

## UNHRC MEMBERSHIP

## Focus on conciliation, cooperation and consensus



**DATUK  
SAIFUDDIN  
ABDULLAH**

**FROM** Jan 1, Malaysia will join 46 other nations as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) — an inter-governmental body in the UN system based in Geneva, Switzerland, that is responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights.

This follows Malaysia's successful bid for the much coveted seat at the UN body, which considers all thematic human rights issues, human rights violations and specific situations requiring attention.

Based on the results of the election on Oct 14 during the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York, where 193 member states of the UN convened to elect 18 new members of the UNHRC, Malaysia received the sixth highest number of votes, totalling 183.

Malaysia is truly honoured and grateful to be given the trust and opportunity by the international

community to serve as a UNHRC member.

Prior to this, Malaysia had served in the UNHRC twice, for the terms 2006 to 2009 and 2010 to 2013.

The experience proved crucial in boosting awareness of international human rights standards and expectations back home, and in addressing human rights crises abroad.

Since Malaysia was last elected to the UNHRC eight years ago, the time has come for the country to renew its commitment to the advancement and promotion of human rights by becoming a member of the Human Rights Council once again, for the term 2022 to 2024.

Malaysia is not pursuing the UNHRC membership because it thinks it has a perfect human rights record. Instead, Malaysia's membership to the UNHRC reflects the country's commitment to continue to make progress, and strengthen its human rights agenda and performance at home and abroad.

Within our borders, we have made progress recently in advancing human rights. These include being the first country in Southeast Asia to have set up a court specifically to handle cases involving children to protect their interest and welfare, lowering our voting age from 21 to 18,

being a strong proponent of women's empowerment and gender equality, as well as introducing the Plan of Action for People with Disabilities 2016–2022 to ensure that our development is inclusive for the disabled.

As part of the country's commitment as a UNHRC member, Malaysia plans to further promote and protect the rights of vulnerable groups, particularly children, women, indigenous people and the elderly.

We will also seek to empower our youths to have a bigger role in the country's decision-making process.

As future leaders, we welcome their views, especially on emerging issues like climate change, digital economy and cybersecurity.

In line with the country's aspiration to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions target, at the earliest by 2050, Malaysia seeks to boost cooperation on climate change, particularly to address its disproportionate impacts on vulnerable groups and to improve understanding on the effects of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights.

As the world rebuilds and recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, Malaysia believes that the UNHRC has an even bigger role to play.

We need to ensure that human

rights are kept at the centre of our post-Covid-19 recovery, including the rights to physical and mental health, education, social security, as well as an adequate standard of living, including food, clothing and housing.

Malaysia will work with the council and its related mechanisms to find a common ground and build back stronger in peaceful coexistence.

On the international stage, Malaysia has been, and will remain, a proponent for peaceful resolutions to conflicts.

We were one of the earliest signatories of the UN Anti-Nuclear Proliferation Treaty. We have acted as honest brokers of peace in Mindanao and Southern Thailand, we have created a milestone in the protection of children in armed conflict as chair of the UN Security Council Working Group and we have successfully introduced a legally binding UN Security Council resolution to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians under illegal occupation.

Becoming a UNHRC member will amplify the country's voice in highlighting human rights violations, such as the systemic oppression of the Palestinians and Rohingya in Myanmar.

Malaysia will also work with the relevant mechanisms to participate in the rebuilding of

Afghanistan. Malaysia pledges to engage constructively with all stakeholders, including the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia and civil society organisations, as part of a whole-of-society approach in furthering the promotion and protection of human rights in the country.

As a council member, we aim to be the facilitator for conciliation, enabler for cooperation and builder of consensus. We will foster a spirit of cooperation, inclusivity, transparency and mutual respect.

As a multiethnic, multicultural and democratic society, we believe Malaysia will be able to share the values of inclusivity, acceptance and understanding captured under the Malaysian Family concept.

Membership in the UNHRC will undoubtedly bring great expectations and responsibilities. We sincerely seek the support of all Malaysians and stakeholders throughout our three-year membership, from Jan 1, 2022 until Dec 31, 2024.

We are ready to play our role as a constructive partner and we welcome ideas and suggestions from all stakeholders towards a better world — In Unity, For Humanity.

The writer is foreign minister of Malaysia