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Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you as the Chair of the UN Association of the United Kingdom to urge the government to support the proposals tabled recently by the President of the UN General Assembly to establish a Human Rights Council. The UNA attaches the greatest importance to following up in a timely way the decision in principle, taken at last September's UN Summit in New York, to establish a Council in place of the discredited Human Rights Commission.

We, like many others, would much have preferred to see a Council with fewer members, with stricter criteria barring countries with a poor human rights record, and with a tougher electoral procedure for choosing members. But, against that, we welcome a number of substantive improvements on the present, defective arrangements – the enhancement of the status of the UN body dealing with Human Rights from a Commission to a Council, membership criteria which should make it more difficult for countries with a seriously bad record to get on the Council, the capacity of the Council to meet all the year round, the provision for peer review of member states' performance. On balance, therefore, we support the Eliasson proposals and believe that they also enjoy the support of the UN Secretary-General, of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and a number of NGOs.

In these circumstances we hope that the British government will throw its full weight and that of the European Union behind these proposals; and will resist any further watering down of the Eliasson text. And that you will do all in your power to resist what we would see as the worst possible outcome, a stalemate which would leave the UN with nothing more than the present highly unsatisfactory arrangements in the Human Rights Commission.



Lord Hannay of Chiswick