



## CIVICUS at the 60th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council

### Advocacy priorities

#### Overview

As civic space continues to shrink globally amid civil society funding crisis and an unprecedented UN liquidity crisis, the Council remains a vital platform for defending human rights and raising the voices of those most affected.

At the 60th session of UN Human Rights Council (8 September to 8 October 2025), CIVICUS will prioritise the protection and promotion of civil society space and fundamental freedoms. Our advocacy efforts at this session will focus particularly on **public participation** and the right to freedom from **arbitrary detention**, advocating for release of unlawfully detained activists, human rights defenders and citizens.

Patterns of **reprisals** and retaliation employed by governments as well as non-State entities against those cooperating with UN mechanisms, including the Council, are also becoming increasingly concerning and sophisticated, taking up various forms that can ultimately result in grave human rights violations.

On country situations, the Council should continue its scrutiny on [Sudan](#) and ensure continued monitoring and investigation into grave human rights violations in the **DRC**, among others. The Human Rights Council should renew crucial country mandates to ensure continued monitoring and reporting, including on Afghanistan, [Burundi](#) and the Russian Federation. Particularly relevant will be the decision on the renewal of the mandate on human rights in **Cambodia** where tools such as technical assistance and capacity building come at play to address the rights crisis.

Additionally, it should also address the human rights situation of countries not on its agenda that

demonstrable progress on human rights, accountability and justice if they want to be seen and treated as legitimate players on the international stage. Some ways States with poor human rights records could do this are the following:

- upholding strong legal frameworks for civic space
- releasing the hundreds of human rights defenders that remain unjustly imprisoned
- stopping cases of transnational repression of political dissidents.

The Council's 47 Member States are expected to uphold the highest standards in the protection and promotion of human rights as per a 2006 resolution of the UN General Assembly. Successful civil society advocacy has previously blocked the election of States with poor human rights records but is not empowered to prevent all countries committing grave human rights violations at home and abroad from sitting on the Council. To do so, the Human Rights Council should reform its election processes to uphold human rights standards when selecting members.

At the 2025 Human Rights Council elections there will be no surprise: closed states will apply to all regional blocs. The election of candidates responsible for patterns of intimidation and reprisals and widespread civil society space restrictions, which are most frequent in countries with 'closed' and 'repressed' civic space, will be inevitable. The Asia and Pacific bloc will see the election of two States with repressed civic space (India and Pakistan), and two with closed civic space (Iraq and Vietnam), whilst the presence of two MENA States with repressed civic space in the African regional bloc is also alarming.

International civil society highlights the value of competitive elections in each regional bloc to prevent States with poor human rights records from serving as members of the Council. Independent and full civil society scrutiny of candidates within each regional bloc must be ensured. However, this should be coupled with structural reforms allowing for full competitive elections and empowering civil society with a soft veto power.

### **Structural issues**

- Liquidity crisis: safeguarding the UN human rights pillar

The financial crisis has severely impacted the work of the Council. Methods of work have been streamlined, with a 10 per cent reduction in regular meeting time since the 59th session. The crisis is also severely affecting the Council's ability to deliver its mandate on the recent Council Decision on "UNHRC

further UN budget and spending cuts and civil society's role across the UN human rights system should be fully safeguarded.

Particularly crucial is the work of Special Procedures and investigative mechanisms: complementarities among these mechanisms should be encouraged and any merger or consolidation of mandates should be undertaken following a careful assessment in respect of impact on the protection of human rights on the ground and in consultation with national, regional and international civil society.

- Civil society space: integrating recommendations on access, protection and participation

We are seriously concerned about shrinking civil society participation in multilateral spaces, including due to the funding crisis in addition to repression tactics. Civil society's engagement at interactive dialogues, particularly those of UN Special Procedures, has been severely impacted due to reduced timings. For instance, we witnessed a total of 194 civil society interventions to Special Procedures during the past Council session, compared to 303 interventions during the 2024 summer session.

Safe, inclusive, and effective civil society access and participation is essential to ensure that the UN human rights system remains relevant and responsive. Civil society space at the UN must be expanded and protected by integrating all previous recommendations on access, protection and participation, particularly those included in the UN Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space and the UN **Mute Civil Society Recommendations**.

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Additionally, the UN system should increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the mandate to prevent and address intimidation and reprisals against those engaging with the UN human right system, including through maintaining a regularly updated database on reprisals. The UN should also go public in a more compelling way in its Annual Report on Reprisals.

- Innovation & Analytics: fostering cross-mandate synergies

We welcome the launch of a [new interactive platform](#) by the Office of the High Commissioners for Human Rights to help stakeholders, including civil society organisations (CSOs), navigate the Council's work including mandates, mechanisms and reports more easily and effectively.

While data are available only about Council initiatives adopted in the past six years, the database largely contributes to enhancing transparency and facilitating planning and engagement by CSOs and other

specific recommendations across relevant reports, is key to fostering synergies that can help move UN documents from paper to practice. It is also crucial for the OHCHR to take up a more prominent role in bridging the gap between various mechanisms and for country teams and UN agencies to be engaged in the implementation of recommendations on ground.

## **Thematic priorities**

### Arbitrary detention

Arbitrary detention of protestors, defenders and journalists feature among the top five violations of civic freedoms documented by the CIVICUS Monitor. Human rights defenders, political opponents, activists and ordinary citizens continue to be arbitrarily detained in all world regions. According to the most recent data, the detention of protestors has been documented as a common tactic used to disperse or prevent protests in at least 76 countries. Alarming, detention of human rights defenders was recorded in at least 58 countries, and nearly 10% of violations were linked to Israel, Palestine and solidarity protests. Politically motivated detentions also escalated, reaching unprecedented levels particularly during electoral cycles.

Those unlawfully or arbitrarily detained for exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression must be immediately and unconditionally released. CIVICUS's *Stand As My Witness Campaign* highlights particular cases of arbitrary detention, underscoring the urgent need for a concrete action plan to prevent and put an end to arbitrary arrest and detention. Read about the latest developments in [Africa](#), [Asia](#) and [LATAM](#). Arbitrary detention is not limited to activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and ordinary citizens; in specific country situations it can also target high-level government officials from Indigenous groups (see our recent statement [here](#)).

We encourage States to:

- Adopt a substantive Resolution renewing the crucial mandate of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions; highlighting the increasing use of arbitrary detentions as a prominent tactic used to curtail the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, including during electoral cycles; and addressing the stigmatization about the work of HRDs which often precedes their imprisonment.
- Use the Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other dialogues to highlight specific cases of arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention of defenders and call for the release of persons detained or imprisoned, especially those whose detention has been found to be arbitrary

- Call for attention on those situations of arbitrary detention that result from previous cooperation with the United Nations or other international mechanisms in the area of human rights.
- Call for investigations of any alleged cases of arbitrary detention, to ensure access to justice and accountability and to end impunity where such violations and abuses have occurred.

Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights (Reprisals)

In a context of shrinking space for civil society in all world regions, addressing the serious reality of reprisals and the situation facing individuals and civil society who engage or seek to engage with the UN is paramount.

Moreover, there is an urgent need to step up efforts towards the development of benchmarks to monitor actual patterns of reprisals, to develop a methodology to monitor self-censorship and to better understand the patterns of reprisals that can lead to severe human rights violations.

Reprisals may concern not only human rights defenders but may affect any citizen cooperating with mandate holders, including during official country visits, submitting information to special procedures or providing assistance and support.

We encourage States to:

- Calls upon all States to give effect to the right to unhindered access to and communication with international bodies.
- Address the Human Rights Council's preventative mandate in the context of reprisals, highlighting that reprisals should be considered severe signs of civic space deterioration, on which the Council should take action in order to avert further deterioration of civic space conditions.
- Adopt a Resolution condemning all acts of reprisals and retaliation for cooperation with the UN; focusing on prevention measures; and taking steps forward towards the establishment of permanent, adequately resourced, civil society Focal Points on reprisals within all UN entities.
- Adopt a Resolution reflecting the latest trends identified by the Secretary General, including stigmatization, torture and ill-treatment and travel bans, and addressing ways to counter previously identified trends such as increased surveillance of those cooperating with the UN and the widespread application of laws to deter cooperation with the UN.

- Use other relevant Interactive Dialogues to highlight how laws, policies and regulations restricting the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, can serve to deter or hinder cooperation with the United Nations under the guise of national security, public order, and counter terrorism.

Country-specific priorities

Country situations on Council agenda

Country	Civic Space Rating	Key Issues	Recommended Actions for States
Cambodia	Repressed	<div>Intensified criminalisation under Hun Manet’s government</div> <div>Judicial harassment and denial of bail</div> <div>Targeted action against environmental activists</div> <div>Revocation of citizenship and expanded repression</div> <div>Convictions of opposition leaders on incitement charges</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demand immediate release and dropping of all politically motivated charges against all activists</li><li>• Oppose any constitutional amendments refining citizenship revocation laws</li><li>• Urge Cambodia to amend laws and rein in prosecutorial and judicial abuse targeting civic space.</li></ul>

<a href="#">Democratic Republic of Congo</a>	Repressed	<p>Escalating armed conflict, especially in Goma, is driving displacement and worsening human rights violations.</p> <p>Sexual violence is used as a weapon predominantly targeting women and children, with acts of sexual and gender-based violence remaining largely underreported due to fear of stigma and threats of retaliation.</p> <p>Civic space is shrinking, with attacks to journalists, activists, and constraints to internet access and humanitarian organisations, whilst overall access to humanitarian services remains inadequate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure adequate funding of international investigative mechanisms on the DRC to ensure continuity of investigative mechanisms on and accountability.</li> <li>• Call on the DRC Government to uphold civic freedoms, end harassment of HRDs and journalists, and ensure safe conditions for civil society.</li> <li>• Demand the lifting of internet restrictions and protection of press freedom.</li> <li>• Support local civil society and victims, particularly in eastern DRC.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Sudan</a>	Repressed	<p>Civic space remains heavily repressed since the outbreak of civil war in April 2023</p> <p>Activists face arbitrary arrest, torture, enforced disappearances, and summary executions;</p> <p>Media repression is extreme: journalists have been kidnapped, beaten and even killed</p> <p>Civic actors involved in humanitarian work, have been arrested or targeted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call for ending violent crackdowns on protests and free expression</li> <li>• Urging the release of arbitrarily detained activists and journalists</li> <li>• Support independent investigations into mass graves and atrocities committed by the RSF and SAF</li> <li>• Ensure safe access for human rights monitors and humanitarian actors</li> <li>• Provide stronger support to Sudanese civil society and grassroots networks.</li> </ul>

Indonesia	Obstructed	<p>Civic space deteriorated sharply under President Prabowo</p> <p>Over 100 HRDs faced arrest, criminalisation, intimidation and physical attacks in 2025</p> <p>Legal revisions were rushed without transparency, expanding military and police powers</p> <p>Peaceful protests were repeatedly met with excessive force, arbitrary arrests and assaults</p> <p>The ITE Law and new surveillance measures continue to curb online expression</p> <p>Journalists face assaults, threats and new clearance requirements</p> <p>Indonesia was added to CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist in July 2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urge Indonesia to end the repression of HRDs, protesters and journalists</li> <li>• Press for repeal or amendment of repressive laws and halt intrusive surveillance</li> <li>• Ensure accountability for excessive force and arbitrary detention by security forces</li> <li>• Support protections for civil society, especially in Papua.</li> </ul>
Kenya	Repressed	<p>Since the #RejectFinanceBill protests, civic freedoms face ongoing lethal repression, abductions, and mass arrests</p> <p>At least 65 people were killed, hundreds injured and 1,500 arrested since June 2025</p> <p>Activists facing terrorism-related charges of state-instigated violence</p> <p>Crackdowns on online dissent, torture of activists, prosecutions under cybercrime laws and censorship of art</p> <p>HRDs and CSOs face harassment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urge Kenya to end use of lethal force, arbitrary arrests, and abductions of protesters</li> <li>• Ensure accountability for abuses, including sexual violence and torture</li> <li>• Reject repressive digital</li> </ul>



Turkey	Repressed	<p>Civic space deteriorated sharply amid mass arrests of opposition politicians and violent suppression of protests</p> <p>Over 2,000 peaceful demonstrators are detained and faced rushed mass trials and ill-treatment</p> <p>Journalists and lawyers have been targeted through arrests, assaults and censorship</p> <p>Bans on protests, including Pride events and May Day rallies, intensified repression</p> <p>Turkey was added to CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist in July 2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Urge Turkey to release arbitrarily detained protesters, politicians and journalists</li><li>• Demand an end to protest bans, censorship, and excessive force against demonstrators</li><li>• Support independent investigations into violations and ensure accountability</li></ul>
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