



PRESS RELEASE

Governments must do more to protect civil society

KRAKOW, POLAND, 5 JULY 2010 - ARTICLE 19, CIVICUS, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, and the World Movement for Democracy welcome US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's statement on "Civil Society: Supporting Democracy in the 21st Century" and urge all governments to take immediate measures to reverse the growing backlash against civil society and human rights defenders.

In her keynote speech to the High-Level Meeting of the Community of Democracies on July 3rd, Hillary Clinton highlighted the role of civil society as one of three pillars of democracy: *"Progress in the 21st century depends on the ability of individuals to coalesce around shared goals, and harness the power of their convictions. But when governments crack down on the right of citizens to work together, as they have throughout history, societies fall into stagnation and decay."* She lamented the growing trend of repressive laws against civil society and human rights defenders: *"Over the last 6 years, 50 governments have issued new restrictions against NGOs, and the list of countries where civil society faces resistance is growing longer."*

ARTICLE 19, CIVICUS, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, and the World Movement for Democracy are members of an international working group on enabling and protecting civil society, chaired by the Government of Canada, under the auspices of the Community of Democracies. They state that *"in our work and countries all over the world, we have observed an alarming increase of regressive legislative measures against civil society, attacks and killings of human rights defenders, and impunity for these crimes. Such violations have come on top of increasing restrictions on foreign funding for human rights and democracy initiatives by CSOs in their countries."*

ARTICLE 19, CIVICUS, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, and the World Movement for Democracy call for:

1. All governments to address key contributing factors to this negative trend. In particular, we call on them to ensure that security and counter-terrorism efforts do not result in violations of fundamental human rights, including the rights to association and freedom of expression;
2. UN member states to establish a United Nations Special Rapporteur to defend freedom of association and the rights of civil society;
3. The implementation of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 4-point action plan, including:
 - The creation of an objective and independent mechanism for monitoring repressive measures against civil society;
 - Increased role of the United Nations Human Rights Council in protecting civil society and freedom of association;
 - Increased commitment by regional and other organizations, such as the OAS, the EU, the OIC, the African Union, the Arab League, others, to do more to defend the freedom of association; and,
 - Coordinated diplomatic pressure, including through a rapid response mechanism to address situations where freedom of association comes under attack.

For more information, please contact:

Agnes Callamard, Article 19 (agnes@article19.org)

Netsanet Belay, CIVICUS (netsanet.belay@civicus.org)

Douglas Rutzen, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (drutzen@icnl.org)

Ryota Jonen, World Movement for Democracy (ryota@ned.org)