



UNITED NATIONS



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

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HIGH COMMISSIONER
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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL



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WHAT IS THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL?

The Human Rights Council (hereinafter Council or HRC) is the principal intergovernmental body within the United Nations (UN) system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe, and for addressing and taking action on human rights violations around the globe.

The Council holds meetings throughout the year providing a multilateral forum to address human rights violations wherever and whenever they occur. It responds to human rights emergencies and makes recommendations on how to better implement human rights on the ground. The Council has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and country-specific situations that require its attention.

The Council held its first session in June 2006. One year later, the Council adopted its "Institution-Building" package by resolution 5/1 to guide its work and set up its procedures and mechanisms. Among the Council's subsidiary bodies are the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, the Advisory Committee and the Complaint Procedure.

The Council also has a large group of independent human rights experts reporting to it known as the Special Procedures who serve as the eyes and ears of the Council. These are made up of independent experts and working groups that examine, advise and report on thematic issues or human rights situations in specific countries.

In addition, the Council can establish international commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and then investigations to respond to human rights violations, to help expose violators and bring them to justice.

DECEMBER 2004	High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change issues report recommending strengthening the UN Commission on Human Rights
MARCH 2005	UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommends to replace the Commission with a "Human Rights Council"
15 MARCH 2006	The Human Rights Council replaces the UN Commission on Human Rights by UN General Assembly resolution 60/251
18-30 JUNE 2006	The Human Rights Council holds its first session in Geneva
18 JUNE 2007	The Human Rights Council adopts the "Institution-Building" package by resolution 5/1, establishing its subsidiary bodies
7-18 APRIL 2008	First session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group held reviewing first group of States
MARCH 2011	Five-year review of the Human Rights Council endorsed with adoption of resolution 16/21 (by consensus)
OCTOBER 2011	Conclusion of reviews of the first cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (with all 193 Member States participating)
13 JUNE 2016	High-level panel discussion on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Human Rights Council: achievements and challenges
NOVEMBER 2016	Conclusion of reviews of the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (with all 193 Member States participating)

HOW DOES THE COUNCIL WORK?

The Human Rights Council meets for at least 10 weeks per year at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland, in regular sessions usually taking place in March, June and September. The Council can also convene urgent meetings on short notice to respond to emerging human rights crises – 26 such special sessions were held within the first decade of the Council. The Council's subsidiary bodies meet for approximately 20 additional weeks each year. Since its first session in 2006, the Council's agenda has been expanding and its meeting time has increased by approximately 50 per cent.

The Council is made up of 47 Member States who are elected by the UN General Assembly by a simple majority vote, through a secret ballot. Members of the Council are elected for three-year terms with one-third of the Members being renewed each year. Council membership is based on equitable geographical distribution according to the following regional breakdown: African States – 13 seats; Asia-Pacific States – 13 seats; Latin American and Caribbean States – 8 seats; Western European and other States – 7 seats; Eastern European States – 6 seats. Within its first 10 years, more than 100 countries have served as Council Members.

The Council has a Bureau which consists of a president and four vice presidents who represent each of the five regional groups, and who serve for a year in accordance with the Council's annual cycle (January – December). Staff from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) serve as the secretariat for the Council providing its members with technical, substantive and administrative support. In addition to the Member States of the Council, observers, which include non-Member

States, inter-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), also participate actively in Council sessions.

The Council can adopt texts with or without a recorded vote. For the Council to adopt a draft text by a vote, it must enjoy the support of a majority of the Members of the Council. Only Council Members are able to vote. The decisions of the Council are not legally binding. In its first decade the Council adopted over 1,300 texts to address a wide range of thematic and country-specific human rights issues.

PRESIDENTS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

1ST CYCLE	LUIS ALFONSO DE ALBA GÓNGORA (Mexico), June 2006 - June 2007
2ND CYCLE	DORU COSTEA (Romania), June 2007 - June 2008
3RD CYCLE	MARTIN I. UHOMOIBHI (Nigeria), June 2008 - June 2009
4TH CYCLE	ALEX VAN MEEUWEN (Belgium), June 2009 - June 2010
5TH CYCLE	SIHASAK PHUANGKETKEOW (Thailand), June 2010 - June 2011
6TH CYCLE	LAURA DUPUY LASSERRE (Uruguay), June 2011 - December 2012
7TH CYCLE	REMIGIUSZ ACHILLES HENCZEL (Poland), 2013
8TH CYCLE	BAUDELAIRE NDONG ELLA (Gabon), 2014
9TH CYCLE	JOACHIM RÜCKER (Germany), 2015
10TH CYCLE	CHOI KYONGLIM (Republic of Korea), 2016
11TH CYCLE	JOAQUÍN ALEXANDER MAZA MARTELLI (El Salvador), 2017

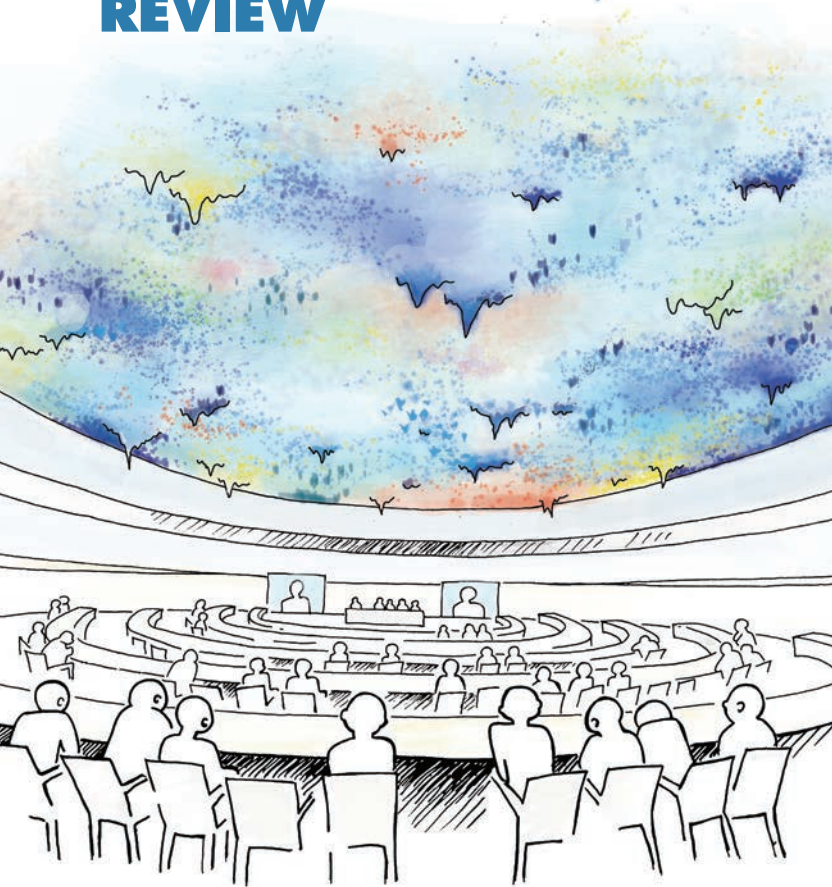
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP ACROSS THE GLOBE (2006-2017)*



The boundaries shown, the designations used and the presentation of material on this map do not imply any opinion, official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW



The Council's Universal Periodic Review (hereinafter UPR) is a unique process which involves a review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States once every four and a half years. The UPR is one of the most innovative and powerful achievements of the Human Rights Council designed to ensure equal treatment for every country when their human rights situations are assessed. It provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situation in their countries and to fulfil their human rights obligations, as well as the challenges and constraints they are facing in so doing.

During UPR Working Group meetings held three times per year, UN Member States spell out positive achievements, express concerns and ultimately pose recommendations to the States under review aimed at improving human rights practices and policies in those countries. Each year 42 States are reviewed, receiving an average of 150 recommendations each. Reviewed States are then expected to indicate which recommendations they support, and to report on measures and steps taken to implement them, which on average are 75% of all the recommendations made. Moreover, the UPR also provides a space for States to request technical assistance from other States to enhance their capacity to deal effectively with human rights challenges and for them to share best practices.

The ultimate aim of this process is to improve concretely the human rights situation in all countries with significant consequences for people around the globe and address human rights violations wherever they occur.

Since the UPR began functioning in 2008, there has been 100% participation by all 193 UN Member States who have had their human rights records reviewed twice, with the third UPR cycle commencing in 2017.



SPECIAL PROCEDURES

The Human Rights Council's Special Procedures mandate holders are made up of special rapporteurs, independent experts or working groups composed of five members who are appointed by the Council and who serve in their personal capacity. Special procedures undertake country visits; act on individual cases and concerns of a broader, structural nature by sending communications to States and other actors bringing alleged violations or abuses to their attention; conduct thematic studies and convene expert consultations; contribute to the development of international human rights standards; engage in advocacy; raise public awareness; and provide advice for technical cooperation.

These independent experts report at least once a year to the Council on their findings and recommendations, as well as the UN General Assembly. At times they are the only mechanism alerting the international community to certain human rights issues.

By the end of 2016 there were 80 active Special Procedures mandate holders for 57 mandates - 43 thematic mandates, such as water and sanitation, arbitrary detention, the rights of migrants, violence against women, torture and human trafficking, and 14 country-specific mandates.

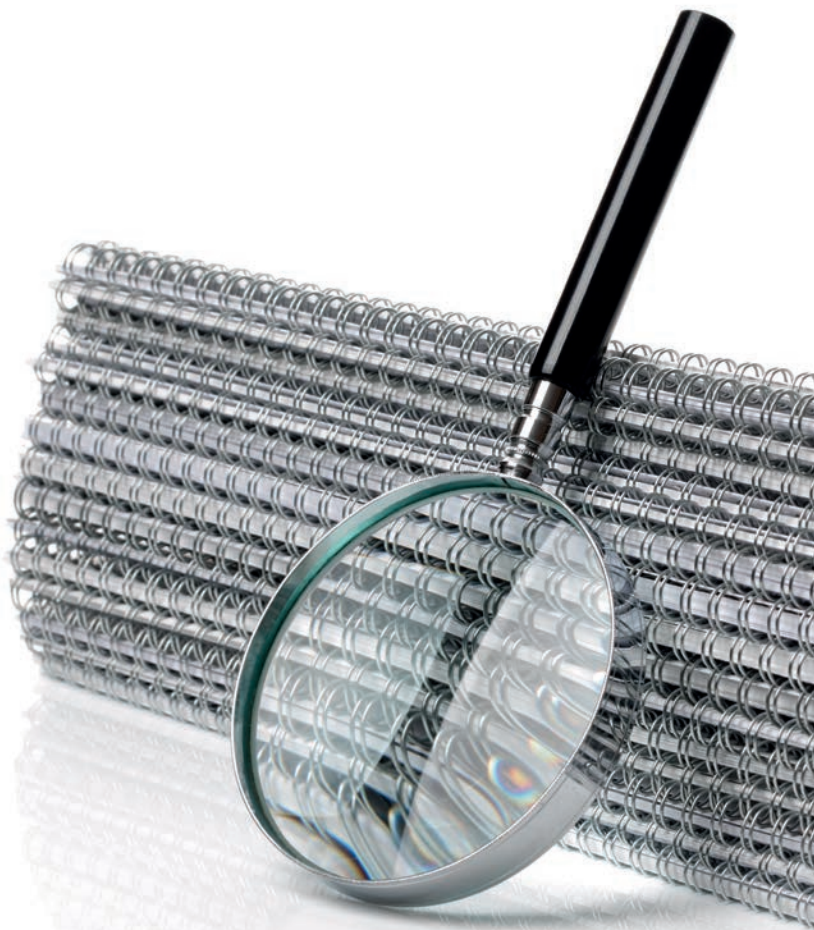


ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Human Rights Council's Advisory Committee functions as the "think-tank" of the Council focusing mainly on studies and research-based advice. It consists of 18 independent experts that are elected by the Council and are drawn proportionally from the five UN regional groups. The experts are from different professional backgrounds, all serve in their personal capacity for three-year terms and are eligible for re-election only once.

The Advisory Committee held its first meeting in 2008. It meets twice a year, in February and August, for one week each.

The Advisory Committee is implementation-oriented, has produced studies on a wide range of thematic issues including vulture funds, corruption, local government, post-disaster and post-conflict situations, terrorist hostage-taking, the right to food, missing persons, the rights of persons living with albinism, and promoting human rights through sport and the Olympic ideal, among others. The Advisory Committee has also formulated draft declarations as well as principles and guidelines on a number of topics, some of which were endorsed by the General Assembly. These include the principles and guidelines for the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members.



COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

The Human Rights Council Complaint Procedure is a victims'-oriented process addressing consistent patterns of gross and reliably attested human rights violations occurring in any part of the world and under any circumstances. The Complaint Procedure is based on communications received from individuals, groups or non-governmental organizations that claim to be victims of human rights violations or that have direct, reliable knowledge of such violations.

The Complaint Procedure was established in 2007 out of the need to improve the previous 1503 procedure through increasing impartiality, objectivity, efficiency and victim-orientation. Two distinct working groups — the Working Group on Communications and the Working Group on Situations — are responsible, respectively, for examining communications and bringing consistent patterns of gross and reliably attested violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms to the Council's attention, for their further action. The Council examines reports and any situation placed before it by the Working Group on Situations in a confidential manner (unless it decides otherwise), with a view to enhance cooperation with the State concerned. It does so as frequently as needed, but at least once a year.

This is the only universal complaint procedure covering all human rights and fundamental freedoms in all UN Member States. An average of 3,400 communications are submitted to the Complaint Procedure each year.

COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRIES AND FACT-FINDING MISSIONS

The Council can also establish international commissions of inquiries, fact-finding missions and investigations to respond to situations of serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, whether protracted or resulting from sudden events, and to promote accountability for such violations and counter impunity.

These investigative bodies are supported by OHCHR staff who provide administrative, logistical as well as security support and expertise, and carry out missions as mandated. By the end of 2016, 22 such commissions and missions have been created by the Council with three currently active (the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Burundi and the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan).

Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Burundi pursuant to resolution 33/24 (2016)

Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan pursuant to resolution 31/20 (2016)

OHCHR Monitoring Mission to South Sudan pursuant to resolution 29/13 (2015)

United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi pursuant to resolutions 24/1 (2015)

OHCHR Investigation on Libya pursuant to resolution 28/30 (2015)

OHCHR Investigation Mission to Iraq pursuant to resolution S-22/1 (2014)

United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict pursuant to resolution S-21/1 (2014)

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea pursuant to resolution 26/24 (2014)

OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka pursuant to resolution 25/1 (2014)

Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea pursuant to resolution 22/13 (2013)

Independent International Fact-Finding Mission to investigate implications of the Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem pursuant to resolution 19/17 (2012)

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic pursuant to resolutions 17/1 (2011), 19/22 (2012), 21/26 (2012), 22/24 (2013), 25/23 (2014), 28/20 (2015) and 31/17 (2016)

OHCHR Fact-Finding Mission to the Syrian Arab Republic pursuant to resolution S-16/1 (2011)

International Commission of Inquiry on Côte d'Ivoire pursuant to resolution 16/25 (2011)

International Commission of Inquiry on Libya pursuant to resolutions S-15/1 and 17/17 (2011)

International Fact-Finding Mission to investigate violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, resulting from the Israeli attacks on the Flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian assistance pursuant to resolution 14/1 (2010)

Committee of Independent Experts to monitor and assess any Domestic, legal or other proceedings by both the Government of Israel and the Palestinian side pursuant to resolutions 13/9 (2010) and 15/6 (2010)

United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict pursuant to resolution S-9/1 (2009)

Expert Group on the Situation of Human Rights in Darfur pursuant to resolution S-4/101 (2006)

High-level Fact-Finding Mission to Beit Hanoun pursuant to resolution S-3/1 (2006)

Commission of Inquiry on Lebanon pursuant to resolution S-2/1 (2006)

Fact-Finding Mission on Human Rights situation on the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 1967 pursuant to resolution S-1/1 (2006)



FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

The Forum on Minority Issues has been established to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, as well as to provide thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. The Forum identifies and analyses best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

The Forum meets annually for two working days allocated to thematic discussions with a Chairperson appointed by the President of the Council on the basis of regional rotation, and in consultation with regional groups. The Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues guides the work of the Forum, prepares its annual meetings and reports on the thematic recommendations of the Forum to the Human Rights Council.

The Forum is open to all relevant stakeholder groups, including States, the wider United Nations system, intergovernmental and regional organizations, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and affected stakeholders, among others.

EXPERT MECHANISM ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides the Council with thematic advice in the form of studies and research on the rights of Indigenous peoples as directed by the Council. Its studies have covered issues such as education, the right to participation in decision making processes, access to justice, the role of language, cultures and the identity of indigenous peoples, among others.

The Expert Mechanism may also suggest proposals to the Council for its consideration and approval, and can highlight good practices. Moreover, the Expert Mechanism may also provide Member States upon request assistance and technical advice regarding the development of domestic policies relating to the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as the implementation of recommendations.

The Expert Mechanism is made up of seven independent experts based on equitable geographical distribution and gender balance, who are appointed by the Council for three year terms. It holds one annual session, usually in July, with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, whose participation is also strengthened through the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. The Expert Mechanism reports to the Council once a year and produces an annual study on the status on the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide.

FORUM ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Forum on Business and Human Rights has been established by the Council and – under the guidance of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises – discusses trends and challenges in the implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It promotes dialogue and cooperation on issues linked to business and human rights, including challenges faced in particular sectors, operational environments or in relation to specific rights or groups. It also identifies good practices.

As per Human Rights Council resolution 17/4, the Forum is open to all relevant stakeholder groups, including States, the wider United Nations system, intergovernmental and regional organizations, businesses, labour unions, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and affected stakeholders, among others.

SOCIAL FORUM

The Social Forum is an annual three-day meeting convened by the Council. It is defined as a unique space for open and interactive dialogue between civil society actors, representatives of Member States, and intergovernmental organizations, on a theme chosen by the Council each year.

The Social Forum has addressed issues such as the eradication of poverty and the social dimension of the globalization process, the impacts of economic and financial crises on efforts to combat poverty, the adverse effects of climate change on human rights, the promotion of the right to development, the rights of older persons, access to medicines and the rights of persons with disabilities, among others.

The reports produced by the Social Forum are submitted to the Council for further consideration.

FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW

The Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law is the latest subsidiary body established by the Council. The purpose of the Forum is to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to the relationship between these areas and to identify and analyse best practices, challenges and opportunities for States in their efforts to secure respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Forum meets biannually for two working days. The President of the Council appoints for each session, on the basis of regional rotation and in consultation with regional groups, a Chairperson of the Forum from candidates nominated by members and observers of the Council.

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MEMBERS (2017)

ASIA-PACIFIC STATES

BANGLADESH

CHINA

INDIA

INDONESIA

IRAQ

JAPAN

KYRGYZSTAN

MONGOLIA

PHILIPPINES

QATAR

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

SAUDI ARABIA

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

AFRICAN STATES

BOTSWANA

BURUNDI

CONGO

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

ETHIOPIA

GHANA

KENYA

NIGERIA

RWANDA

SOUTH AFRICA

TUNISIA

EGYPT

TOGO

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STATES

BOLIVIA (PLURINATIONAL STATE OF)

BRAZIL

CUBA

ECUADOR

EL SALVADOR

PANAMA

PARAGUAY

VENEZUELA (BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF)

WESTERN EUROPEAN AND OTHER STATES

BELGIUM

GERMANY

NETHERLANDS

PORTUGAL

SWITZERLAND

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES

ALBANIA

CROATIA

GEORGIA

HUNGARY

LATVIA

SLOVENIA

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AMB. MR. JOAQUÍN ALEXANDER MAZA MARTELLI (EL SALVADOR)

VICE-PRESIDENTS

AMB. MR. MOAYED SALEH (IRAQ)

AMB. MR. VALENTIN ZELLWEGER (SWITZERLAND)

AMB. MR. SHALVA TSISKARASHVILI (GEORGIA)

AMB. MR. AMR AHMED RAMADAN (EGYPT)



* To date a 103 UN Member States have served as Human Rights Council Members: Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Czechia, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Libya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Zambia.

References:

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