

Adjusting the Calendar of the Human Rights Committee

Background

Rule 2 of the Rules and Procedures section of the HRC 5/1 lays out the guidelines for Human Rights Council sessions. There are three requirements: the Council must meet “regularly” throughout the year, with no fewer than 3 sessions per Council year (“including a main session”), and a total duration of no less than 10 weeks. The Council now meets three times a year in March, June and September. Each session is three weeks, except for the March high-level session, which is four weeks. This does not include the six weeks of UPR working group sessions or other meetings of subsidiary bodies and working groups.

Issues to Address

The current calendar places strains on the resources of every delegation, and is especially difficult for smaller delegations. The process of submitting new resolutions once sessions have begun also strains resources, reduces the time for careful consideration of resolutions, and puts smaller delegations at a further disadvantage as they are often unable to track all these new resolutions.

Concrete Proposals

1. Hold monthly mini-sessions called by the President of approximately two days each on specific topics. To facilitate planning, the President should announce the schedule for mini-sessions at the first session of the year, and at the end of each mini-session announce the topic for the next mini-session.
2. Formats for mini-sessions should draw from tools in the IBP package, including briefings, open-ended meetings, panel debates, seminars, and roundtables. Topics for mini-sessions should be decided by the President, in consultations with OHCHR, and may include follow-up to special procedures reports, discussions on thematic topics, addressing crisis or chronic situations, or anything that helps fulfill the Council’s mandate.
3. To facilitate well reasoned debate, and allow for the full participation of all members, require that the subject matter of all resolutions to be considered in a session to be submitted the Friday before the session begins. An initial draft of resolution text must be provided a week before the tabling deadline. In both cases, exceptions can be made for an unforeseen crisis situation.
4. Independent dialogues and other discussions of work by special procedures should also be announced as far in advance as possible to allow for adequate preparation.
5. To prevent the calendar from being overwhelmed, thematic resolutions should only be re-introduced once every two years. Country-specific mandates should also be renewed every two years.