lao Federation of Trade Unions (LFTU) a limb of the government. Striking is illegal in Laos, violating workers’ basic rights.

Freedom House ranks Laos as Not Free, with a dismal 6.5 freedom rating, 6 for civil liberties, and 7 for political rights out of a worst possible 7.

U.N. VOTING RECORD

Negative: Laos failed to condemn human rights violations in Syria and Iran by abstaining from votes regarding these countries in the General Assembly, and voted against a resolution condemning human rights violations in North Korea. Laos backed human rights abusers by voting for a resolution that denies the right to sanction such regimes.

PAKISTAN

HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

The government of Pakistan has been cited for gross human rights abuses, including:

- Arbitrary detention, lengthy pretrial detention, weak criminal justice system;
- Poor prison conditions;
- Lack of judicial independence in the lower courts;
- Infringement on citizens’ privacy rights;
- Harassment of and high-profile attacks against journalists and media organizations;
- Restrictions on freedom of assembly and limits on freedom of movement;
- Practices and laws limiting freedom of religion, particularly for religious minorities;

- Sectarian violence and discrimination against religious minorities continued;
- Corruption within the government and police;
- Rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, honor crimes;
- Discrimination against women and girls;
- Child abuse and commercial sexual exploitation of children;
- Child labor remains pervasive;
- Widespread human trafficking, including forced and bonded labor;
- Societal discrimination against national, ethnic, and racial minorities;
- Discrimination based on caste, sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status;
- Disregard for worker rights;
- Lack of government accountability, culture of impunity for government officials accused of human rights violations;
- Violence, abuse, and social and religious intolerance by militant organizations, creating lawlessness in parts of the country, particularly in the provinces of Balochistan, Sindh, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

In Pakistan in 2014, sectarian attacks and violence against religious minorities continued with impunity, the military intervened in political decision-making, accountability of law enforcement agencies showed no signs of improving, and freedom of expression and media came under severe pressure. Blasphemy charges are not atypical in Pakistan.

According to Freedom House, in the month preceding the general elections, between 130 and 150 incidents of political violence resulted in more than 180 deaths. Human Rights Watch also reports unidentified assailants' attacks on offices and media employees. In August, journalist Omar Quraishi and columnist Kamran Shafi both received death threats from anonymous sources after they criticized the August protests in Islamabad led by opposition politicians.

Impediments to freedom persist, especially in relation to women and non-Muslim minorities. Pakistani human rights nongovernmental organizations estimate that there are approximately 1,000 "honor killings" every year. According to Human Rights Watch, perpetrators of these killings often enjoy impunity because law enforcement officials drop the case if the victim's family has offered "forgiveness." Additionally, a report by the Movement of Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan found that at least 1,000 girls belonging to Christian and Hindu communities are forced to marry Muslim men every year. The government has failed to act to stop these forced marriages and to ensure the security of the religious minorities.

Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman from a rural area of Punjab, was accused in June 2009 of blasphemy after using the same cup as Muslim women working in the field with her to drink water. She was accused of insulting the prophet Muhammad and has since been imprisoned and kept in solitary confinement in a small cell with no window. Through her continued imprisonment, her health has seriously deteriorated. Because she was convicted of blasphemy through Pakistani law, she awaits execution by hanging.

Pakistan is ranked Partly Free by Freedom House, and received a low score of 4.5 out of a worst possible 7 for freedom rating, 5 for civil liberties and 4 for political rights.

U.N. VOTING RECORD

Negative: Pakistan failed to condemn human rights violations in Syria and North Korea by abstaining from UNGA votes on these situations, and voted against a resolution condemning human rights violations in Iran. It backed human rights abusers by voting for a resolution that denies the right to sanction such regimes. At the Human Rights Council, Pakistan voted for a resolution entitled “Composition of staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights” which aims to limit the ability of that entity to choose its own personnel. Pakistan refused to condemn human rights violations in Belarus and Syria, abstaining on both resolutions.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

Major human rights problems in UAE include:

- Citizens’ inability to change their government through free and fair elections;
- Severe limitations on the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and internet use;
- Arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, and lengthy pretrial detentions;
- Police and prison guard brutality;
- Increased arrests and detentions following individuals’ internet postings or commentary;
- Corruption, lack of judicial independence;
- Domestic abuse and violence against women;
- Non-citizens face legal and societal discrimination;
- Discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS and based on sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Trafficking in persons, mistreatment and sexual abuse of foreign domestic servants and other migrant workers;
- Discrimination against persons with disabilities;
- Restricted worker rights.

The United Arab Emirates government limits the freedoms of expression and migrant workers, and women lack the basic rights that men possess.

According to Human Rights Watch, since the Arab Spring, UAE authorities have cracked down on peaceful demonstrations across the country. In 2012, the UAE deported activist Ahmed Abd al-Khaleq for speaking out against the government. According to Amnesty International, government crackdowns target lawyers, students, professors and activists as well as their families for even minor social media posts. More than 60 of the 100 activists serving time since the Arab Spring have served sentences up to 14 years.

Twenty-five year old Osama al-Najjar is currently incarcerated after describing on social media the unlawful treatment to which he believes his father, activist Hussain Ali al-Najjar al-Hammadi, is being subjected.

Migrant workers in the UAE are subject to horrendous conditions and female South East Asian domestic workers are at particular risk for sexual and other types of abuse. Such

conditions have on multiple occasions been compared to modern day slavery. In February 2015, Human Rights Watch released an 82 page report on the abuse of migrant workers on the Saadiyat Island site which included withholding of wages, confiscation of workers' passports, inadequate living conditions, and the arbitrary deportation of hundreds of striking workers.

Women's rights are not respected in the UAE. Husbands may legally beat their wives and women who report rape have been arrested. Additionally, there are no legal solutions for marital rape. Human Rights Watch accused the authorities of the UAE of "failing to respond adequately to reports of domestic violence."

The UAE is ranked Not Free by Freedom House receiving a score of 6 out of a worst possible 7 overall freedom rating and 6 on both civil liberties and political rights.

U.N. VOTING RECORD

Mixed: In the General Assembly, the UAE voted to condemn human rights violation in Syria and North Korea, yet refused to condemn violations in Iran, opting to abstain. The UAE voted in favor of a resolution condemning unilateral coercive measures, which aims to limit embargoes that are put in place on grounds of human rights abuses. In the Human Rights Council, the UAE abstained when given the opportunity to support a resolution condemning Belarus' human rights situations. The UAE voted to condemn Syria in the HRC, but supported a resolution which aims to limit the ability of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights to choose its own personnel.

VENEZUELA

HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

Venezuela has been cited for major human rights abuses, including:

- Severe and systematic violations of freedoms of assembly, expression and press;
- Lack of due process, and lack of judicial independence;
- Arbitrary arrests, detentions and wrongful convictions against civil society leaders; in particular, political opponents;
- Use of judiciary to intimidate and selectively prosecute political, civil society, union, and business leaders who were critical of government policies or actions;
- Widespread censorship of media outlets. Harassment, intimidation, forced purchases and government-mandated closures of privately-owned television stations and any other mass media outlets, critical of the government;
- Unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings by police and security forces;
- Torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment;
- Harsh and life-threatening prison conditions and lack of due process rights that contributed to widespread violence, riots, injuries, and deaths in prisons;
- Inadequate juvenile detention centers;
- Corruption and impunity in police forces;
- Interference with privacy rights;
- Corruption at all levels of government;
- Threats against domestic NGOs;

- Violence against women;
- Anti-Semitism in statements by senior government officials;
- Trafficking in persons;
- Violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Restrictions on workers' right of association.

Following the death of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in 2013, the Maduro regime has continued to suppress political opponents and student protesters, as well as subjecting prisoners to inhuman and degrading treatment, and limiting the media's ability to report freely.

The arbitrary arrest, wrongful conviction and 14-year prison sentence against opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, as well as the ongoing arbitrary arrest and criminal process against Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma, are among the most high-profile examples of the persecution and arbitrary imprisonment that civil society leaders and political opponents face in Venezuela.

More than 3,000 protesters, primarily university students, were detained during the pro-democracy demonstrations that took place between February and December 2014. About 100 of them remain in prison, while the rest have been released on parole and banned from any political activism. Police and military forces frequently use brutal and disproportionate force to suppress activists.

Since former president Chavez took control of the Supreme Court in 2004, its judges have openly supported the government, thus rendering the judicial branch no longer independent. Following the 2014 demonstrations, court officials acted under the influence of Maduro's government in denying arrested protesters access to a lawyer until minutes before the trial, or denying them access completely.

The government retains wide control over Venezuelan media outlets. According to Human Rights Watch, Globovision, the only station that remained critical of Chavez's government, was sold to government supporters in 2013 and has ceased to publish dissenting views. Additionally, cable news source NTN24 was expelled from the country during the 2014 protests along with several other media outlets that reported on the government's violent repression of students.

According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons, Venezuelan prisons suffer from overcrowding and are host to the worst conditions in South America.

Venezuela is ranked by Freedom House as Partly Free, with a low 5 out of a worst possible 7 in freedom, civil liberties, and political rights. Venezuela ranks as Not Free in Freedom House's freedom of the press index.

U.N. VOTING RECORD

Negative: Venezuela has a dismal voting record both in the U.N. General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. Venezuela voted against resolutions condemning human rights violations in Syria, Iran and North Korea. Also in the General Assembly, Venezuela voted

in favor of a resolution condemning unilateral coercive measures, which aims to limit embargoes that are put in place on grounds of human rights abuses. In the Human Rights Council, Venezuela voted for a resolution that aims to limit the ability of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights to choose its own personnel, and voted against resolutions condemning human rights situations in Belarus and Syria.