



**29th session of the
Human Rights Council**

**Item 4 General Debate
25 June 2015
Delivered by Tor Hodenfield**

Thank you, Mr. President,

CIVICUS shares the concerns of a number of states which have expressed alarm today at persistent restrictions on civil society space, and in particular unwarranted limitations on the rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression and persecution of human rights defenders.

Across the globe in both consolidated and emerging democracies in the global south and global north, governments are actively seeking to stifle independent dissent and suppress critical voices in contravention of their international and national human rights obligations. A new global report by CIVICUS finds that rights of civil society were violated to a significant degree in at least 96 countries in 2014.

Mr. President, while shrinking space for civil society has unquestionably emerged as a global challenge, the following examples are emblematic of the exigent need to support the creation of a safe and enabling environment for civil society.

Yesterday, the ruling EPRDF party in Ethiopia confirmed that it had won 100 percent of all 547 parliamentary seats in its national elections held on May 26th. These results are unquestionably the consequence of the government's unrelenting crackdown on all forms of dissent in the country. We remain deeply concerned by reports that opposition members and candidates were beaten to death over the last two weeks. We urge the government to end its relentless and systematic campaign to suppress civil society space, including by releasing the 17 journalists currently imprisoned in the country.

CIVICUS also remains gravely concerned by the escalating crackdown on civil society in Azerbaijan. We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to head the recommendations put forward by Ireland and 24 other states today to release all political prisoners and remove debilitating restrictions on the activities of civil society.

Thank you Mr. President