



29<sup>th</sup> Session of the  
Human Rights Council

Panel discussion on the effects of terrorism on the enjoyment by all persons of human rights and  
fundamental freedoms

30 June 2015  
Delivered by Renate Bloem

CIVICUS strongly condemns last Friday's terrorist attacks in Tunisia, Somalia, France and Kuwait and express our deepest sympathies with the victims and their families. But we also applaud the principled stand of the High Commissioner in addressing the challenges to human rights: "The fight against terror is a struggle to uphold the values of democracy and human rights – not undermine them."

Many terrorist organisations, including ISIS, Boko Haram, Al-Shaba, or Al-Qaeda, pose genuine threats to national security, human rights, stability, and civilian populations across entire regions.

However, anti-terrorism legislation in many countries is not used to prosecute terrorists. Conversely, such laws often serve as a smokescreen to stifle dissenting voices, and are routinely and willfully misapplied to target human rights defenders, journalists, and wider civil society, instead of addressing genuine national security concerns.

So-called 'anti-terrorism' legislation has had a chilling effect on civil society and the human rights community in many countries. In **Ethiopia**, anti-terrorism laws have been used to restrict the work of human rights defenders, dismantle independent civil society, and jail journalists en masse. In **Cameroon**, a recent draft anti-terrorism law introduces wide-ranging and disproportionate sanctions for journalists exercising their right to freedom of expression. In **Sudan**, prominent human rights defenders remain detained following charges under Sudan's Anti-terrorism Act of 2001. In **China** the government tabled three inter-linked draft laws on national security, counter-terrorism, and "foreign NGO management" that severely restrict space for independent civil society and dissenting views.

But also in Europe we see worrying trends such as the UK's introduction of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill seen to undermine human rights. Similarly in December 2014, Spain passed the controversial new Citizen Security Law (the "Gag Law") by the lower house of the parliament.

The trend for vague "undefined legal concepts" that depend on subjective analysis with no clear distinction of what is right or wrong has been growing and could develop, if not stopped, into even more worrying counter-terrorism strategies.

CIVICUS calls on the Council to stand up and provide leadership in countering terrorism by ensuring and helping States to integrate compliance with their obligations under international human rights law into their efforts to stem the tide of terrorism.

Thank you.