General Assembly Holds Tribute Honouring Amir of Kuwait, Also Elects 15 Member States to Human Rights Council, Adopts Fifth Committee Resolution

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The General Assembly today elected 15 States to the Human Rights Council, the United Nations body responsible for promoting and protecting all human rights around the globe.  It also paid tribute to the late Amir of Kuwait, with speakers remembering him as a champion of peace, diplomacy and humanitarian action.

By secret ballot, the Assembly elected Bolivia, China, Côte d’Ivoire, Cuba, France, Gabon, Malawi, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.  All 15 members will serve three-year terms beginning on 1 January 2021.

The newly elected States are replacing the following outgoing members:  Afghanistan, Angola, Australia, Chile, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, Senegal, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine.  In accordance with Assembly resolution 60/251, those Member States were eligible for immediate re-election except delegations which had already served two consecutive terms, namely Nigeria and Qatar.

The 15 new members were elected according to the following pattern:  four seats for African States; four seats for Asia-Pacific States; two seats for Eastern European States; three seats for Latin American and Caribbean States; and two seats for Western European and other States.

Assembly President Volkan Bozkir (Turkey) announced that the following States will continue as members of the Geneva-based Council:  Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Czech Republic, Denmark, Eritrea, Fiji, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Libya, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Namibia, Netherlands, Philippines, Poland, Republic of Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Created by the General Assembly in March 2006 as the principal United Nations entity dealing with human rights, the Human Rights Council comprises 47 elected Member States.  On the basis of equitable geographical distribution, Council seats are allocated to the five regional groups as follows:  African States, 13 seats; Asia-Pacific States, 13 seats; Eastern European States, 6 seats; Latin American and Caribbean States, 8 seats; and Western European and other States, 7 seats.

In other business, the Assembly adopted without a vote a resolution submitted by its Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) titled “Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations:  requests under Article 19 of the Charter”, and contained in an eponymous report (document [A/75/382](https://undocs.org/en/A/75/382)).  By its terms, the Assembly agreed that the failure of the Comoros, Sao Tome and Principe and Somalia to pay the full minimum amount necessary to avoid the application of Article 19 of the United Nations Charter was due to conditions beyond their control, and thus decided to permit these States to vote in the Assembly until the end of its seventy-fifth session.

Venezuela’s representative, in explanation of his delegation’s position after the adoption, noted that, since 1 January, his country’s right to vote in the Assembly has been suspended under Article 19.  While it has the financial ability to pay its debt to the Organization, it is unable to do so owing to the increasing scope of the unilateral and illegal blockade imposed on his country by the United States, he said.  Cuba’s representative, echoing those remarks, added that the Committee on Contributions should have taken up Venezuela’s case without political considerations.

Turning to a draft decision “Introduction of certain reports in the plenary meetings at the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly” (document A/75/L.3), submitted by its President, the Assembly decided that, during its seventy-fifth session, where COVID-19 quarantine requirements are in place, those who are introducing reports under the agenda items “Report of the Human Rights Council”, “Report of the International Court of Justice”, “Report of the International Criminal Court”, “Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency”, “Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations” and “International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals” may each submit a pre-recorded statement, which will be played in the General Assembly Hall, with a text version to be added to the verbatim record of the relevant meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Assembly observed a minute of silence in honour of Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, Amir of Kuwait, who died on 29 September at age 91.  The President of the Assembly extended condolences to the Al-Sabah family and the people of Kuwait, noting that Sheikh Al-Sabah was known as the “dean of Arab diplomacy” for his commitment to peace and dialogue.

Secretary-General António Guterres described Sheikh Al-Sabah as a bridge‑builder and messenger of peace.  With foresight and political wisdom, Sheikh Al-Sabah shaped Kuwait’s preventive diplomatic engagement, he said, recalling how in the thick of the Syrian refugee crisis, Sheikh Al-Sabah convened the first conference of solidarity, and started it off with a generous offer that inspired other countries to step up their response.

Several delegates highlighted Sheikh Al-Sabah’s humanitarian legacy, with Cameroon’s representative, speaking on behalf of the African Group, noting that Kuwait, under his leadership, had donated hundreds of millions of dollars not only in the Middle East, but in many African countries.  Uruguay’s delegate, speaking on behalf of Latin American and Caribbean countries, pointed out that Sheikh Al‑Sabah’s humanitarian vocation led to him being recognized as an “exemplary humanitarian” at the United Nations in 2014.  He was also a pioneer in the Gulf Cooperation Council, he said, noting the late Amir’s significant efforts to mediate in regional conflicts.

Egypt’s delegate, speaking on behalf of the Arab States, said that to bid farewell to Sheikh Al-Sabah is to say goodbye to one of the leaders of the nation‑building project in the Arab world.  “He defined the aspirations of our peoples and met them,” he said, adding that it was Sheikh Al-Sabah who raised Kuwait’s flag at the United Nations in 1963.  Echoing those words, the representative of the United Arab Emirates, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), said his death represents an “immense loss to the Islamic world and to advocates of peace around the world”.  Noting that Sheikh Al‑Sabah was recognized globally as an exceptional elder who mobilized the international community to support people in vulnerable conditions, she recalled his efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and development within Kuwait.

Kuwait’s representative, thanking members for “sharing our sorrow”, said history will remember Sheikh Al-Sabah’s long journey and all that he gave to the development of Kuwait, he said, highlighting his many cultural and political contributions that enabled Kuwait to take its place among the community of nations.  Also noting various architectural and educational projects that will continue to be shining lights in the country’s development, he pointed out that, during his reign, the late Amir amended the legislative framework of the country to enable women to exercise their political rights.  Under such leadership, he said, the country crossed many volatile rivers to reach the banks of safety again and again.

Also delivering tribute statements were representatives of Indonesia (on behalf of the Asia-Pacific States), Latvia (on behalf of the Eastern European States), Liechtenstein (on behalf of the Western European and other States) and the United States.

The General Assembly will reconvene at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, 21 October, to discuss the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.