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Press Release

Civil Society applauds as 63 nations sign on to landmark human rights resolution

1 October 2010. Johannesburg. Sixty-three countries have sponsored a landmark United Nations-backed human rights resolution on “the Rights of Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association”, drawing to an end a hard-fought campaign by civil society groups, including the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), Article 19, World Movement for Democracy, and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.

An initial group of governments from Indonesia, Nigeria, Mexico, Lithuania, the U.S., the Czech Republic and the Maldives, were joined by multiple others, including Benin, Chile, Ghana, Israel, Senegal, Colombia, Serbia and Somalia, making a total of 63 co-sponsoring nations to enable the resolution to pass by consensus.

“The resolution reaffirms that everyone has the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and that civil society makes a valuable contribution to the achievement of the aims and principles of the United Nations at a time when those rights are increasingly threatened around the world,” said Ingrid Srinath, Secretary General of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.

“We are heartened by the number of nations who supported this resolution, even those whose record in this area is less than ideal” she added.

The resolution calls upon States to ensure the rights of individuals to assembly and association by taking all necessary measures to abide by obligations under international human rights law.

“This is a major win for civil society globally, which is faced with increasing attacks and shrinking space for its operations. Freedom of assembly and association are they key pillars of civil society space and fundamental to our very existence and operations”, said Netsanet Belay, Policy and Research Director at CIVICUS.

The initiative to realise this resolution benefited from the Community of Democracies Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society. This Working Group is chaired by the Government of Canada and includes the governments of Spain, Mongolia, Tanzania, Lithuania, and the U.S. ICNL, CIVICUS, Article 19, the World Movement for Democracy, the International Steering Committee of the Community of Democracies, UNDP, CIDA, SIDA, USAID and others also serve on this working group.

“The adoption of this resolution clearly demonstrates the power of state-civil society partnership” says Belay.

Most importantly, the resolution also calls for the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur to monitor and study trends, developments and challenges in relation to the exercise of these rights, and to make recommendations on ways and means to ensure the promotion and protection of these rights. Among other duties, the Special Rapporteur will report on violations and discrimination, threats or use of violence, harassment, persecution, intimidation or reprisals directed at persons exercising these rights.

“While much remains to be done, including the appointment of a respected and committed Special Rapporteur, this is a promising step forward, and we commend the UNHRC for passing this resolution,” said Ingrid. “We also like to thank our partners in Geneva and South Africa, our members around the world and the many others who worked tirelessly with us to advocate for this resolution.”

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is a global movement of civil society dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society across the world. CIVICUS will continue to engage on this issue and other initiatives to defend the space for civil society around the world.

For more information please contact CIVICUS:

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