



**UN Human Rights Council  
21<sup>st</sup> session  
Item 3**

**An enabling environment for civil society  
Statement delivered by Renate Bloem, CIVICUS UN Representative, Geneva**

Thank you Madam President

CVICUS commends the Council for addressing the space of civil society during this session. At yesterday's milestone panel on intimidation and reprisals, and during discussions on various resolutions, such as freedom of assembly and association, safety of journalists, the right to truth, justice reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence, we hear an overwhelming majority of governments commit to the protection of civil society to exist, express and engage.

CIVICUS sincerely hopes that these actions will help to encourage an enabling environment for civil society, without which sound democratic societies cannot exist. We also hope it will counterbalance the negative trends we have unfortunately observed in CIVICUS, for example in our recent report on the State of Civil Society.

We note with great concern old and new legal restrictions in many countries – developed or developing - which mount barriers against civil society actions and limit funding, to silence independent human rights defenders and associations, as was so vividly demonstrated for example in the case of Ethiopia, or more recently in the Russian Federation.

In other countries, the operating environment for civil society has suffered deterioration, when reference to security and the control of terrorism has frequently been used to justify restrictions on fundamental freedoms, particularly for example in Bahrain, Belarus, Iran and Syria.

Overall, the recent increase in mass protest action has seen a corresponding rise in state pushback, in both democratic and authoritarian states. In the light of this, there is a need to invest in and strengthen protection strategies for human rights defenders and civil society activists who come under attack.

We therefore strongly underline and welcome all positive recommendations coming out of this Council, not only to prevent clampdown on and negative actions towards civil society, but to unite in order to promote and protect human rights defenders and civil society so that they can do their work.

Thank you.