

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

ADVOCACY BRIEF

Towards a Recognition of the Right to International Solidarity at the UN Level

Why international solidarity must be recognised as a right and duty to protect civic space and strengthen multilateralism

Executive Summary

The world faces a deep crisis in multilateralism and human rights cooperation, alongside a dangerous redefinition of global responsibility. Access to international funding is shrinking and entire sectors of civil society are being pushed to the margins, unable to sustain their work or protect the communities they serve.

This erosion is not accidental: it is an attack on the very idea that people, across borders and backgrounds, can stand together for justice and accountability.

DATA HIGHLIGHT

73%

of the world's population lives in countries where civic space is closed or severely repressed

— CIVICUS Monitor

This global regression affects all regions and signals a deepening crisis, not only a civil society crisis but also a solidarity crisis.

At the UN level, there is momentum to reaffirm that solidarity is not charity but an existential necessity — a political, moral and human imperative that must become a legal imperative.

KEY MESSAGE

Solidarity must move from principle to practice — embedded in how we build peace, uphold rights, and respond collectively to global crises.

CIVICUS calls on states to:

- Recognise international solidarity as a right and duty
- Protect and enable civil society
- Strengthen inclusive multilateralism
- Implement the forthcoming Declaration on International Solidarity

01 International Solidarity at a Crossroads

A deepening crisis in multilateralism and human rights cooperation is reshaping the idea of shared responsibility. Access to international funding has become severely restricted; entire sectors of civil society are being squeezed out, unable to sustain their work or protect the communities they serve. This is not simply a crackdown on individual organisations, but an attack on the very idea of cross-border solidarity.

As warned by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, recent attacks threaten “not only the survival of civil society organisations, but also the future of international solidarity and collective action.” The Rapporteur urges “a transparent, inclusive and democratic process to redefine the principles, goals and governance of international cooperation rooted in solidarity and shared responsibility.”

02 A Unique UN Mandate

The year 2025 marked the 20th anniversary of the creation of the UN mandate on international solidarity (Independent Expert). At a time of retreat from international solidarity, with governments reducing funds that sustain human rights, democracy and humanitarian work, the UN mandate’s potential has been overlooked by both states and civil society.

The UN Secretary-General’s report [Our Common Agenda](#) recognises international solidarity as foundational for future-oriented, inclusive multilateralism. This is a critical moment for the international community to commit to solidarity as the basis for a renewed multilateralism and as a powerful tool to address the structural causes of global crises.

CALL TO ACTION

Amid criminalisation of solidarity action and rising reprisals, international solidarity should be re-affirmed as a foundational pillar of international law.

03 International Solidarity in International Law

International solidarity is not new in international law. Robust legal references across UN, regional and constitutional frameworks pave the way for recognition of the right to international solidarity:

UN & Treaties	UN Convention to Combat Desertification (Art. 3); UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Part XI)
European Frameworks	Treaty on the European Union (Art. 21); Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (Art. 80); EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (solidarity as a meta-right)
African Frameworks	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Arts. 23 & 29(4)); Constitutive Act of the African Union
Americas & OIC	Charter of the Organization of American States (Art. 30); Charter of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)
Constitutional Traditions	Solidarity appears as a key norm across Latin America in: international relations; development; humanitarian response; labour rights; education; social security; access to water; and indigenous peoples' rights.

04 The Declaration on International Solidarity

The Declaration process represents a pivotal opportunity to enshrine solidarity in international law. The timeline for adoption is as follows:

2015	First Draft Declaration on International Solidarity presented
2023	Revised Draft Declaration presented to the UN Human Rights Council following broad consultations
2024–2025/26	Subsequent open consultations held
June 2026	Final text to be presented for adoption at the Human Rights Council and transmitted to the UN General Assembly

Why this matters now:

- Rising repression and reprisals against those engaging in solidarity
- Fragmented responses to global crises
- Urgent need for people-centred, rights-based multilateralism that enables civil society

05 International Solidarity as an Enabling Right

International solidarity should be understood as a positive corollary to non-discrimination, an enabling right that amplifies the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (“the right to have rights”).

The Declaration offers a unique opportunity to build bridges among states, civil society and other actors in a shifting geopolitical landscape where policy alignment is no longer guaranteed. It defines the principles, scope, objectives and implementation of international solidarity as both a right and a duty, emphasising the role of civil society organisations and social movements.

Engendering trust and mutual respect among states and between states and civil society, through a coordinated approach to peace and security, sustainable development and human rights, is more urgent than ever.

06 CIVICUS’ Position

International solidarity as an emerging tool

- **Not a luxury:** A necessity for states and civil society, working alongside international cooperation, capacity-building and technical assistance, while providing an overarching framework.
- **Recognition as right and duty:** Move beyond symbolism and translate solidarity into concrete policy and legal measures.

- **Protect and empower civil society:** Activists, CSOs and grassroots organisations face threats, restrictions and funding shortages. They must be shielded and supported, they are on the frontlines of rights defence.
- **Strengthen multilateral institutions:** Bodies designed to uphold rights, including the UN Human Rights Council, must become more inclusive and responsive, especially to those most affected by injustice.
- **Build resilient solidarity networks:** Build adaptive, mutual-care-centred networks capable of withstanding pressure, leveraging digital tools, cross-border alliances and community strategies.
- **Rethink financing models:** Move beyond fragile donor-recipient dynamics towards decentralised power, locally led, flexible, trust-based funding.
- **Embrace intersectional solidarity:** Crises are interlinked - human rights, climate breakdown, gender injustice, digital repression. The most powerful responses are collective, bridging constituencies, movements, geographies and sectors.
- **Use legal pathways:** Address delays, non-compliance and selective enforcement that erode trust, resource and protect civil society to engage effectively.

“Solidarity is not charity, but an existential necessity.”

07 What States Should Do

To implement the right and duty to international solidarity, states should:

<p>Protect Civil Society</p>	<p>Create Dialogue Platforms</p>
<p>Strengthen mechanisms addressing intimidation, reprisals and sanctions against those cooperating with UN and regional mechanisms</p>	<p>Institutionalise regular, meaningful engagement with civil society on matters of international and transnational solidarity, including engagement towards adoption of the Declaration on International Solidarity by consensus at the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.</p>
<p>Ensure enabling environment</p>	<p>Support Resilient Networks</p>
<p>Guarantee that civil society can operate across borders on regional, national and international solidarity issues without hindrance, within the limits of relevant legal frameworks.</p>	<p>Invest in cross-border alliances and community-based strategies that can sustain movements in restrictive contexts.</p>
<p>Stand in Solidarity with Oppressed Peoples</p>	<p>Safeguard Civic Space</p>
<p>Use diplomatic engagement and actions when gross violations of international human rights or humanitarian law occur.</p>	<p>Promote people-centred approaches and ensure inclusive, diverse participation in decision-making at all levels including within multilateral institutions.</p>

08 Implementation and Accountability

Once the Declaration is adopted, states should:

- Give full effect to the right to international solidarity through legislative, administrative, budgetary and other measures, including solidarity agreements.
- Develop indicators to measure the impact of transnational solidarity actions, drawing on civil society-developed metrics where relevant.
- Report on progress via existing peer-review mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and relevant treaty bodies.

Contact

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