Re: Voluntary pledges and commitments of France to the Human Rights Council for the period 2021-2023.

Respect for human rights is one of the founding principles of the French Republic and is one of the priorities of its foreign policy, both within the European Union and in multilateral forums. That is why, for the fourth time, France has the honour of presenting its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the period 2021-2023, in view of the elections to be held in New York in October 2020.

Having contributed actively to the work of the Commission on Human Rights and then the Human Rights Council since their inception, France is deeply committed to the international system for the promotion and protection of human rights. It demonstrated that commitment throughout its three terms on the Human Rights Council (2006-2008, 2009-2011 and 2014-2016).

Although it has not been a member since, France continues to contribute actively to the Council’s work and is committed to promoting the highest human rights standards there. France supports and engages in dialogue and cooperation between all regional groups.

1. In its candidature to the Human Rights Council, France emphasizes three priorities:

1. An ambitious feminist foreign policy

Gender equality was elevated to a great national cause in 2017 and is a priority of France’s international action. In this context, the Biarritz Partnership was launched during the French G7 Presidency in 2019, aimed at promoting the most ambitious legislation for women’s rights and encouraging the States that have joined the partnership (11 to date) to draw on it. In its action to promote women’s rights, France is committed to:

⇒ Strengthening global momentum in favour of women’s rights by hosting the Generation Equality Forum in the first half of 2021. The Forum will be an opportunity to bring on board States and civil society for women’s rights, a quarter of a century after the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. This conference will address the lessons to be learned from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the fragility of what has been achieved since Beijing, and the persistence of certain inequalities;
⇒ Continuing its efforts to promote the universalization of the Istanbul Convention, reaching out in particular to States outside the Council of Europe, to strengthen action to combat violence against women and girls and domestic violence;
⇒ Constantly promoting the freedom to decide over one’s own body and the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights and health, in order to allow women and girls to fully and safely enjoy all their rights, and to achieve gender equality;
⇒ Working to promote the implementation of the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and supporting the action of the dedicated committee;
⇒ Continuing to submit a resolution to the United Nations General Assembly every two years, alongside the Netherlands, aimed at eliminating violence against women worldwide.

2. Protection of rights defenders

France is determined to work for the protection of human rights defenders, who are too often threatened around the world, in accordance with the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted in 1998 by the United Nations General Assembly, and as such commits to:

⇒ Proposing effective action to combat the shrinkage of the space granted to civil society to protect rights defenders in danger, particularly those defending women and the environment;
Promoting ambitious language in multilateral texts on the protection of rights defenders and civil society.

3. Defence of the freedom of the press and the right to reliable information

The independence and diversity of the media, the right to inform and be informed, and the possibility to express critical points of view are essential to democratic debate. As such, France is committed to:

- Continuing the promotion of international instruments on the protection of journalists and the fight against impunity for violence against them, strengthening coordination between States to address the most concerning situations, and supporting the efforts of UN bodies for the protection of journalists worldwide;
- Promoting the International Partnership for Information and Democracy, which aims to defend the possibility for all individuals to access free, independent, diverse and reliable information, and taking part in the development of the Forum launched by civil society in this framework.

II. France also commits to continuing, as a member of the Human Rights Council, its efforts to promote the universalization and effective implementation of all civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights.

France is convinced that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” and remains determined to act in favour of universal equality and universal civil and political rights, which are the foundation of the rule of law and must be respected by all States. As such, it will be committed, within the Human Rights Council, to:

- The fight against all forms of discrimination (including racism, sexism, gender discrimination, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and hate speech), and for the rights of LGBTI persons;
- The effective implementation of the rights of children, including girls, advocating to ensure that upheaval stemming from climate change, new technologies and the growth in armed conflicts does not result in these rights losing any ground;
- The fight against enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention. France will continue to be a driving force on these subjects, in line with its leading role in the adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the resolution it traditionally submits at the Human Rights Council on arbitrary detention;
- The universal abolition of the death penalty. Our advocacy will continue, alongside civil society;
- The fight against torture, supporting the activity of international mechanisms in this field, the annual UN General Assembly resolution recalling the absolute prohibition of torture, the implementation of national mechanisms to prevent torture and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture;
- The fight against impunity. France, as the third-largest contributor to the budget of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the leading participant in judicial cooperation with the Court, will continue to work to strengthen it as a central actor in the fight against impunity. France will support specialized international criminal jurisdictions and mechanisms such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) on Syria;
- The freedom of religion and belief. True to its vision of secularism, France will continue to defend the universal scope of the freedom of religion and belief, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is inextricably linked to the other fundamental freedoms, recalling that human rights aim to protect individuals and not belief systems and their symbols.
France also commits to promoting **economic, social and cultural rights** to foster **equitable globalization and sustainable development**, and will work to:

- **Fight inequalities**, particularly in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). France will remain committed to subjects such as the fight against **extreme poverty**, the right to inclusive, free-of-charge and quality education, the right to social protection and a decent job. France will continue its action in the field of **corporate social responsibility**, promoting its best practices, including its law on due diligence;

- **Link human rights and development.** France will, in accordance with the international framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, defend a “rights-based approach, encompassing all human rights”, in accordance with the interministerial “Human Rights and Development” strategy of December 2018;

- **Remain active to preserve all human rights in the face of climate change and the need to preserve the environment**;

- **Ensure respect for human rights in the digital age.** France defends an interpretation that protects human rights online. In order to ensure that cyber space is open, safe, accessible and peaceful, France defends the full applicability of international law there, including human rights law.

Lastly, France commits to promoting **respect for human rights in the fight against COVID-19 and learning lessons from the pandemic in this respect**, to ensure the emergency measures adopted to curb the pandemic are compliant with international law, proportionate and time-limited, and so that the it cannot serve as a pretext for a targeted attack on rights enshrined in international instruments. France is determined to act to ensure the social and economic consequences of the epidemic do not have a disproportionate impact on women, children and vulnerable persons.

**III. Within the Human Rights Council, France will work to foster and consolidate the functioning of the international system to protect and promote human rights.**

France commits to:

- **Be a source of proposals to improve the functioning of the Council**, including in view of the review which will begin in 2021. The aim is to make it more effective and robust, in a context where its action is more essential than ever;

- **Support the mandates and work of Special Procedures** while improving their functioning, to ensure they meet the highest professional standards;

- **Use the opportunity of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**, which **all Member States are subject to**, to produce constructive recommendations to the reviewed countries. Through its **development cooperation policy**, France will support projects dedicated to the implementation of the relevant recommendations accepted by beneficiary countries and foster the participation of all actors concerned in the UPR. For its part, France will carry out **enhanced follow-up** of the recommendations it receives, involving all relevant ministries in liaison with the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH);

- **Continue supporting the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**, which monitors human rights on the ground and provides expertise and support to authorities and civil society;

- **Support, beyond the Human Rights Council, the work of the bodies and committees** established by international human rights conventions. France will continue making proposals
to contribute to the quality of work and the coherence of interpretation within convention committees, including within the ongoing review;

☞ Be particularly attentive to the functioning of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, which accredits NGOs, to guarantee their independence and constructive contribution to human rights discussions;


IV. France remains demanding on respect for and promotion of human rights at home.

France has ratified the main international instruments on human rights, including, recently, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (in 2008) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol (in 2010). Cooperating with treaty bodies, including by presenting its periodic reports, France recognizes the faculty of eight such bodies to examine communications from individuals, where individual complaints mechanisms are in effect. In the field of international humanitarian law, France is also party to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 and 2005 AdditionalProtocols.

In 2001, France became one of 110 States to have extended a “standing invitation” to the Special Procedures of the United Nations. It has since received many independent experts and special rapporteurs, on adequate housing in 2019, counter-terrorism and human rights in 2018, and rights of persons with disabilities in 2017.

As a member of the Council of Europe and of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, France recognizes the competence of monitoring committees of regional instruments and supports their work. Upon request, France receives visits from these organizations’ independent institutions.

France is subject to the judicial review of the European Court of Human Rights. Individuals can lodge applications to the Court directly in accordance with the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. France works to adjust its internal law to comply with rulings and the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights.

France has been working for many years to strengthen its human rights protection system. The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights was created in 1947. It is the national institution for the protection and promotion of human rights and is accredited with “A” status by the UN, in accordance with the Paris Principles. The CNCDH is an independent administrative authority with an advisory role, evaluating public authorities when it comes to human rights. The Defender of Rights is an independent constitutional authority responsible for defending rights and freedoms in relations between individuals and all public administrations. It defends and protects the superior interests of the child, combats discrimination, promotes equality and ensures the ethical conduct of law enforcement forces. The National Commission on Data Processing and Liberties (CNIL), created in 1978, is the independent administrative authority responsible for protecting individual freedoms online and personal data. Lastly, the Inspector-General of Facilities for Deprivation of Liberty, established in 2007, has responsibility for preventing any violation of the rights of detained persons, ensuring they are treated humanely, and guaranteeing respect for human dignity.
France commits to ensure national compliance with the international instruments it has ratified and to continue its close cooperation with treaty bodies.

France was among the first countries to be subject to the Universal Periodic Review. During its last UPR in January 2018, it accepted most of the recommendations it received. It will produce a mid-term review by 2021, aimed at presenting its progress in implementing the recommendations.

France undertakes to implement its National Plan Against Racism and Anti-Semitism (2018-2020), ensuring all ministries address four priorities: the fight against hate speech online, education to combat prejudice and stereotypes, better support for victims and new areas of action.

France will continue developing an ambitious legal arsenal to combat hateful, racist and anti-Semitic content online. A bill to combat hate speech online was adopted by the National Assembly in early May 2020.

France is committed to renewing and effectively implementing its Action Plan to Combat Hatred and Discrimination against LGBTI Persons. The first plan covered the period 2017-2019 and has since been supplemented by several emergency plans (November 2018 and April 2020). In accordance with the recommendations France received during the UPR, this plan is being evaluated independently by the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights.

France will ensure the implementation of its second National Human Trafficking Action Plan, led by the Interministerial Unit for the Protection of Women from Violence and the Suppression of Human Trafficking (MIPROF), working closely with civil society.

France commits to act for the rights of persons with disabilities, implementing the programme of 22 measures for 2020 aimed at facilitating the daily lives of these people, which was presented during this presidential and parliamentary term’s third session of the Interministerial Disabilities Committee, meeting on 3 December 2019.

France undertakes to present its third Women, Peace and Security action plan.

France is committed to continuing its national action to combat violence against women, both in its foreign policy and its law (2018 Act on the fight against gender-based and sexual violence; 2019 national action plan to eradicate female genital mutilation; national domestic violence consultation of autumn 2019).

Lastly, France is committed to protecting the rights of older persons and will implement the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. It will report on its action during the fourth review and appraisal (2017-2022).