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The Universal Periodic Review must live up to its stated objective

At the start of the inaugural session of the Working Group of the UN Human Rights Council, mandated to review the human rights record of all UN Member States, Amnesty International calls on all States to deliver on the promise of this new mechanism to improve the situation of human rights on the ground.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is widely regarded as the key innovation of the Council, allowing it to review the situation of all human rights in all countries and to recommend measures to enhance the fulfilment of states' human rights obligations. The UPR mechanism is intended to address one of the main criticisms of the Council's predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights, namely that its focus on a small number of country situations was selective and based on double standards. A credible and effective UPR mechanism is therefore critical to the credibility of the Council.

This first session of the UPR Working Group will be key in setting the standard for future reviews, in terms of process as well as substance. Notwithstanding the emphasis on dialogue and cooperation, the review must hone in on the key human rights challenges in each country and must lead to credible recommendations for follow up by the state concerned. Both reviewed and reviewing countries have an important role to play in achieving effective outcomes.

Among the countries coming up for review are some whose human rights record is a cause of grave concern for Amnesty International; however, the organization firmly believes there is room for improvement in the human rights performance of all countries.

Transparency is among the founding principles of the UPR. Although members of civil society cannot participate directly in the dialogue with the countries under review, as key stakeholders in the UPR it is essential that they are able to follow the reviews in an open and effective manner.

Amnesty International remains convinced that, if used well, the UPR can make an important contribution to the Council's efforts to promote and protect human rights in all countries. The first round of reviews will be a strong indication of the degree of political will by Member States to honour the aspirations of General Assembly resolution 60/251. Amnesty International looks to all Member States to step up and help launch the UPR as an effective human rights mechanism.

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