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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

UN to Vote on Russia's Bid to Rejoin Human Rights Council

By AFP

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Vassily Nebenzia, Russia's permanent representative to the UN. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Russia on Tuesday will seek to return to the UN Human Rights Council, a test of what Moscow believes is quiet support for its membership despite fierce criticism from the West over the invasion of Ukraine.

Russia, which was booted from the Geneva-based body after it invaded Ukraine last year, will be considered in a vote by the General Assembly for a new seat in the 2024-2026 term.

The vote comes just days after a Russian missile attack on the Ukrainian village of Groza killed more than 50 people.

The ambassador of Albania, which is running against Russia and has sharply criticized the invasion of Ukraine, said the UN General Assembly "has an important choice" to "demonstrate that it is not ready to take an arsonist for a firefighter."

The Human Rights Council's 47 members are allocated by region, and each large regional group usually pre-selects its own candidates, which the General Assembly then approves.

But this year, two groups have more candidates than available seats.

In Latin America, Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Peru are vying for three seats, and in Eastern Europe, Albania, Bulgaria and Russia are seeking two seats.

The vote will take place by secret ballot, testing Russia's contention that it has private support among countries in the Global South.

In April 2022, 93 countries voted to suspend Russia from the council, while 24 opposed.

That vote against Russia was less lopsided than other resolutions defending the territorial integrity of Ukraine, which drew approval from around 140 countries.

Votes for the Human Rights Council are more complicated as some countries whose own records face scrutiny are uneasy about authorizing repercussions.

'Undermine credibility'

The United States has often criticized the Human Rights Council over its membership and alleged slant against Israel, although President Joe Biden rejoined the group after a pullout by his predecessor Donald Trump.

"Russia's reelection to that body, while it openly continues to commit war crimes and other atrocities, would be an ugly stain that would undermine the credibility of the institution and the United Nations," senior U.S. diplomat Robert Wood said.

But Vassily Nebenzia, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations, insisted that there "are no beacons of democracy or rogue states, as is sometimes being portrayed."

"No member state can claim to be immune from human rights violations. But the solution is to strengthen international regulation," he said.

Richard Gowan, who follows the United Nations for the International Crisis Group, said that Western diplomats were worried that Russia could return.

"Russia has always argued that many UN members sympathize with it in private but won't support it in public for fear of antagonizing Western powers," he added. "Moscow will hope that this supposed silent majority supports it in this secret vote."

Advocacy group Human Rights Watch has called on countries to oppose the candidacies of Russia, China and Cuba.

China, at least, faces little risk as it is one of the four countries in the Asian group vying for four open seats, alongside Japan, Indonesia and Kuwait.

The United States and several other Western governments say China is committing genocide against its mostly Muslim Uyghur minority through massive camps, a charge denied by

Beijing.

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