



25th Session Human Rights Council  
Item 3

## PANEL ON THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

11 March 2014

### Joint Statement

Thank you Mr. President,

CIVICUS on behalf of the Civic Space Initiative consortium and its partners\* welcome this discussion and urge the Human Rights Council to maintain its focus on this topic.

A diverse and independent civil society plays a critical role in strengthening democracy, providing essential services, and protecting human rights. Civil society should provide a space for children and other groups to realize their civil rights and freedoms, including their rights to register their own organisations and access information.

But the physical and digital spaces civil society relies on to carry out its functions are increasingly threatened globally.

States are seeking to exert control over these spaces, to silence critical and challenging voices. This trend is not confined to States by geography or stage of development.

Laws and practices prevent civil society from accessing resources, in particular foreign funding; they authorize invasive oversight in internal affairs, prohibit informal associations, allow arbitrary terminations, and limit civic engagement.

The excessive use of force, including lethal force against peaceful assemblies is a major concern. Laws have instituted authorisation regimes and other barriers to deter peaceful gatherings, imposed disproportionate penalties and in some cases banned protests entirely.

Dissent online is also targeted, and censorship institutionalised without adequate judicial oversight. Unchecked mass surveillance, including in established democracies, undermines the premise that all people should be able to communicate and associate free of State intrusion.

Restrictions are invoked in the name of public order or counter-terrorism; without evidence such threats exist. Laws are frequently introduced with little or no consultation, often in violation of democratic processes, and seek to marginalise vulnerable groups.



We call on States to lead by example, to adopt and adhere to meaningful participatory processes in legislating and policymaking, and to repeal laws and abandon practices that restrict civic space.

We ask the Human Rights Council through its special procedure mechanisms to develop and adopt guiding principles on creating a safe and enabling environment for civil society.

We request the Human Rights Committee to prioritize the drafting of General Comments on Articles 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Thank you.

\* on behalf of:

ARTICLE 19

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)

World Movement for Democracy

European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL)