



Item 8: Follow up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action

One of the landmark achievements of the Vienna Declaration was the proposal to create the position of High Commissioner for Human Rights.

For more than 20 years, successive High Commissioners have provided a strong and independent voice, committed to promoting and protecting human rights around the world.

Today, that independence is under threat. The draft resolution, inaccurately titled “Composition of staff of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights” goes well beyond staffing issues, seeking to affirm and encourage follow-up to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), which reviews the “Management and Administration” of the OHCHR.

While the JIU report itself affirms that “nothing in the review would infringe or impact adversely on the independence” of the Office, its primary recommendation is to “strengthen the capacity of Member States to *direct* ... the work of OHCHR” (emphasis added).

There is much that is controversial and inconsistent in the JIU inspector’s report, but what is clear is that it is not a matter for the Council. Not one of the report’s recommendations is addressed to the Human Rights Council. As the Bureau has noted, the JIU report itself clearly states:

[I]t is inconceivable that the Human Rights Council can address, or will be allowed to address, questions relating to management and administration of the Office, given its current agenda. (JIU report, para. 64)

The Council is all too often guided by political considerations. During the high-level segment at this Council session, numerous foreign ministers and high-ranking officials expressed concern at global human rights crises taking their toll in every region of the world. Now more than ever, we need a High Commissioner who can stand outside the politics of the Council and provide a principled independent voice to remind us all of the human rights standards that the Council is sworn to uphold.

The resolution on the composition of the staff of the Office has always been divisive. Regrettably, the lead sponsors have chosen to make the new text even more so, by continuing a trend of incrementally encroaching on matters outside the purview of the Council. We urge States to reject such damaging and intrusive provisions.

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