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**UNITED NATIONS YOUTH AND STUDENT ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRIA**

EISENSTADT - GRAZ - INNSBRUCK - KLAGENFURT - LINZ - SALZBURG - VIENNA



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**Abstract:**

**Human Rights Council (HRC)**

**“Relevance of Human Rights in the 21st Century”**

## **Introduction**

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which is composed of 47 states elected by the UN General Assembly, is an inter-governmental body within the UN system, and responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe. The council was established by the UN General Assembly on 15 March 2006, with the main purpose of addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them. The resolution establishing the UNHRC states that “members elected to the Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights.”

One year after holding its first session the council adopted its “Institution-building Package,” which provides the guidelines for its work. Among these are the new Universal Periodic Review Mechanism, which serves to assess the human rights situations in all 193 UN Member States, the new advisory committee which serves as the Council’s “think tank” providing it with expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues as well as the revised Complaints Procedure Mechanism which allows individuals and organizations to bring complaints about human rights violations to the attention of the Council. The UNHRC also continues to work closely with the UN Special Procedures established by the former Commission on Human Rights.

## **Topic**

At VIMUN 2013, the UNHRC will debate on the topic “Relevance of Human Rights in the 21st Century” since continuous human rights violations all around the world, persistent criticism of the universal nature of human rights and failure to implement the existing human rights codifications, point to the necessity of discussing the very conception of human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the subsequent International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, respectively, as well as supplementary international agreements.

As a seemingly decisive response to atrocities of World War II the Universal Declaration of Human rights was regarded as a milestone. Nonetheless, relentless man-made disasters such as the genocide in Rwanda, former Yugoslavia and Darfur, the still existent criminalization of homosexuality in more than 70 countries, the disproportionate allocation of economic wealth between and within societies, lack of media freedom and free use of the internet, usage of torture as a counter-terrorism measure and female genital mutilations in African countries are merely a selection of issues challenging the success story of human rights. The apparent disconnect between theory and reality, between global commitments and local implementations inevitably poses serious questions to the existing international human rights regime, which has never before encompassed such a great number of human rights treaties and agencies. Additionally, regional documents such as the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam and the Bangkok Declaration ultimately question aspects of the existing international human rights arrangements by emphasizing principles of non-interference, primacy of religious beliefs and the right of development.

Hence, the UNHRC will convene to debate problems of enforcement of existing human rights treaties and practical solutions to effectively overcome those problems. Moreover, the UNHRC also intends to discuss alternative concepts, which challenge the contemporary human rights treaties and address the question whether new guidelines would serve as more appropriate to tackle violations of human rights and issues of global economic, social and political crises. Finally, the UNHRC will also consider whether there exists a need for re-drafting existing human rights codifications in order to combine different notions of human rights more adequately in one single document and establish functioning mechanisms for its implementation.