

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE INTERIM REPORT
OF THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS -
“CANADA AND THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL:
AT THE CROSSROADS”**

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INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to House of Commons Standing Order 109, the Government of Canada is pleased to respond to the Interim Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights entitled *Canada and the United Nations Human Rights Council: At the Crossroads*.

The Government of Canada welcomes the Senate Committee’s interest in the Human Rights Council and is grateful for the Committee’s considered input on critical issues facing the Council during its first year of operation. The Government notes that the Committee has benefitted from the views of a number of experts familiar with the Council and would like to take this opportunity to thank the many advocates, academics, diplomats and officials in Ottawa and Geneva who assisted the Senate Committee in studying the Human Rights Council. The Government would also like to thank the Senate Committee for the time and resources it has devoted to its study and for its continued efforts to assist in the implementation of Canada’s international human rights obligations.

Canada has been a champion for the international system for the protection and promotion of human rights, from its inception in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to our membership on the Human Rights Council today. Canada is party to six core international human rights instruments and has extended an open invitation to all UN Special Procedures.

The Government shares the Senate Committee’s view expressed in the interim report that the Council is at a crossroads in creating a viable framework for human rights protection. During the Council’s first year, the Government of Canada devoted significant efforts towards the Council’s development, seeking to ensure that the Council is an improvement over its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights. The Government will continue to work towards the development of the Human Rights Council into an institution that is credible and effective, and that upholds the guiding principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity, and non-selectivity upon which it was founded by General Assembly resolution 60/251.

The Government of Canada views the Council as a vehicle to promote Canada’s objectives of promoting human rights, democracy, the rule of law and good governance around the world, resulting in enhanced security and prosperity for Canadians. Canada can use the Human Rights Council as a forum to make statements on its human rights foreign policy to a broad international audience; to focus international attention on human rights situations and issues as they arise; to call states to account for serious human rights violations; to promote the development and implementation of international human rights standards that reflect Canadian values and priorities; to engage in constructive dialogue to

improve respect for human rights on the ground; and to support the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Government of Canada has carefully considered the Senate Committee's recommendations contained in the interim report and addresses each recommendation below.

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada focus its attention upon, and direct its resources towards, working intensively with the six working groups currently in negotiations to establish the rules, mechanisms, and procedure of the UN Human Rights Council.

In terms of the Special Procedures, the Government of Canada should emphasize the need for:

- **The independence and expertise of mandate holders to be maintained;**
- **Timely and adequate state cooperation with mandate holders;**
- **Strengthening of the urgent appeals tool by which Special Procedures can communicate with governments on behalf of individual victims of human rights violations; and**
- **Protection gaps to be addressed to ensure that all human rights issues are covered within the Special Procedures system.**

In terms of the Universal Periodic Review, the Government of Canada should emphasize the need for:

- **The UPR to be held as frequently as possible;**
- **The review to be undertaken by a mechanism within the Council so that the full Council's already limited time is not taken up by this process; and**
- **The UPR to be part of a comprehensive and continuous process, accompanied by advance preparation, interactive dialogue, meaningful outcomes, and careful attention to follow-up and implementation. This process needs to be transparent (with respect to the information used in the review, dialogue, and the outcome and follow-up), and should be backed by strong human rights expertise to focus the review on essential human rights issues in any given country.**

To assist it in negotiating and establishing its rules, mechanisms and procedures, the Human Rights Council established Working Groups on the agenda, annual programme of work, methods of work and rules of procedure; on the universal periodic review; and on the issue of reviewing and, where necessary, improving and rationalizing all mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities in order to maintain a system of special procedures, expert advice and a complaint procedure. Canada worked intensively with the working groups throughout the Human Rights Council's first year, both in formal sessions and during informal, inter-sessional meetings, in order to promote Canada's

objectives for the Human Rights Council.

Canada was an early proponent of a system of **Universal Periodic Review** and worked intensively to establish its modalities. The Human Rights Council developed a good starting framework for the Universal Periodic Review, which was considered during the Human Rights Council's fifth session. The creation of a system of Universal Periodic Review constitutes a significant addition to the multilateral human rights machinery. With its modalities established, the first periodic reviews should begin in early 2008. The Universal Periodic Review will allow the Human Rights Council to review the human rights records of each and every country on a regular basis. While Canada consistently advocated a three year cycle, the first complete cycle of reviews will last four years. Canada also advocated for the work of the universal periodic review to be conducted by working groups reporting to plenary, so as to spread the burden of work. However, the institution building package brought forward at the fifth session of the Human Rights Council states that the reviews will be conducted by one Working Group, chaired by the President of the Council and composed of the 47 member states of the Council, with outcomes to be adopted by plenary. Canada is pleased with the inclusion of a gender perspective as one of the principles upon which the universal periodic review will be based - an element Canada supported.

This new mechanism should still forestall charges of selective treatment, double standards and politicization within the United Nations system. Inputs from both the United Nations human rights system and from civil society will accompany national input. Civil society has secured a strong role in the process, as NGOs will also be able to observe the review process and comment in the final plenary session. Furthermore, the country under review will not have a veto over the results. Canada regrets, however, that the recommendations flowing from reviews will be split into two categories: those that enjoy the support of the state concerned will be identified as such, while other recommendations together with the comments of the state concerned will be noted. There is a risk, therefore, that this approach will create a hierarchy of recommendations. Canada will also continue to work to ensure that the universal periodic review is a useful complement to the treaty body system.

Now that the UPR's basic framework and modalities have been established, Canada's attention turns to the implementation of UPR scheduled to begin in April 2008. A number of states will have had to undergo review by the UPR before Canada is able to assess credibility of the mechanism. Canada maintains the UPR as a priority of our Council-related work and continues its leadership at the Council on this initiative. Canada continues to seek the development of a streamlined, credible and effective process that allows for a meaningful review in the limited time allotted, and to maintain flexibility for the review to be tailored to specific issues faced by each country. On September 21, 2007, the schedule of reviews was determined at the sixth session of the Human Rights Council. Canada will undergo its review in 2009.

The independent system of **special procedures** was maintained in the transition between the Commission of Human Rights and its successor Human Rights Council. The advent of the Human Rights Council has resulted in greater interaction between the special procedures and member and observer states. With the Human Rights Council meeting a minimum of ten weeks over three sessions each year, the Special Procedures have greater interaction with the Human Rights Council than they did with the Commission on Human Rights. Canada was active in working towards the protection of the independence and credibility of the mandate holders for the Special Procedures, advocating a more transparent nomination, selection and appointment process. Canada will continue to work to ensure that special procedures meet minimum standards of expertise and qualifications. Canada is encouraged that international organizations, NGOs and other human rights bodies may propose candidates. This will ensure increased transparency at all levels and provide a wider pool of potential candidates.

Canada's approach to the review of the special procedures is well reflected in the following excerpt from a statement made by the Canadian delegation to the Working Group on the Review of Mandates on February 13, 2007:

We are in favour of increasing the support provided by the OHCHR to the special procedures. We should also strengthen the coordination and cooperation between the special procedures and other relevant bodies.

We should also recommend ways of strengthening cooperation by States with the Special Procedures, including by issuing standing invitations, accepting visit requests without conditions, responding to communications promptly, and following-up recommendations. Following completion of this review and strengthening of the system, every State should agree to visits by the special procedures.

We should also ensure comprehensive coverage of human rights issues, for example based on the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), as well as country situations where needed.

Duplication and overlap should be reduced where possible and necessary while ensuring adequate specificity and capacity to address all necessary human rights issues. Duplication could be assessed on the basis of whether there is a continued need for a mandate, and whether there is another forum or existing mechanism which is already more effectively addressing or could better address the issue in question.

Overlap could be assessed on the basis of whether the mandate closely relates to or is a sub-set of another mandate that is more general. Does it relate to an issue that falls within the scope of a human right already covered by another mandate?

If so, is there scope for combining the mandates by ensuring that the broader mandate covers the issues relating to the narrower mandate or eliminating the mandate in favour of the more relevant or competent body?

Gaps could be assessed by asking whether a mandate is too narrow: Could it be expanded to more comprehensively address a human right? Are there human rights in the UDHR that are not covered by existing mandates which should be?

We would welcome the views of the Special Procedures themselves on obstacles they have encountered in their work and how could they be overcome, as well as on areas of duplication and overlap, and where there may be gaps in protection, possibly at the fourth session of the Council as suggested by India. The Council could usefully hold an annual consideration of issues of duplication and gaps among special procedure mandates. In order to avoid a proliferation of mandates that would diminish the resources available to each and lessen the impact of all, proposals for new mandates should be required to meet a high threshold of demonstrating the need for a mandate in order to address a human rights issue that cannot be better addressed by another body.

On the issue of **country mandates**, it is useful to recall the important role that country mandates have played historically in many situations around the world, often with the consent of the country concerned. In addition, it is important to distinguish between mandates that deal with serious human rights situations, and those which deal with technical cooperation and advisory assistance. Many of the former, and all of the latter, were established by consensus. But even where the consent of the State in question has not been obtained, and the situation is of concern, a country mandate can still serve a useful function. Neither special sessions nor UPR will be an adequate replacement for either type of mandate, in cases where more urgent, in-depth, frequent or ongoing reporting, consideration, and dialogue and cooperation are needed.

The creation of a consultative group of states to propose candidates to the President risks limiting the President's discretion to appoint mandate-holders, and to politicize the appointment procedure. During negotiation of the institution building package, Canada was active in seeking to limit the effect of the consultative group on the President's ability to appoint mandate holders. The creation of a code of conduct for mandate holders in parallel to the institution-building package was also of concern to Canada, in particular the possibility that it might be used to limit the independence of the special procedures. Canada was active in negotiations on the code of conduct to limit such potential negative effects.

Overall, the revised selection process and code of conduct should result in greater legitimacy and acceptance of the special procedures themselves, which should in turn

lead to improved cooperation, while preserving the special procedures' independence and effectiveness. By renewing ten of twelve country mandates, the institution-building package also reaffirmed the importance and validity of country mandates as a mechanism, and preserved the ability to create new mandates. However, at the fifth session of the Human Rights Council, Canada regretted that the mandates for Belarus and Cuba were discontinued.

Work at the fifth session of the Human Rights Council was also fruitful on the issue of an **expert advice body - the Human Rights Advisory Committee**. The expert advisory committee was streamlined. Although experts will be still elected, efforts to depoliticize candidacies include a strong emphasis on requirements for basic qualifications and expertise. The Advisory Committee will also be more accountable and responsive to the Human Rights Council than the Sub-Commission on Human Rights was with respect to the Commission on Human Rights.

The **complaints procedure** was also improved during the institution-building phase of the first year of work of the Human Rights Council. Canada was instrumental in achieving incremental progress. Improvements include consideration of balance between men and women in the composition of the complaint procedure's working groups, deadlines for State responses, greater procedural fairness and transparency for complainants. The complaints procedure comprises the Working Group on Situations and the Working Group on Communications. The Working Group on Communications receives complaints and determines the severity of the alleged human rights abuses, while the Working Group on Situations recommends to the Council how to address the situation. It is the job of the HRC's Advisory Committee, which has not been formed yet, to appoint the members of the Working Group on Communications. As the Human Rights Advisory Committee itself has yet to be constituted, the complaints procedure will likely only be established sometime in 2008. The President of the Human Rights Council has recommended the creation of a temporary working group to receive complaints in the interim, which Canada supports.

On the **rules of procedure and methods of work**, the Human Rights Council also institutionalizes the Canadian-proposed ground rules for special sessions to promote transparency and increase predictability, as well as the possibility of innovative work formats (panels, roundtables, seminars, different outcomes) for the regular sessions. Improvements also lock in greater NGO participation and prominence compared to the Commission on Human Rights and preserve national human rights institutions' participation.

The final institution-building package presented to the Human Rights Council in June 2007 included these positive developments, all of which have been influenced by Canada's leadership in promoting fair, transparent and effective mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

Regrettably, the final institution-building package failed to reform the agenda format. It retains an **agenda item (number 7) on “Palestine and other occupied Arab territories”** in addition to an agenda item (number 4) on “Human rights situations that require the Council’s attention”. The inclusion in the institution-building package of a separate agenda item “Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories” that is dedicated to singling out one situation for highly politicized, partial and subjective treatment does not respect the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity on which the Council is founded. Canada was disappointed by the outcome that resulted in the inclusion of this item in the Council’s agenda. Canada did not agree to the institution building package for this reason. Canada continues to believe that Middle East issues can and should be addressed instead under the Council’s agenda Item number 4 “Human Rights Situations that Require the Council’s Attention.”

Also, although the independent system of special procedures was maintained, the Human Rights Council also failed to renew the **country mandates for Cuba and Belarus**, through deliberate omission of reference in the text presented to the Human Rights Council on the final institution-building package.

Despite Canada’s leadership and constructive work on the package of institution-building mechanisms for the Human Rights Council during its first year of work, Canada could not accept the final outcome given the retention of an item singling out a particular situation on the agenda. The discontinuation of two important country-specific mandates was an additional factor. Beyond the inclusion and removal of these key elements, the procedural irregularities used to prevent Canada from calling a vote on the package on this basis are of serious concern.

Canada will nonetheless continue to work intensively on remaining outstanding issues.

Recommendation 2: That, during the working group negotiations, Canada vigorously presses for effective follow-up and implementation of Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures recommendations.

Over the first year of work of the Human Rights Council, Canada played a leading role in proposed establishing modalities for the **Universal Periodic Review**, a Canadian initiative. Thanks in large measure to Canada’s vigorous efforts, the Human Rights Council adopted a system of universal periodic review that constitutes a significant addition to the international human rights machinery. Now that the modalities have been established, the first reviews should begin in early 2008. The Universal Periodic Review will allow the Human Rights Council to review the human rights records of all countries, with no exception. It should therefore reduce charges of selective treatment and politicization and thereby promote follow-up. Furthermore, although as noted above Canada has concerns that a hierarchy of recommendations may emerge, it is noteworthy that the country under review will not have a veto over the results.

The institution building package provides for follow-up to universal periodic review in several ways. It states that the subsequent review should focus, inter alia, on the implementation of the preceding outcome; that the Council should have a standing item on its agenda devoted to Universal Periodic Review (item 6); that in considering the universal periodic review outcome, the Council will decide if and when any specific follow-up would be necessary; and that after exhausting all efforts to encourage a state to cooperate with the universal periodic review mechanism, the Council will address, as appropriate, cases of persistent non-cooperation with the mechanism. As the Human Rights Council is an inter-state body, it is the member states of the Human Rights Council that will ultimately determine what constitutes effective follow-up and implementation of universal periodic review recommendations.

At the fourth regular session of the Human Rights Council, Canada explained its position on Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/4/L.2: “Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: follow up to the Human Rights Council resolutions S-1/1 and S-3/1”. Canada’s explanation of positions stated:

Canada agrees with and supports the notion that in principle there should be substantive follow up to the Council’s decisions, and we encourage cooperation by all sides with the Council and its mechanisms. The Council has a high responsibility to ensure that when it addresses situations, it does so in a fair manner, taking into account the actions of all sides. Ultimately, the Council’s ability to influence behaviour rests upon its moral authority, which in turn rests upon the credibility of its decisions. The extent of cooperation that we may expect with a decision of the Council will be a function of the fairness of the decision. In this regard, when taking decisions the Council must be mindful of General Assembly Resolution 60/251’s call for universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity in the conduct of its work.

At the time of the events that led to the Council’s First and Third Special Sessions, Canada called upon all sides to comply with their respective obligations. Had resolutions S-1/1 and S-3/1 been more even handed and objective, Canada may have been in a better position to support the texts. However, where the Council’s original decisions are flawed because they do not accurately and objectively reflect the situation, endorsing follow up would only compound the initial problem. This Council is going to have to move beyond a disproportionate focus on one country and extend its scrutiny to a broader array of pressing human rights issues, if it is to be seen as acting in accordance with its guiding principles. It is for this reason that Canada cannot support follow-up on these specific decisions, and therefore disassociates itself from the Council’s decision.

At the Human Rights Council’s fourth regular session, Canada also addressed the question of follow-up to the Human Rights Council’s decision on Darfur adopted at its

fourth special session. Canada stated, inter alia:

Canada expresses its appreciation to the High-Level Mission for its report which assess the situation of human rights in Darfur. The Special Session on Darfur held by this Council last December received broad support from all regions and the decision to dispatch the High-Level Mission was adopted by consensus. We welcomed the commitment by the Government of Sudan to cooperate with the High-Level Mission and regret that visas were not issued to the Mission, preventing it from visiting Darfur. Nonetheless as with many previous missions and reports both to this body and to the Commission on Human Rights, the mission and its report remain valid and should be addressed by this Council.

The institution building package put forward at the HRC's fifth session has one provision related to follow-up to recommendations of Special Procedures, stating: "In cases of violations of human rights or a lack of cooperation that require the Council's attention, the principles of objectivity and non-selectivity, and the elimination of double standards and politicization should be applied." It should be noted that the criteria for selection and appointment of mandate holders should give their recommendations more weight. Canada was active in working group discussions in seeking to limit the potential impact the code of conduct might have on the independence of the special procedures. Canada will continue to guard against the use of the code of conduct to undermine valid recommendations and reports of special rapporteurs.

Recommendation 3: That Canada press the Human Rights Council to establish an accountability mechanism to ensure that fact-finding missions created by the Council receive full support from Council members, both in terms of fulfillment of mission mandates and in terms of follow-up to mission recommendations.

The institution building agenda put forward at the Human Rights Council's fifth session includes an item on "Follow up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action." As noted above, it is the member states of the Human Rights Council that ultimately constitute an accountability mechanism for fulfillment of mission mandates and in terms of follow-up to mission recommendations. It bears repeating that ultimately, the Human Rights Council's ability to influence behaviour rests upon its moral authority, which in turn rests upon the credibility of its decisions. The extent of cooperation that we may expect with a decision of the Human Rights Council will be a function of the fairness of the decision.

Requesting reports to subsequent sessions by missions and recourse to special sessions are some of the ways the Human Rights Council can ensure support for missions, fulfillment of mission mandates and follow-up to mission recommendations. Consistent with the approach outlined above, Canada will continue to press Human Rights Council member and observer states alike to support missions and to follow-up on mission

recommendations.

Recommendation 4: *That Canada remain active in negotiations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the human rights treaty body system, without supporting the proposal for a unified treaty body system at this time.*

The concerns regarding a unified treaty body that are highlighted in the Committee's report are broadly shared by the Government. The Government of Canada endorses the Committee's recommendation that Canada remain active in negotiations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the human rights treaty body system. As noted by the Committee, at the Human Rights Council's second session, Canada sponsored a resolution on the effective implementation of international instruments on human rights. The resolution, adopted by consensus, took note of the concept paper on the High Commissioner's proposal for a unified standing treaty body, as well as of the Chairperson's summary of the brainstorming meeting on reform of the treaty body system (Malbun II) from 14 to 16 July 2006, which took place in Triesenberg, Liechtenstein. The resolution also encouraged the High Commissioner to undertake a study on various options, including alternatives to a unified treaty body, for reforming the treaty body system, and to seek the views of States and other stakeholders.

Canada further underlined the importance of treaty body reform at the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ambassador Henri-Paul Normandin, Canada's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York stated:

Canada has expressed all along our desire to innovate in designing an international monitoring mechanism which would serve the goal of ensuring effective and efficient monitoring of the rights contained in this Convention. We heard the delegations and representatives of non-governmental organizations expressing the opinion that the existing monitoring model would ensure that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities would not be a "second-class citizen". Canada never accepted this argument. Instead we believe that the rights of persons with disabilities would be best ensured by innovation, through a linking of the existing treaty bodies through a system of experts. In recognition of the time constraints, Canada joined consensus on the creation of a mechanism on the basis of the existing model though here too we had hoped for some innovation based on best practices of existing treaty bodies. We hope that the new treaty body will integrate the lessons learned over the years of operation of existing treaty bodies and we expect that the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will be able to make an important contribution to discussions on future treaty body reform.

Officials also raised the High Commissioner's concept paper during consultations with NGOs on February 6-7, 2007. NGOs echoed many of the concerns raised in the Committee's report, especially the potential loss of expertise and attention to particular issues such as children's rights.

In an April 17, 2007 "non-paper" to the Human Rights Council on its agenda, Canada proposed the inclusion of an item on **Effective functioning of human rights instruments and mechanisms**, with three sub-items to be divided among Human Rights Council sessions, and with national human rights institutions able to intervene under each. The sub-items would have included: Dialogue with the Coordination Committee of the Special Procedures; Dialogue with the treaty bodies; Cooperation with regional human rights organizations. Unfortunately, the final agenda did not include this element.

At this time, Canada does not support the proposal for a unified treaty body system for many of the reasons outlined in the Committee's report. As this issue develops, the Government will continue to assess all options available for improving the treaty body system. The Government shares the concerns expressed in the Committee's report, such as the potential loss of expertise and attention to specific issues. There are significant legal questions that a unified treaty body would present - not least of which is the amendment of the applicable treaties. At this juncture, Canada agrees that there are efficiencies to be found through increased coordination and cooperation amongst the existing treaty bodies, and will be active in supporting such efforts.

Recommendation 5: That Canada work to enhance its effectiveness and leadership in the Human Rights Council by increasing its role as a bridge-builder, and moving beyond its traditional allies to foster alliances with countries around the world.

The Committee's report underlines the significant role bloc politics plays at the Human Rights Council. The Human Rights Council is organized upon the basis of regional groups, with its 47 seats distributed accordingly. The Asian and African Groups each comprise 13 members; the Latin American and Caribbean Group includes 8 members; the Western Europe and Other Group includes 7 members, including Canada; the Eastern Europe Group includes 6 members. The coordinating mechanism for the Human Rights Council's work is a bureau of representatives of the 5 regional groups. The current Bureau Representatives are: Sri Lanka (Asia); Djibouti (Africa); Uruguay (Latin America); Netherlands (Western); Romania (as President of the Human Rights Council, for Eastern Europe).

As the Committee's report notes, other groupings of states play a significant role in the dynamics of the Human Rights Council. These include the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the European Union, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Arab Group, the Africa Group and others. Unlike the aforementioned groups, the Western Group to which Canada belongs does not take coordinated formal positions. Rather it serves as a point of

information exchange and informal coordination. The Commonwealth and the Francophonie have not been active at the Human Rights Council. While they might provide some avenues for cross-regional bridge building, their diverse make-up also results in member states identifying more strongly with those groups that take coordinated formal positions at the Council. Canada continues to explore ways in which it can use these organizations to work across regional and other groups.

As Canada does not belong to any regional or other body that adopts coordinated positions at the Human Rights Council, the Government agrees with the Committee on the importance of working with countries around the world. As the Committee notes, Canada's principled position on unbalanced resolutions relating to the Middle East has resulted in Canada being isolated on several votes over the Human Rights Council's first year, including on the institution-building package brought forward at the Human Rights Council's fifth session. Nevertheless, Canada continues to work closely and substantively with a diverse number of delegations in Geneva on a wide range of issues and resolutions. Canada also uses its extensive network of bilateral missions to support priorities at the Human Rights Council, on issues such as ensuring continued attention to the human rights situation in Darfur, supporting special procedures, or ensuring that egregious human rights violators are not elected to the Council. Further, Universal Periodic Review was an initiative introduced by Canada in an effort to hold all member states accountable to the same standards, breaking down the divide of developed and developing nations.

Another manner in which Canada has been working to engage moderates in other regional groups has been by proposing innovative, alternative formats for Human Rights Council meetings, such as roundtable formats and panel discussions.

At the Human Rights Council's third session, Canada joined with 53 other states, including 17 other Member States, in issuing a statement on human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

At the third regular session of the Human Rights Council Canada organized a panel discussion on promoting human rights in Afghanistan, in cooperation with the Afghan government, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, other UN agencies, NGOs and donors.

Also at the Human Rights Council's fourth regular session, Canada hosted, along with the UK, France, the Netherlands, Mexico, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Norway, Armenia, Australia, New Zealand, Hungary, Turkey, the Republic of Korea, and Tanzania, a panel discussion on "Addressing the Elimination of Violence against Women through the Work of the Human Rights Council".

Recommendation 6: That Canada put into place a Canadian ambassador for human rights, based in Canada, to work in coordination with relevant federal departments. The ambassador should be Canada's permanent representative at the Human Rights Council and participate as necessary in other international negotiations on human rights issues.

The Government of Canada takes note of the Committee's recommendation on the appointment of a Canadian ambassador for human rights. This proposal seeks to create an increased profile for international human rights across federal departments, while providing an inter-departmental human rights focal point for the Government of Canada.

The Government of Canada respectfully submits that the functions and responsibilities of the proposed ambassador are currently met by a series of existing arrangements designed to ensure close and consistent coordination across all relevant federal departments in the formulation of Canada's international human rights policies. The Department of Foreign Affairs' Human Security and Human Rights Bureau acts as the ongoing focal point for the coordination of Canada's international human rights policies and their implementation abroad. The Deputy Minister's Committee on International Human Rights provides for formal consultations at the senior officials level to ensure strategic coordination. The Continuing Committee of Officials on Human Rights provides for monthly federal-provincial-territorial consultations. The whole of government policies are represented abroad by senior ambassadors including the Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Office of the United Nations in Geneva and the Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York.

It should be noted that the Human Rights Council meets a minimum of ten weeks a year over three sessions. When combined with inter-sessional work, such as universal periodic review and other working groups, the Human Rights Council is for all intents and purposes a standing body that requires the attention of a resident ambassador. That function is ably carried out by Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Office of the United Nations in Geneva. The Ambassador is supported by Canada's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, and by the Human Security and Human Rights Bureau, which have internally reallocated resources to ensure Canada's continued leadership role.