

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>.

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

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