

Switzerland

Candidate for the
Human Rights Council
2016–2018



“In the knowledge that only those who use their freedom remain free, and that the strength of a people is measured by the well-being of its weakest members.”

from the preamble of the Constitution
of the Swiss Confederation

Switzerland's vision of the Human Rights Council

Human rights are at the core of Switzerland's self-understanding: a small democracy of free and equal citizens who enjoy a wide range of fundamental freedoms and actively participate in politics. Peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among people with different religious, linguistic or cultural backgrounds, a deeply rooted humanitarian tradition and good offices which are appreciated around the globe, the rule of law, stability and solidarity as well as credibility and reliability are among the specific and fundamental values of our country.

It is on the basis of these values that Switzerland took a leading role in the creation of the Human Rights Council. Together with other states that shared our dedication and keen interest we managed to improve the functioning of the human rights system. Ever since, we have been committed to ensuring that the Human Rights Council remains a strong and effective institution, not only able to react rapidly to human rights violations wherever they occur, but also capable of addressing

worrisome situations before they become critical. Our global engagement has been widely recognised and has contributed to Geneva becoming a "global human rights hub". Today, we are satisfied to see that the Human Rights Council is a dynamic and responsive body, sensitive to the calls of our societies.

The successes of the Council entail some challenges. Since its creation, the Council's workload has steadily increased. On the one hand, further efforts are required to prevent the Council from spreading itself too thin and from its activities multiplying excessively. On the other hand, the resources of the United Nations' human rights system must be adapted to the increasing demands of the member states. In future, we need a Council and a human rights system that remains responsive to the most pressing human rights challenges. In the past few decades, a consensus has emerged that there is no development without security and no security without development, and especially that neither is possible without



respect for human rights. Indeed, it is a matter of concern for Switzerland that although human rights are one of the three pillars of the United Nations, they do not yet occupy the central place they deserve within the United Nations system.

The collaborative spirit that has been developed among members and observers of the Council in the wake of the Arab Spring must be preserved and cultivated. The Council is the United Nations' most important body mandated to genuinely serve human rights.



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The promotion and protection of human rights for all human beings in all parts of the world is more than just an aspiration – it is an obligation. Promoting universal respect for human rights is a permanent priority of Switzerland’s foreign policy. As host state to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Human Rights Council as well as many non-governmental organisations, Switzerland has a particular interest in ensuring that the United Nations’ main human rights body be strong, efficient and fair. To this end, Switzerland is pre-senting its candidature for a third term in the Human Rights Council for the period 2016–2018.

I thank you for your support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D Burkhalter', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Didier Burkhalter
Head of the Swiss Federal Department
of Foreign Affairs

A school class made up of six teenagers of different origins. Promoting integration is one of the most effective means of countering racism.



Switzerland's pledges and commitments

To promote human rights at the **national level**, the Swiss government pledges to further improve compliance with its human rights obligations, in particular by:

- » Strengthening coordination among all stakeholders at different state levels by developing a national coordination mechanism
- » Continuing its efforts against racism by promoting the integration of all sections of the resident population
- » ...
- » Implementing the accepted UPR recommendations in good faith and launching a transparent and inclusive process to draft its third UPR report
- » Considering the establishment of a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles
- » Promoting respect for human rights by companies based in Switzerland
- » Stepping up its efforts to raise awareness of the issue of human trafficking

For further details please refer to the full version of Switzerland's Pledges and Commitments: www.eda.admin.ch/swiss_pledges_hrc

Trafficking in human beings is a modern form of slavery in which people are recruited, procured or made available for the purposes of sexual exploitation in prostitution, different forms of labour exploitation and the removal of organs.

© Karen Robinson / Panos



To promote human rights at the **international level**, the Swiss government pledges to assist states in carrying out their human rights obligations, in particular by:

- » Pursuing its commitment to the worldwide abolition of capital punishment
- » Strengthening its efforts to increase accountability for gross human rights violations
- » Contributing to the promotion and protection of human rights, the strengthening of the rule of law, democracy and good governance in partner countries
- » Pursuing its engagement in the area of women's rights with a view to empowering women and girls both economically and politically and achieving gender equality
- » Continuing its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests
- » ...

For further details please refer to the full version of Switzerland's Pledges and Commitments: www.eda.admin.ch/swiss_pledges_hrc

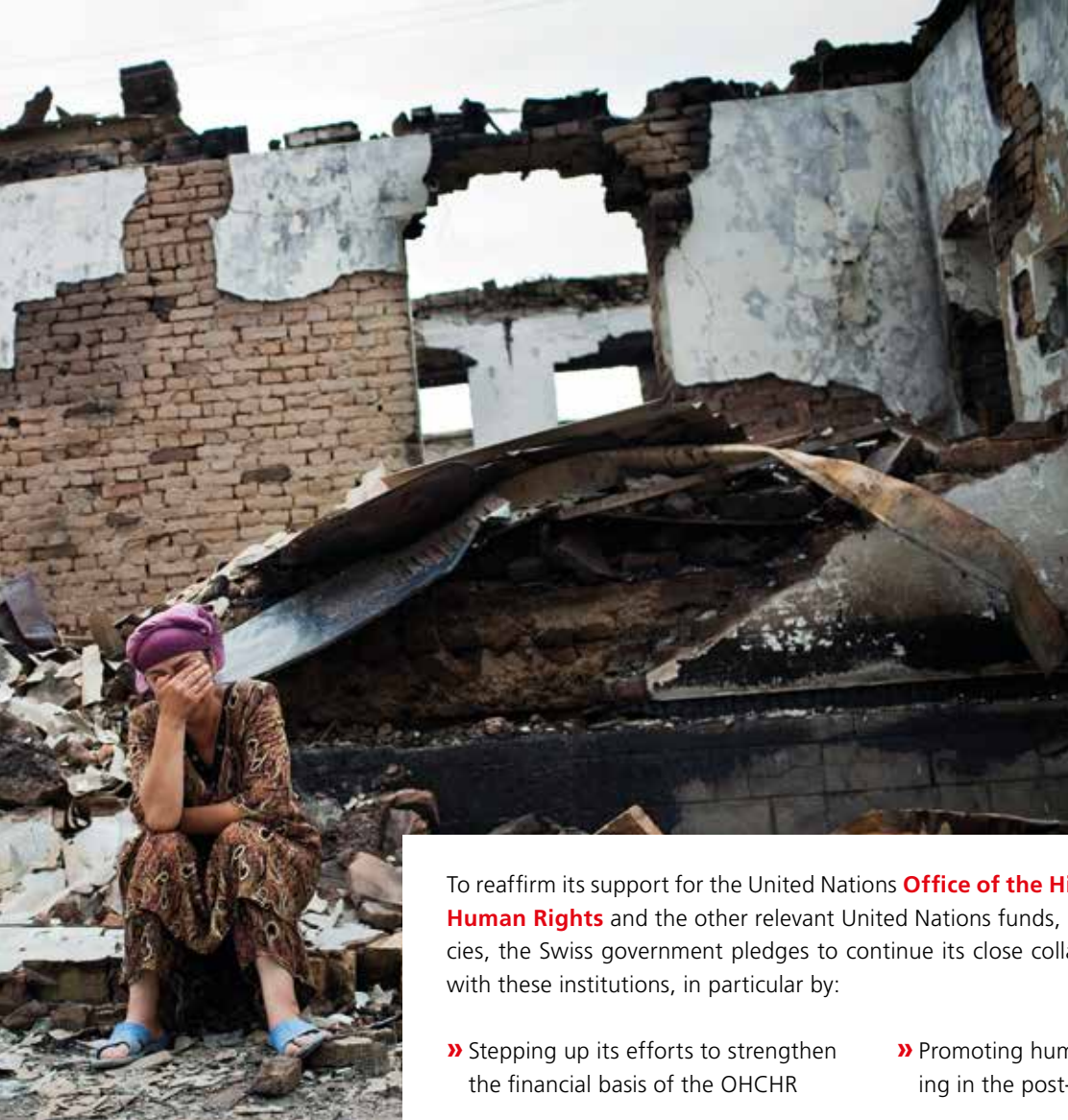
To contribute to the strengthening of the **Human Rights Council**, the Swiss government pledges to help ensure that this institution can fulfil its mandate under the best possible conditions, in particular by:

- » Continuing to actively participate in the work of the Council in a spirit of cooperation and genuine dialogue with partners from all regions;
- » Taking stock of the achievements of the Human Rights Council and identify challenges that lie ahead
- » Improving the participation of non-governmental organisations and national human rights institutions in the work of the Human Rights Council
- » Strengthening its efforts to achieve universality of representation by offering assistance to the states that do not yet have a permanent mission in Geneva
- » ...

For further details please refer to the full version of Switzerland's Pledges and Commitments: www.eda.admin.ch/swiss_pledges_hrc



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In addition to human suffering and destruction, violent conflicts always entail human rights violations and abuses. Switzerland consistently calls for accountability for serious human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law.

To reaffirm its support for the United Nations **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** and the other relevant United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, the Swiss government pledges to continue its close collaboration and dialogue with these institutions, in particular by:

- » Stepping up its efforts to strengthen the financial basis of the OHCHR
- » Promoting human rights mainstreaming in the post-2015 process
- » ...
- » Supporting the OHCHR in its efforts to increase states parties' capacities to comply with obligations under international human rights treaties
- » Continuing to support the human rights treaty body system

For further details please refer to the full version of Switzerland's Pledges and Commitments:
www.eda.admin.ch/swiss_pledges_hrc

Women, children and elderly people escaping from violent conflict. The protection of vulnerable groups is one of the cornerstones of Switzerland's human rights foreign policy.

Swiss human rights foreign policy stands for ...

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Dialogue Peaceful protest
Detention standards Food Freedom of assembly and association
Social peace and economic development Water and sanitation
Fight against impunity **Women's rights** Commissions of inquiry
Freedom of expression **Accountability**
Humanitarianism **Universality** Transparency Protection of minorities
Human rights defenders **Bridge building** Cooperation
Abolition of death penalty Commitment Health
Truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence
Prevention of torture **Participation of civil society**
Responsibility of business enterprises
Support for OHCHR Children's rights
Institutional reforms Commitment to Universal Periodic Review
Credibility **Fight against human trafficking**
Support for Special Procedures



Switzerland is proud to host the Human Rights Council in Geneva – a city that has become a global human rights hub.



What Switzerland has achieved so far

The creation of the Human Rights Council in 2006 was based on a Swiss proposal submitted in September 2004 to the UN Secretary General. Switzerland is proud to host the Human Rights Council in Geneva – a city with a long-standing humanitarian tradition where the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights as well as numerous non-governmental organisations are based. Switzerland continued to play an active role both during the institution-building and review processes of the Human Rights Council, and was a driving force behind the establishment of the Office of the President of the Human Rights Council.

In cooperation with various coalitions of like-minded states Switzerland successfully launched and supported several cross-regional initiatives on diverse issues such as transitional justice, accountability, the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests, human rights and the environment, the right to privacy in the digital age, human rights education and training, the safety of journalists and the issue of child, early and forced marriage. These initiatives produced concrete results, for instance the establishment of new special procedures (the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth,



Parliament square and the federal parliament building in Switzerland's capital Bern.

Justice, Reparations and Guarantee of non-recurrence and the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment), the adoption of new human rights instruments (the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training) and the creation of the Group of Friends of the International Criminal Court in Geneva.

Switzerland volunteered to be among the first countries to be examined by the Universal Periodic Review, strived to implement the recommendations it received and accepted to further improve the human rights situation at the national level. Since the very first session of the Universal Periodic Review, Switzerland has actively participated and made recommendations to more than 100 governments. During its last two terms of membership (2006–2009 and 2010–2013) Switzerland spared no effort to build bridges between numerous actors and worked in close collaboration with other states and civil society partners to ensure that the Human Rights Council would become a strong and effective institution and that the Council was able to deal appropriately with human rights violations in any part of the world.

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Peaceful protest in Bern. As a multifaceted society, Switzerland can only be a prosperous country by building on dialogue, power sharing and compromise.



Switzerland is a particularly suitable candidate because ...

... human rights are a cornerstone of Swiss foreign policy.

The promotion and respect of human rights, the alleviation of need and poverty in the world, the promotion of democracy, the peaceful coexistence of peoples and the preservation of natural resources are the five key objectives of Switzerland's foreign policy. Being a small state, Switzerland's prosperity depends on an international order that is characterised by stability and respect for international law. Switzerland has learned from its own history that the rule of law and the creation of solid institutions are the foundation of durable peace. For these reasons, Switzerland is a fervent supporter of a stringent and durable international legal system, and in particular of a strong international human rights system.

... Switzerland stands for cooperation, tolerance, mutual respect, dialogue, power sharing and compromise.

These values and ideas are Switzerland's formula for success. Historically, Switzerland grew into what it is today from a union of numerous smaller entities. That is why its society is composed of diverse population groups of different cultural backgrounds, languages and faiths. Switzerland was not spared violent conflicts in the past, but the Swiss people have learned to prevent disputes by practising tolerance and mutual respect.

As a multifaceted society, Switzerland can only be a prosperous country with a stable political system by building on dialogue, power sharing and compromise. This consensual tradition qualifies Switzerland as a committed and reliable partner in all international efforts to promote human rights in an inclusive and cooperative way.

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A woman leaving a voting booth during a federal election. Every four years, Swiss citizens elect a new bicameral parliament.



Swiss aid worker delivering humanitarian aid following the destructive earthquake in Haiti in 2010.

... Switzerland has a longstanding humanitarian tradition.

For centuries, people who have been persecuted for religious or political reasons have sought and received protection in Switzerland. Incensed by the cruelties of war, in the mid-19th century the Swiss citizen Henry Dunant began to advocate better protection and nursing of wounded soldiers who until then had been left to die a miserable death on the battlefield. Since then, Geneva has been known as the world capital of humanitarianism, international humanitarian law and the seat of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). For centuries, Switzerland has renounced the use of violence and recognised the necessity of multilateral cooperation. It is

not by accident that the country hosted the League of Nations, the first international organisation that was intended to secure world peace after the horrific experiences of the First World War. Today, Switzerland is host not only to the United Nations' European headquarters, but to numerous international organisations and local, regional and international non-government organisations. Due to its experience in mediating negotiated solutions, Switzerland is appreciated as the host of a wide range of high-level meetings and conferences that help to secure or restore peace, stability and respect for human rights all over the world.



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Imprint

Editor:

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

Directorate of Political Affairs DP

3003 Bern

www.fdfa.admin.ch

Design:

Visual Communication FDFA, Bern

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Bern, 2015

