

Re: Call for your support and solidarity in rejecting amendments to HRC32 draft resolution protecting civil society space (A/HRC/32/L.29)

Open Letter to Member States of the UN Human Rights Council

29 June 2016

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned 244 civil society organizations, spanning across all regions of the world, call on your delegation to **stand in solidarity with civil society by supporting the draft resolution on the protection of civil society space**, to be considered for adoption at the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council (on 30 June or 1 July).¹ We urge you to **cosponsor the draft resolution, reject all amendments, and vote in favour of the resolution if a vote is called.**

The draft resolution, presented by a cross-regional group of States comprising of Chile, Ireland, Japan, Sierra Leone, and Tunisia, was developed through broad consultation with States and civil society and in the past was adopted by consensus.

The **essential ingredients** for States to create a safe and enabling environment for civil society are spelled out in the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' report,² on which the draft resolution is based. It affirms that:

"If space exists for civil society to engage, there is a greater likelihood that all rights will be better protected. Conversely, the closing of civil society space, and threats and reprisals against civil society activists, are early warning signs of instability. Over time, policies that delegitimize, isolate and repress people calling for different approaches or legitimately claiming their rights can exacerbate frustrations and lead to instability or even conflict."

The draft resolution welcomes the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and recognizes the key role of civil society in achieving the goals. Once adopted, the resolution will be a substantive contribution to the Council's work to protect civil society space. In particular, it:

- Emphasizes the **positive contribution of independent, diverse and pluralistic civil society** to peace, security, sustainable development and human rights, and highlights good practice in protecting and supporting this role;
- **Provides useful guidance for States** to ensure that legal and policy frameworks are enabling for civil society and prevent intimidation and reprisals against civil society actors;
- Helps States and civil society to **identify areas of legal, policy and administrative reform to safeguard the ability of civil society actors to fully exercise the rights to freedoms of expression, opinion, assembly and association, and to participate in democracy and public life, without hindrance.** This includes on registration and reporting requirements, access to information, and securing resources for the vital work of civil society;
- Creates opportunities and **incentives for States to voluntarily share and develop their good practices**, and to lay the groundwork to benefit from the transformative potential of a vibrant civil society in any healthy, pluralistic and participatory democracy;
- Mandates OHCHR to **study practices and procedures for civil society to contribute to the work of international and regional organisations**, and consolidate best practices and challenges in that regard; and
- **Invites United Nations bodies, agencies, funds and programs** to themselves contribute to the protection and expansion of space for civil society.

¹ The tabled version of the draft resolution is available at <http://bit.ly/28Ssx8x>.

² See http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/32/20.

However, fifteen amendments (L. 51 – L. 66) tabled by the Russian Federation³ seek to remove these essential elements from the draft resolution, and insert language to justify illegitimate restrictions on civil society that would undermine the protections of international human rights law. Many of the amendments challenge previously agreed HRC or General Assembly language.

If adopted, the amendments would undermine international efforts to safeguard space or civil society, including because they would effectively:

- **Reject the expert guidance and practical recommendations made by the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights on civil society space**, including to remove substantive recommendations to states on ensuring: a supportive legal framework for civil society and access to justice; public and political environment for civil society; access to information; public participation of civil society actors, and human rights education (L. 63);
- **Remove or otherwise limit commitments to protect and promote the right to freedom of association**, in particular **civil society's right to access resources for its vital work**, and to be **free of arbitrary registration and reporting requirements** that seek to hinder the work and safety of civil society (L. 56, L. 57, L. 61, L. 63);
- Remove references to the **gravity of threats civil society faces, including illegitimate restrictions to their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly**, as well as **reprisals against those seeking to cooperate or cooperating with the United Nations** and other international bodies (L.51, L.54);
- **Narrow the understanding of “minority groups”**, by seeking to include only a limited and under-inclusive list of protected characteristics to the exclusion of others recognised under international human rights law (L. 59);
- **Remove reference to the term “human rights defenders”**, as well as previous work of the HRC on their protection (L.51, L. 53);
- Remove concerns that **restrictions on civil society may limit the United Nations** in achieving its purposes and principles (L. 52), and removing the **emphasis on the Universal Periodic Review as an important mechanism to create space for civil society** (L.62).

Excellency, we therefore ask that your delegation stand in solidarity with civil society by cosponsoring draft resolution L.29 on civil society space, opposing any amendment that would weaken the text, as those tabled appear to do, and voting in favour of the resolution if a vote is called.

Yours sincerely,

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| 1. Abibiman Foundation | 2. Access Now |
| 3. Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights | 4. Adala Center for Human Rights |
| 5. African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) | 6. Akahata AC |
| 7. Albanian Helsinki Committee | 8. Alkarama Foundation |
| 9. Alliance for Democracy in Laos | 10. Alliance for Good Governance (AGG) |
| 11. Allied Rainbow Communities International | 12. Alternatives |
| 13. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) | 14. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain |
| 15. Amnesty International | 16. Anuak Justice Council (AJC) |
| 17. Arab Forum for the rights of people with disability | 18. ARTICLE 19 |
| 19. Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights | 20. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) |
| 21. Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) | 22. Association des victimes et parents du 28 Septembre 2009 |

³ See a compilation of amendments tabled at <http://bit.ly/290p9YZ>.

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| 23. Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE) | 24. Association for Progressive Communications |
| 25. Association for Promotion of Sustainable Development, Hisar, India | 26. Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) |
| 27. Association of Scientists, Developers and Faculties | 28. Association of Women for Awareness & Motivation (AWAM) |
| 29. Association of World Citizens | 30. Baha'i International Community |
| 31. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy | 32. Bahrain youth society for Human Rights |
| 33. Boat People SOS | 34. Both ENDS |
| 35. British Humanist Association | 36. Brot für die Welt |
| 37. Burma Task Force/Justice for All | 38. Business & Human Rights Resource Centre |
| 39. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) | 40. Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine) |
| 41. Center for Development of International Law | 42. Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA) |
| 43. Center for Inquiry (USA) | 44. Center for International Environmental Law |
| 45. Center for Reproductive Rights | 46. Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University |
| 47. Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights | 48. Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan |
| 49. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) | 50. Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y Justicia de Género |
| 51. CEPAZ (Venezuela) | 52. Child Rights Connect |
| 53. Child Rights International Network (CRIN) | 54. Christian Solidarity Worldwide |
| 55. Citizens for Democratic Rights in Eritrea (CDRIE) | 56. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation |
| 57. Coalition de la Societe Civile pour le Monitoring Electoral (COSOME) | 58. Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CIDDH) |
| 59. Coalition of African Lesbians | 60. CODDHD (Niger) |
| 61. COFADEH (Honduras) | 62. COMBITE POUR LA PAIX ET LE DEVELOPPEMENT |
| 63. Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos | 64. Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement - Terre Solidaire |
| 65. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) | 66. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (South Sudan) |
| 67. Community Legal Education Center (CLEC) | 68. Concertation Nationale de la Societe Civile du Togo (CNSC- TOGO) |
| 69. Conectas Human Rights | 70. Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) |
| 71. Coordination des associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience | 72. CREA (India) |
| 73. Deepti Bhuvan | 74. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) |
| 75. Dimension Humaine | 76. Due for youth and women Tainment Forum (Nigeria) |
| 77. East Timor and Indonesia Action Network | 78. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights |
| 79. Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA) | 80. Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) |
| 81. Emony Yefwe International | 82. End Impunity Organization |
| 83. Equality Myanmar | 84. Ethiopian Human Rights Project (EHRP) |
| 85. European Center for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR) | 86. European Center For Not For Profit Law |
| 87. European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights | 88. Femmes et Droits Humains |
| 89. Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA) | 90. Foundation for Media Alternatives |
| 91. Foundation for Media Alternatives | 92. Freedom House |

- (Philippines)
93. Front Line Defenders
 95. Girls Education Mission International
 97. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
 99. Global Human Rights Group
 101. Global Initiatives for Human Rights - Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights
 103. Hawaii Institute for Human Rights
 105. Helsinki Citizen's Assembly, Vanadzor
 107. HRM "Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan"
 109. Human Rights Concern Eritrea (HRCE)
 111. Human Rights Defenders Network
 113. Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA)
 115. Human Rights Watch
 117. Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team
 119. Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
 121. IFEX
 123. iilab UG
 125. Insight Namibia
 127. Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM)
 129. International Alliance Of Women
 131. International Center For Not For Profit Law
 133. International Dalit Solidarity Network
 135. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
 137. International IDAHO committee
 139. International Platform against Impunity
 141. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
 143. International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)
 145. Iraqi Al-Amal Association
 147. Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights
 149. JOINT LIGA DE ONGs em Mocambique
 151. Justice and Peace Netherlands
 153. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law
 155. Knowledge and Rights with Young people through Safer Spaces (KRYSS)
 157. Korean Confederation of Trade Unions
 159. Kuwait Watch
 94. Function 8 Ltd
 96. Global Bersih
 98. Global Fund for Women
 100. Global Initiative for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights
 102. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
 104. Help & Shelter
 106. Hope for Community Development Organization(HCDO)
 108. Human Rights and Legal Aid Network (HRLAN)
 110. Human Rights Defenders Alert - India
 112. Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF)
 114. Human Rights Law Centre
 116. Humanitaire Plus
 118. Humanrights.ch
 120. Hurisa
 122. IHEU in New York
 124. Indian Social Action Forum - INSAF
 126. Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa
 128. Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights
 130. International Association for the Advancement of Innovative Approaches to Global Challenges IAAI
 132. International Commission of Jurists
 134. International Federation for East Timor (IFET)
 136. International Humanist and Ethical Union
 138. International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)
 140. International Presentation Association
 142. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
 144. International Youth Human Rights Movement (YHRM)
 146. Irish Council for Civil Liberties
 148. JASS (Just Associates)
 150. Jonction
 152. Karapatan Alliance Philippines
 154. Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC)
 156. Komuniti Muslim Universal (KMU) Malaysia
 158. Korean House for International Solidarity
 160. Timor-Leste Institute for Development Monitoring and Analysis (La'o Hamutuk)

161. Labour, Health and Human Rights Development Centre
163. Legal and Human Rights Centre
165. LGBT Human Rights NASH MIR Center
167. Loretto Community
169. Mariakani Magnet Theater
171. Mauritius Council of Social Services
173. MINBYUN - Lawyers for a Democratic Society - South Korea
175. Mityana Rural Sustainable Farmers Organisation
177. Mouvement pour les Libertés Individuelles
179. Nagorik Uddyog
181. National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders -Burundi
183. National Human Rights Monitors Organization (NHRMO)
185. New Woman Foundation
187. Niwaafa (Nigerian women agro allied farmers association)
189. ONG Ezaka ho Fampandrosoana any Ambanivohitra, ONG EFA, Madagascar
191. Pacific Womens Indigenous Networks
193. Pacificwin-Youth
195. Pan Africa ILGA
198. People in Need (PIN)
200. Polish Institute for Human Rights and Business
202. Public Association "Dignity"
204. Public Verdict Foundation
206. Radio Souriat
208. REPORTERS SANS FRONTIERES INTERNATIONAL
210. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
212. Seguridad en Democracia (SEDEM)
214. Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF)
216. Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia
218. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
220. Supolnasc Centre
222. The Norwegian Human Rights Fund
224. Togolese Coalition for Human Defender's Right
226. Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos - Guatemala
228. United Federation for peacekeeping & Sustainable Development
230. Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
232. VOICE
162. Lawyers Rights Watch Canada
164. Legal-Informational Centre for NGOs, Slovenia
166. LIDEJEL
168. Lutheran World Federation
170. Martin Ennals Foundation
172. Men against Violence and Abuse Alliance
174. Minority Rights Group
176. Mongolian Gender Equality Center
178. Muslims for Human Rights (Muhuri)
180. National Center For Advocacy Studies
182. National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Kenya
184. New Future Foundation
186. NGO Federation of Nepal
188. Observatorio de derechos humanos de la Universidad de Los Andes
190. P24 Platform for Independent Journalism
192. Pacificwin-SamoaNZ
194. Palestinian Consultative Staff for Developing NGOs
196. Partnership for Justice
197. Peace Brigades International
199. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy
201. Privacy International
203. Public Sphere Project
205. Pusat KOMAS
207. Renewable Freedom Foundation
209. Réseau de Défenseurs des Droits Humains de l'Afrique Centrale (REDHAC)
211. Rural Reconstruction Nepal
213. Sexual Rights Initiative
215. Society for the Promotion of Human Rights (PROHAM), Malaysia
217. Stichting Global Alliance for LGBT Education (GALE)
219. Sudanese Development Initiative (SUDIA)
221. Tenaganita
223. Timor-Leste Institute for Development Monitoring and Analysis (La'o Hamutuk)
225. Transformation Resource Centre
227. Unión Nacional de Instituciones para el Trabajo de Acción Social
229. United Religions Initiative
231. Vietnam Committee on Human Rights
233. We women Lanka

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| 234. Women Peace Network-Arakan | 235. Women Thrive Worldwide |
| 236. World Federalist Movement - Institute for Global Policy | 237. World Movement for Democracy |
| 238. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders | 239. World Uyghur Congress |
| 240. Yemen Organization for Defending Rights & Democratic Freedoms | 241. Zambia Council for Social Development (ZCSD) |
| 242. Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) | 243. Zimbabwe United Nations Association |
| 244. Zo Indigenous Forum | |