



The UN Human Rights Council is a Farce, It Has Hurt Its Credibility

Description

The UN votes condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine have made one thing clear: the political fronts in this war are not as simple as governments in the West would like.

On 7 April the United Nations General Assembly voted to suspend Russia from the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council over "gross and systematic human rights abuses" in Ukraine.

The vote followed reports of hundreds of civilian bodies found in parts of Ukraine such as Bucha, near Kyiv. Western corporate media and governments claim there is also mounting evidence that Russia has targeted civilian infrastructure as well as besieging the southern port of Mariupol, inflicting life-threatening conditions on the civilian population.

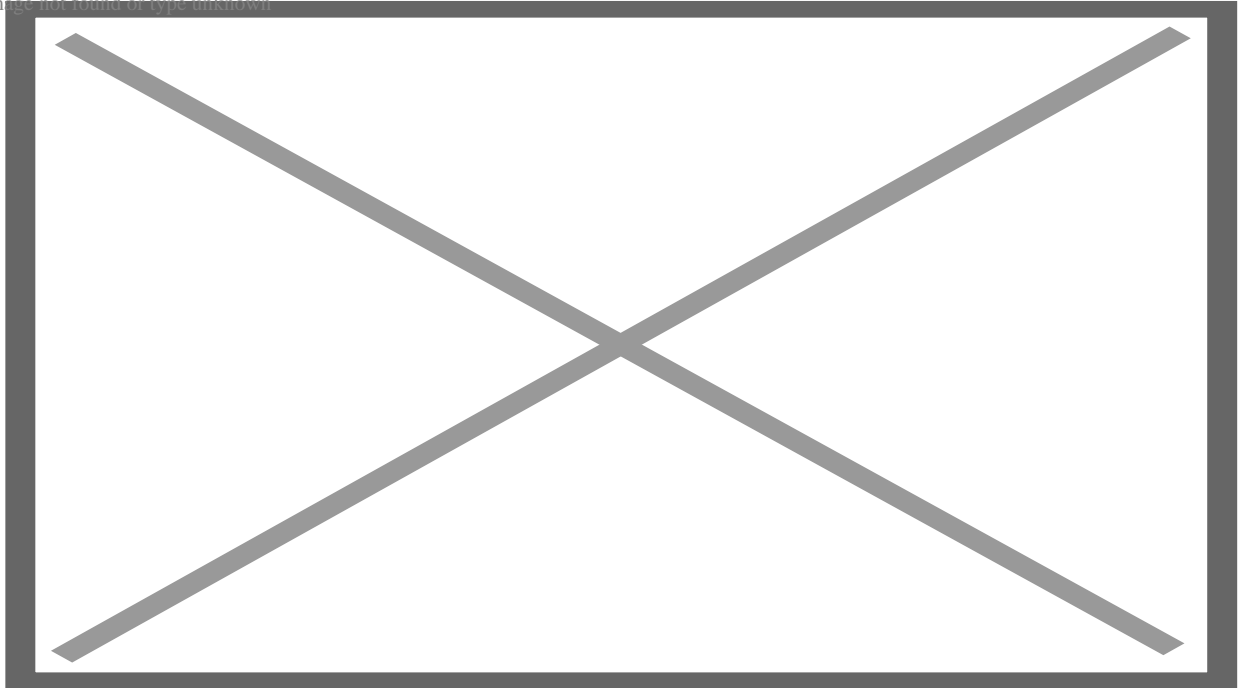
The suspension, only the second in the history of the Human Rights Council, raises unwelcome questions in the UN. The only other country to have been voted off the Human Rights Council is Libya. That happened in 2011 in response to grave violations by the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. Russia's suspension is the first of a "Big Five" permanent member of the Security Council, the UN's supreme body.

A two-thirds majority of voting members, abstentions do not count, was needed to suspend Russia from the 47-member council.

The US-led push garnered 93 votes in favour – including from Switzerland – while 24 countries voted "no", 58 abstained, and the rest were absent. China voted "no," and so did several other countries, notably in Africa and central Asia.

"Russia's participation on the Human Rights Council is a farce," said US ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield on 4 April. "It hurts the credibility of the council and the UN writ large."

Image not found or type unknown



[Russia's suspension from UN Human Rights Council raises big questions](#)

Olivier de Frouville, a professor of public law at the University of Paris 2 and expert on UN human rights issues, sees the vote as “ambivalent”. He says that while the procedural requirements were met, “the majority is not overwhelming. This is not so much about the 24 who voted against, their reasons are generally clear – a number of them are also accused of massive violations of human rights. But the 58 that abstained should really be a matter of concern for the sponsors.”

Russia's suspension raises a question. There are other members of the 47-member Human Rights Council with appalling human rights records, notably China and Eritrea but also Venezuela, Cuba and the United Arab Emirates, which has been accused of atrocities in the Yemen war. So why haven't they been suspended, and what makes Russia different?

De Frouville says it is a political decision by a number of states to suspend one member and not another.

The question *Swiss Info* didn't ask and one we should all be asking is: how were nations able to vote one way or the other in the absence of investigations into the atrocities? The US ambassador's statement quoted earlier may hold some truth however it is not due to Russia's participation. The UN Human Rights Council is a farce because of the actions of many of its members, the US and the UK included, and it is they who hurt the credibility of the council and the UN writ large.

Below are comments by representatives of a few of the participant countries, as noted in the [meeting coverage](#) published by the UN, which demonstrate that the Human Rights Council is not concerned with human rights.

Iran's representative rejected the resolution as “politically driven.”

Syria's delegate said that not only were human rights being politicised, but some States were applying

double standards. They were choosing to shine a spotlight on some nations while ignoring violations carried out in others, depending on what best suited their political ambitions.

China's representative also opposed the politicisation of human rights. A hasty move in the Assembly had forced countries to choose sides, setting new precedents, he said. A move to deprive a State of its legitimate membership in the Human Rights Council should be founded on facts and not through a text whose drafting had not been conducted in an open fashion.

Cuba's delegate, meanwhile, cautioned against activating the suspension of the membership clause in the Council, noting that it could be used to achieve political goals. "It is the Russian Federation today, but tomorrow it could be any of our countries, especially nations of the South, which do not support the interests of domination, and which firmly defend their independence," he said.

Several delegates chose to highlight the urgent need for continued mediation and diplomacy, with South Africa's representative stressing that "Wars end when dialogues begin, and wars endure when there is no dialogue".

Mexico's delegate stressed that the central focus in this regard should be to bring to justice those responsible for atrocities and not to suspend any one State from a subsidiary body of the General Assembly.

The United Arab Emirates' delegate said that due process must be followed with regard to any violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Her delegation abstained on the resolution as the bodies that comprise the international order were not supposed to be "a club for the like-minded", but rather spaces where nations could talk freely with one another.

[Meanwhile, the United Kingdom proved that human rights were indeed being politicised.] The United Kingdom's representative noted the Russian delegate's statement "sounds like someone being fired tendering their resignation." Later, he observed that following on the heels of the suspension, the declaration of the Russian Federation of its withdrawal would trigger a by-election. This means that a Member State from the region will be able to take the seat and protect human rights. [We wonder which State he had in mind and whose "rights" he wants to protect.]

By Rhoda Wilson

Category

1. Freedom-Free speech-Resistance & H-rights
2. Main
3. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

Date Created

04/24/2022