

[UNGA 74 | States must promote civil society engagement to propel sustainable development and eradicate poverty](#)

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On 15 March 2019, Voule addressed the UN General Assembly's Third Committee in his report ([A/74/349](#)) which shows how restrictions on civil society worsen the lives of those living in poverty and further enable those in power. That narrowing of civic space can be associated with increased poverty and economic inequality, in direct contradiction to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

'Civil society plays an integral role in promoting the sustainable development goals. Silencing civil society denies its critical role in achieving those goals. Not only that - as Voule highlights: corruption thrives. The voices of human rights defenders, and particularly the right to freedom of assembly and association, must be protected,' said ISHR's Tess McEvoy.

The Special Rapporteur identified that one root cause of governmental restrictions on the right to freedom of assembly and association is that certain States perceive the exercise of those rights as a threat to development and public order. 'In reality, civil society organisations provide expertise, knowledge and experience,' emphasised Voule, 'and States should view them as a critical partner in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda'.

Many countries welcomed Voule's report, including Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Indonesia, Estonia (on behalf of the Nordic countries), Mexico, the USA, the EU, the Netherlands, and the UK.

However, not all in the room were as receptive. 'We were extremely concerned by the Russian delegation's comment that the Special Rapporteur acted beyond his mandate and breached State sovereignty in his report. 'Any attempt to restrict the scope of the mandates of Special Procedures should be opposed,' said McEvoy.

Disappointingly, China accused the USA of making groundless claims and of carrying out a 'bullying act' when the US highlighted the grave restrictions on freedom of assembly and association of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, China. The US' critique of China echoed concerns raised by [nine States and the European Union over human rights violations in China](#) at the 42nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council. From Xinjiang to Hong Kong, China must put an end to gross human rights violations.

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