



**27nd session of the
Human Rights Council**

Item 2

**Opening Statement of the New High Commissioner for Human Rights
General Debate 9 September 2014
Delivered by Renate Bloem**

Thank you Mr. President,

High Commissioner Zaid, CIVICUS warmly welcomes you to the Council and congratulates you for assuming the daunting task to become the chief of Human Rights, the 6th UN High Commissioner. You do this at a time, when the world is on fire in too many corners.

We thank you for your first very rich update and concur with your frank analysis.

For CIVICUS, an organisation committed to protection of civil society rights and freedoms, we particularly thank you for your strong pledge and support for civil society. CSOs help in ensuring representation of all voices in the development and governance discourses, particularly those of the most vulnerable and marginalised. They must be enabled not impeded in performing these functions.

CIVICUS remains deeply concerned about continued global democratic deficits. We are seeing an increasing crackdown on pro-democracy activists around the world - as currently in Bahrain - in the face of contemporary waves of protest, including through a combination of dubious legislation, the demonisation of protest movements and direct harassment of civil society activists and their organisations. CIVICUS also remains concerned about the rise of extremism and rightwing movements which has led to attacks on women's rights and LGBTI activists.

We believe that the Office of the High Commissioner and the Human Rights Council have played a key role so far in the protection of human rights defenders including through relevant resolutions and we call here for the strong endorsement of the Ireland led resolution on Civil Society Space. We also believe strongly in the Universal Periodic Review process where civil society has been able to present its challenges before the international community. Yet, we remain deeply concerned about the issue of reprisals against activists for cooperating with UN mechanisms. Navi Pillay said in one of her last statements: "Human Rights Defenders are the heroes of our time"; we now trust that you will become the next unwavering advocate for defending the space for civil society and human rights defenders.

Thank you, Mr. President