

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)
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. Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR-Centre)
41. Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
42. Center for Development of International Law
43. Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA)
44. Center for Inquiry (USA)
45. Center for International Environmental Law
46. Center for Reproductive Rights
47. Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University
48. Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights
49. Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan
50. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)
51. Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y Justicia de Género
52. CEPAZ (Venezuela)
53. Child Rights Connect
54. Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
55. Christian Solidarity Worldwide
56. Citizens for Democratic Rights in Eritrea (CDRIE)
57. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
58. Coalition de la Societe Civile pour le Monitoring Electoral (COSOME)
59. Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CIDDH)
60. Coalition of African Lesbians
61. CODDHD (Niger)
62. COFADEH (Honduras)
63. COMBITE POUR LA PAIX ET LE DEVELOPPEMENT
64. Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos
65. Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement - Terre Solidaire
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 Bhuban
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. Federation of Women and Family Planning, Poland
90. Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA)
91. Foundation for Media Alternatives
92. Foundation for Media Alternatives

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

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

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