Significance of UNHRC

What is the issue?

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- The United States has recently withdrawn from the United Nations Human Rights Council. Click here to know more
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- It is essential at this juncture to understand the role of the council in human rights issues.
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What is UNHRC?

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- The HRC was established in 2006 as part of the UN's reform process.
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- It replaced the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
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- UNHRC is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system, made up of 47 States.
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- Members are elected by the UNGA with 3-year terms, with a maximum of 2 consecutive terms.
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- They are responsible for promotion and protection of human rights.
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- It meets 3 times a year to examine human rights violations worldwide.
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- Its resolutions are not legally binding but carry moral authority.
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What is the concern?

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- The main criticism is that it is made up of states not known for their human rights records.
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- Many have, in fact, been violators of human rights.
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- Current members include Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, Pakistan, and the UK and a few elected based on geographic quotas.
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Why is it still crucial?

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- HRC has a fair track record of taking up human rights agenda.
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- It has facilitated the evolution of human rights norms.
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- There are many less tangible gains from having such a body in place.
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- Resolutions adopted have highlighted rights violations, despite resistance by some members.
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- The situation in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar, and North Korea are few examples.
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- Issues that have been the source of much controversy have been addressed at the HRC, including LGBTIQ rights.
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- It is also a forum to monitor international obligations of a state based on international law.
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- HRC is thus an important component of the UN rights system.
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- Its sustenance with credibility is significant for handling global human rights issues.
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Source: The Hindu, The Wire

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Quick Facts

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OHCHR

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- The role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is not to be confused with the HRC.
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- OHCHR is a separate institution which presents reports independent of the HRC.
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- E.g. the recent report on Kashmir
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- The HRC and the OHCHR have separate mandate and functions, but both are part of the UN system for human rights protection.
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