

# United States Will Run for Seat on the Human Rights Council

1 April - The State Department announced yesterday that the United States would run for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council in elections scheduled for May 15, 2009. The decision marks a sharp break from the Bush administration's relationship with the council, which was established in 2006 to replace the much-criticized Human Rights Commission. Under the Bush administration, the US was one of only four UN member states to vote against the council's creation, joining Israel, the Marshall Islands and Palau. The Bush administration never ran for election to the council. Last year, it ended US participation as an observer.

In the State Department release, US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Susan Rice, explained that the US was seeking to join the council "because we believe that working from within, we can make the Council a more effective forum to promote and protect human rights."

The release noted that the decision was "in keeping with the Obama Administration's 'new era of engagement' with other nations" and that both Rice and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said that the United States would work in partnership with other countries to improve the effectiveness of the council and the UN human rights system. The decision was praised by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, while the response from Congress was mixed. (...)

Members of the council serve three-year terms, with elections held every year for one-third of the council's 47 seats. The US will run on an uncontested slate of candidates for the May 15 elections, ensuring a victory. Seats are apportioned based on the UN's regional group system. The US is a member of the Western European and Others Group (WEOG) and will run on a slate with Belgium and Norway for three open seats reserved for this region. New Zealand had announced its candidacy for one of the three WEOG seats, but withdrew yesterday after the State Department announced its decision to run.

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