

CANDIDATURE OF ESTONIA TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL FOR THE 2026–2028 TERM

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

The promotion and protection of human rights is Estonia's national priority and an integral part of Estonia's foreign policy. Estonia underlines the importance of a multilateral world order with the United Nations and its Charter at its core, which is essential to the protection and promotion of human rights and for advancing democracy. It is a priority for the Government of Estonia both domestically and in the implementation of its foreign policy in all its aspects. Estonia's international efforts are aimed at strengthening security, development and human rights in the world. As a part of these efforts, Estonia is presenting its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the 2026–2028 term in order to more actively contribute to the Council's work for the promotion of human rights. Previously Estonia served as a member of the Human Rights Council from 2013 to 2015. During this period, we focused on advancing gender equality, protecting and promoting the rights of women and children, the rights of indigenous people as well as freedom of opinion and expression.

Estonia has always been an outspoken advocate of multilateralism and universal values. We have upheld this commitment during our mandate as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council from 2020 to 2021 and as an elected member of the Human Rights Council from 2013 to 2015.

Estonia supports the human rights institutions of the United Nations and the mainstreaming of human rights into all UN activities. Estonia is firmly committed to the universality, indivisibility, interdependence, and interrelatedness of human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other key covenants adopted. Estonia will continue to fully support the Human Rights Council and the mechanisms and tools at its disposal. Estonia believes that the Human Rights Council continues to be the best tool to advance all human rights and to address human rights violations and abuses as well as to seek accountability. We believe that the Human Rights Council should be able to respond, in a timely and responsible manner, to all urgent human rights violations, but also to advance and develop a universal human rights agenda.

Estonia will continue to support the functioning of the OHCHR and has issued a standing invitation to all UN special procedures. It has regularly received visits from several rapporteurs and has always responded positively to communications and follow-up on recommendations. Estonia highly values the opportunities for Member States and other stakeholders to contribute to and benefit from the work and findings of the special procedures and mandate holders.

Estonia is committed to actively engaging in the United Nations human rights system, including sessions of the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee of the General Assembly. Estonian experts have served in various UN Expert Groups and bodies, i.e. through current membership in the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and in the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms

of Discrimination against Women, as co-chair of the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession and of the UN High-Level Steering Group for Every Women Every Child (EWEC), and as a member of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Leadership Panel. Estonia was the Vice-President of the UN General Assembly for the 78th session and the President of UNICEF Executive Board Bureau in 2016.

Estonia has ratified the most important international human rights instruments and advocates for the full implementation of said conventions and agreements. National processes to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have been initiated.

Estonia participates actively in the Universal Periodic Review and was examined in this framework in 2021. Estonia has undertaken a coordinated effort to implement the recommendations and voluntary commitments accepted within the framework of this procedure and has submitted mid-term review reports. Estonia considers the Universal Periodic Review an excellent tool in the promotion and protection of human rights, and will continue to be actively involved in the UPR debates.

Estonia pledges to continue to submit regular reports on implementing the human rights instruments and maintain and promote the system for distributing the conclusions and recommendations made by the treaty bodies and special procedures to the relevant authorities, non-governmental organisations and the general public in Estonia.

As a member of the Council of Europe, Estonia is a party to several regional human rights treaties and subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights.

Despite being a small country with a population of 1.3 million, Estonia contributes regularly to an increasing number of UN programmes and various other funds aimed at promoting and protecting human rights, including OHCHR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNPFII, UNVFIIP, IDIL, OCHA, UNDAC, UNHCR, IOM, SRSG-CAAC, GMDF, IFPIM, CSO Lifeline, and the UN Team of Experts. In addition to regular donations, Estonia has made targeted contributions in support of victims of specific humanitarian crises with a focus on people in most vulnerable situations including children and women. Estonia is also firmly committed to the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and believes its work to be fundamental for the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. In line with that commitment, Estonia's voluntary financial support to the OHCHR has been consistent. Estonia's voluntary contribution to the OHCHR amounts to 83 000 USD. We pledge to continue to support the crucial activities of the OHCHR.

We recognize the inherent dignity of every person and everyone's right to the full enjoyment of all human rights without discrimination. Estonia's transparent (e)-governance and close cooperation with civil society allows to present us internationally as an example of open governance and contributes to the implementation of human rights. In addition to our own digital success story, Estonia continues to advocate for and support other countries in their transitioning towards a strong digital society.

The role of and collaboration with civil society is an integral element of the promotion and protection of human rights both nationally and internationally. The Chancellor of Justice who fulfils the functions of the national human rights institution and non-governmental organizations, including many women's rights organizations, play a vital part in our society.

Estonia's human rights diplomacy has been consistent and stayed on a similar course for decades, focusing on advancing gender equality, protecting the rights of women and children; freedom of expression and internet freedom and digital inclusion, upholding the principles of independent civil society, rule of law, and democracy, as well as on promoting accountability and fighting impunity. The accountability of the

perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole should be ensured as these grave crimes threaten the peace, security and well-being of the world. Estonia highly values the role of the International Criminal Court in ensuring effective prosecution for atrocity crimes.

In line with its commitment to effective multilateralism and universal values, and to an international system based on the rule of law, we present the following voluntary pledges

We pledge to stand up for a stronger multilateral human rights system

- We pledge to continue to push for the effective coordination and the mainstreaming of human rights across the entire UN system.
- We pledge to cooperate with all States to promote and protect human rights for all. We highly value open and honest communication and dialogue.
- We pledge to support the Human Rights Council in addressing country-specific situations and violations of human rights. We will work to uphold the role of the Council as a forum for dialogue on thematic human rights issues.
- We pledge to support the independence of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. We are committed to strengthening and supporting the human rights treaty body system and the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms.
- We pledge to continue our voluntary contribution to the OHCHR and to advocate for sustainable and predictable financing for United Nations human rights mechanisms.
- We pledge to continue our efforts to safeguard the effective functioning of the universal periodic review process and to support efforts to strengthen national implementation and follow-up to its recommendations.
- We pledge to continuously uphold the principles of open and independent civil society, encourage active civic engagement, stand for transparent policy making and enhance civil discourse among different stakeholders and levels of governance.

Protection and promotion of children's rights

- We pledge to continue to protect and promote the rights of the child in all international forums.
- We pledge to continue to support initiatives aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against children, in particular efforts aimed at eliminating sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and harmful practices.
- We pledge to uphold international law to protect children's rights living in situations of war and conflict, including to ensure the continuity of safe education during armed conflict.
- We pledge to intensify the concerted efforts to protect the rights of the child in the digital environment.
- We pledge to support the right to access equitable and inclusive education, with a particular focus on girls.
- We pledge to promote the participation of children and young people in decision making processes.
- We pledge to support the work of special procedure mandate holders dealing with the rights of the child, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF and United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI).
- The Government of Estonia is committed to continuing to implement its juvenile justice system in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Enhancing digital rights

- We pledge to advance the development of human rights standards in the field of new and emerging technologies, promoting a human rights based vision for digitalisation and advocating for democratic principles and rule of law.
- We pledge to support an inclusive, open, safe, secure and human-centric digital future for all.
- We pledge to promote and protect the principle that the same rights that people have offline are also protected online.
- We pledge to support the development of a common digital society that relies on the principles of the UN Charter, Agenda 2030, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- We pledge to support initiatives that bridge the digital divide by enhancing inclusive policies, investment and the digital skills of all women and girls, as well as persons with disabilities.
- We pledge to push for stronger and systematic cooperation across stakeholders to remove barriers to girls and women's full participation in the digital sphere. We pledge to address the risk of discrimination and bias in the functioning and effect of artificial intelligence systems, as well as improving gender balance in all AI-related activities.
- We pledge to advance open, inclusive, multi-stakeholder, transparent and accountable internet governance and promote internet freedom.
- We pledge to encourage responsible corporate behaviour in respecting human rights, including user data and privacy and fulfilling human rights due diligence including in the digital context.

Upholding media freedom

- We pledge to protect and promote freedom of expression, media freedom online and offline, access to information and to combat censorship.
- We pledge to protect and promote, both online and offline, the right to privacy, the right to assembly and association, the right to political and public participation, fair trial and non-discrimination.
- We pledge to protect and promote the rights of human rights defenders, journalists, media workers and other actors of civil society to ensure a safe and enabling environment and to enhance their enjoyment of all human rights freely without harassment or reprisals.
- We pledge to continue our support to independent media outlets and access to pluralistic information.
- We pledge to continue to tackle the spreading of disinformation, expose malicious influence activities and improve the level of media literacy to enhance media freedom.
- We pledge to continue focusing on countering hate speech and gender-based violence online and offline.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women

- We pledge to advance gender equality and the enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls and to strengthen gender mainstreaming in UN policies and programmes.
- We pledge to contribute actively to the elimination of all forms of discrimination, violence, including harmful practices, and harassment of women and girls, both offline and online.
- We pledge to actively engage men and boys in promoting gender equality and to promote the engagement of men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls.

- We pledge to promote women’s full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making processes.
 - We pledge to advocate for women’s economic empowerment, closing the gender pay gap and promoting gender equality in household and caregiving responsibilities.
 - We pledge to continue supporting and engaging with all relevant stakeholders in the advancement and promotion of respect for sexual and reproductive health and rights and promoting access to non-discriminatory and comprehensive sexuality education to improve the well-being of adolescents.
 - We pledge to support all initiatives within the United Nations system that address issues of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.
 - We pledge to continue to support the mandate of UN Women and the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.
 - We pledge to remain strongly committed to implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
 - We remain devoted to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
 - We pledge to continue promoting the dissemination, use, and application of the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition endorsed by the Committee on Food Security in 2023.
 - We pledge to remain committed in allocating financial support to UN Women, the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.
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Human rights-based climate action

- We pledge to strengthen the linkage between climate change and respecting, promoting and considering human rights obligations as stipulated in the preamble of the Paris Agreement.
 - We pledge to promote increased public awareness and participation in environmental decision-making as a means to empower individuals and communities to positively impact their environment and contribute to sustainable development.
 - We pledge to prioritize gender equality in green transition and improve women’s opportunities to participate in clean technology projects, while integrating and incorporating human rights considerations in domestic climate change-related legislation.
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Accountability and effective prosecution for the most serious international crimes

- We pledge to continue to work actively towards ending impunity for the most serious crimes under international law and to address the situation of victims and survivors of such crimes.
- We pledge to ratify amendments to Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.
- We pledge to continue to provide expertise and financial support to the International Criminal Court, the Office of the Prosecutor, the Special Fund for Security and the Trust Fund for Victims.
- We pledge to support the work and mandate of the International Criminal Court in ensuring prosecution of perpetrators of atrocity crimes and bringing justice to victims.

We pledge to stand up for:

- stepping up international, regional and national efforts against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance;
- supporting and promoting the right to adequate food in the context of food security;
- advancing the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledging that safe drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realization of all human rights;
- enhancing the rights of persons with disabilities and working to ensure their participation at all levels, in public and private life, and in activities of societies on an equal basis with others;
- promoting the right to freedom of religion and belief, protecting the right to change religion or beliefs and the right to have no religion;
- contributing to the work of the Equal Rights Coalition and strengthening cooperation between countries in advancing LGBTIQ+ rights;
- promoting the worldwide abolition of the death penalty;
- supporting and promoting the rights of Indigenous Peoples in all regions of the world;
- protecting the rights of persons belonging to minorities in accordance with the applicable international norms and standards.

Estonia regards the Human Rights Council as a fundamental cornerstone of the multilateral system and would be honoured to serve as its member with the objective of strengthening respect for universal human rights for all.