



## CIVICUS at the 59th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council

### Advocacy priorities

#### Overview

As civic space continues to shrink globally, the Council remains a vital platform for defending human rights and raising the voices of those most affected. At the 59th session of UN Human Rights Council (16 June to 11 July 2025), CIVICUS will prioritise the protection of civil society space, fundamental freedoms, and civil society resilience.

In line with our mandate, we will continue to support civil society where they face persistent, new and emerging risks and challenges. Amid new challenges, particularly concerning are those posed by the recent aid and funding cuts which reflect enhanced needs for flexibility, shared learning, cross-sector **solidarity**, and long-term resilience.

Recognising the need to further empower grassroots actors, to make UN human rights mechanisms more accessible *vis-a-vis* increasing complexity of the human rights system, and lay the groundwork for deeper, more inclusive and longer-term civil society engagement, CIVICUS will work to enable the meaningful participation and engagement of civic groups with the Council based on these new and emerging needs.

While civil society space concerns have been recognised as full-fledged human rights issues by the UN Human Rights Council, more has to be done to support civil society to thrive by preventing efforts to restrict the **enabling environment**. In addition, the specific contribution and different protection needs of civil society actors remain under addressed in the context of the Council. Furthermore, the Council's prevention mandate should be revitalised to avert further escalation of ongoing crises, further restrictions for civil society, and - ultimately - definitive closure of civic space at the national, regional, and global levels.

Amid an increasingly hostile environment for civil society, protest suppression and restrictive legislation to silence dissent, freedoms of **peaceful assembly and association** face heightened crackdowns. The Council should firmly renew the mandate of the *Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association* for a further period of three years and request the Special Rapporteur to report to the Council on a *biannual* basis.

During this Council session, which historically has a strong focus on the **rights of women and girls** as well as gender issues related to human rights standards, the Council should also reaffirm its commitment to the protection and promotion of these rights by renewing crucial mandates such as:

- the mandate of the *Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity*
- the mandate of the *Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences*,
- and the mandate of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls.

Moreover, it is our position that the Council should reaffirm its commitment to the **protection and promotion of human rights** by renewing the mandate of the *Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons*.

On country situations, the Council should:

- strengthen its action on **Eritrea**
- continue its scrutiny on **Ukraine** and occupied territories of Ukraine, among others
- address the human rights situation of countries not on its agenda that require urgent action.. e.g. sustained attacks against civic space in the **Philippines, and in Turkey**, **where** human rights defenders, peaceful protestors, activists and asylum seekers continue to be arbitrarily arrested and detained on fabricated charges.

### **Structural issues**

The full and effective participation of civil society in Council debates and negotiations is hampered by most of the Council's activities being held in person and the associated costs involved for civil society organisations.

In addition, the unprecedented funding and aid cuts that have jeopardised the work of civil society organisations over the past months have worsened some of the pre-existing challenges, resulting in civil society action being increasingly fragmented, fatigued, and under pressure.

There is a need for further cooperation between UN human rights mechanisms, as well as improved consistency and coherence through the harmonisation of working methods, joint planning, adoption of predictable and accessible country and thematic calendars, and integration of relevant recommendations issued by specific UN human rights mechanisms into different Council country and thematic reports.

UN country teams and UN agencies could be engaged in the implementation of relevant recommendations on grounds which could foster improved implementation and reporting on human rights, closing the **implementation gap**.

### **Thematic priorities**

## Civil Society Space

Civil society space can be understood as the environment that enables people and groups – or civic space actors – to participate meaningfully in the political, economic, social and cultural life in their societies. Civic space, however, is increasingly restricted throughout the world with 72.4% of the world's population living in countries where state and non-state actors are routinely allowed to repress fundamental freedoms.

We believe that it is imperative for the Council to focus increasingly on **grave, new and emerging risks** facing civil society and reflect the multifaceted obstacles, challenges and barriers faced by civil society in the light of the global regressive context.

We call on States to adopt a Resolution that:

- Acknowledges the positive role of civil society actors and positive strategies used by civil society to protect and promote human rights, including mobilisation, strategic litigation, international diplomacy, and international advocacy, whilst stressing the States' primary responsibility to protect and promote an open and enabling civic space.
- Addresses the role of non-State actors in ensuring respect for human rights and protection and promotion of civil society space and the expansion of the phenomenon of transnational repression as recently highlighted by Special Procedures in their recent thematic and country reports and as referenced in recent thematic Resolutions.
- Strengthens the preventative mandate of the Council and stresses that violations of civic space as the first early warning signs on which the Council should take action in order to avert further escalation of the crisis.
- Emphasises, while acknowledging the essential contribution that civil society makes to regional and international organisations, that full and civil society participation in UN mechanisms is crucial. The Resolution should also encourage States and regional and international organisations to put in place transparent, fair, non-discriminatory and gender-responsive accreditation processes.
- On procedural conditions for effective engagement of civil society - UNMute recommendation 3.b The UN should facilitate appropriate conditions to allow effective civil society participation in official meetings and sessions through improved access to information, in which digital technologies can play a significant role; ensuring proper notice and information of UN meetings, as well as timely civil society registration; allowing civil society, especially from developing countries, to have adequate time to obtain travel documents and make travel arrangements.
- Condemn the practice of reprisals and address the role of UN Member States and of the UN as a whole in protecting civil society actors against cases of reprisals.
- Addresses the most concerning trends such as the prominence of foreign agent laws to target civil society actors, the nexus between security, counter terrorism laws and closing civil society space; undue restrictions to accessing domestic and foreign funding, urging States to Provide flexible core funding through simplified procedures; and the

increasing use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) by State and non-State actors.

- Recognises civil society's pivotal role in meeting UNSDGs and clearly states that attacks on civil society and civic freedoms are threatening adequate progress being made on meeting the SDGs.
- References the [UN's Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space and the Declaration +25](#).
- Requests the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to conduct a comprehensive study about the increasingly restricted environment governing access to funding for civil society and its implications on civil society activities working towards the promotion and protection of human rights.
- Mandates the OHCHR to undertake a stocktaking exercise on the 2016 High Commissioner's [Practical recommendations for the creation and maintenance of a safe and enabling environment for civil society](#), based on good practices and lessons learned, with a view to mapping the implementation of recommendations that were made to States and to developing clear guidelines for States to implement these recommendations. In addition, the Resolution should mandate the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to evaluate the status of implementation of [the UN's Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space](#) across all UN agencies and offices as a prelude to putting in place a plan of action for measurable implementation.

### Human Rights and International Solidarity

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the creation of the mandate of the Independent Expert on international solidarity. Yet, the world is witnessing a dangerous retreat from international solidarity, with Governments significantly reducing funds that sustain human rights, democracy, and humanitarian initiatives.

This is a critical time for the international community to commit to international solidarity as the foundation of a new form of **multilateralism** and as a power tool for addressing the structural causes of global challenges.

Amid growing criminalisation of solidarity action and solidarity networks and pressing human rights challenges, international solidarity should be re-affirmed as the **foundation pillar of international law**.

We urge States to:

- Cooperate with each other and with non-State actors and civil society actors to implement the right to international solidarity to prevent and overcome pressing global challenges.
- Urge the Council to reaffirm international solidarity as a foundational principle underpinning international human rights law and a fundamental tool in the promotion and protection of human rights.

- Urge other States to acknowledge the role of International Solidarity as the foundation for a future oriented, inclusive multilateralism, as identified by the Secretary General in his report on [Our Common Agenda](#).
- Bring to the attention of the Council concrete strategies for international solidarity and accountability.
- Give full effect to the right to international solidarity by adopting legislative, administrative, budgetary or other measures and pursuing solidarity agreements to facilitate access to funding, create indicators to measure the impact of transnational solidarity actions and make use of indicators developed by civil society and report on these actions in the context of the Universal Period Review, as suggested by the [Draft Declaration on International Solidarity](#).

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

Over the past year, protest rights have faced escalating threats. Protest suppression has become normalised, with authorities deploying excessive force, mass arrests and restrictive legislation to silence dissent. The year 2024 became a period marked by shrinking civic space, escalating repression, and increased risks to those exercising their fundamental rights, including the right to peaceful assembly.

We urge States to:

- Use relevant thematic debates to bring to the attention of the Council the global implications of the super election year on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, spotlighting patterns of repression and resistance.
- Urge states, including those where general elections are upcoming, to repeal or substantially amend restrictive legislation that is not in accordance with international law and standards on freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Promote full accountability for restrictions on civil society undermining the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly in electoral contexts.

### **Country-specific priorities**

#### **Country situations on Council agenda**

**Afghanistan** (Civic space is rated '**Closed**' by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#))

Since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, civic space in Afghanistan has collapsed. Activists, journalists, and everyday citizens are being silenced—some through arrest or torture and ill-treatment, others simply disappear. Human rights defenders, in particular women activists, have continued to be criminalised as well as tortured and ill-treated for their activism. Media outlets face constant pressure and have been raided or shut down, and NGOs employing

women risk closure. The Taliban has also blocked access to the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan.

**We call on States to:**

- Support the creation of a dedicated independent investigative mechanism to investigate crimes under international law, collect and preserve evidence for future accountability efforts and cooperate with existing international judicial mechanisms.
- Lift restrictions and allow the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan safe and unfettered access to the country.
- Provide sustained funding to Afghan civil society, with a focus on women-led and women-serving organizations.
- Clearly and publicly reject the Taliban's institutional discrimination against women and girls.
- Ensure any diplomatic or humanitarian engagement is tied to concrete improvements in fundamental rights and freedoms.
- Guarantee safe, unimpeded access for humanitarian aid groups and human rights monitors across the country.

**Eritrea (Civic space is rated 'Closed' by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#))**

Eritrea continues to be one of the world's most repressive countries, with no space for independent civil society, free press, or dissenting voices.

Eritrea is the worst jailer of journalists in Africa, with at least 16 journalists detained, many of them held incommunicado since 2001 without trial.

Independent media has been shut down since 2001, and the state controls all channels of communication.

**We call on States to:**

- Urge the Government of Eritrea to immediately release all arbitrarily detained journalists, HRDs, and political prisoners.
- Extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea and call for unhindered access to the country.
- Adopt a strong resolution condemning the systemic violations of civil liberties in Eritrea as well as instances of transnational repression, outlining concrete steps for international accountability.

- Prioritise the protection of Eritrean exiled civil society and journalists and increase support for documentation efforts on human rights violations committed at home and abroad.

### **Ukraine** (Civic space is rated '**Obstructed**' by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#))

CIVICUS stands in strong solidarity with Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion committed by the Russian Federation and expressed its firm support to Ukrainian people, the country's sovereignty and civil society.

The war has severely exhausted civil society's resources, especially with the funding cuts and volunteer fatigue. Different organizations including the Independent Investigative Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine and Amnesty International has documented torture, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances in Russian-occupied territories, highlighting the urgent need for accountability.

Media freedom has recently seen a sharp decline.

#### **We call on States to:**

- Continue their firm support to Ukrainian people, its sovereignty, and its vibrant civil society despite the contemporary geopolitical challenges.
- Extend and fully fund international investigative efforts into human rights violations across all parts of Ukraine.
- Support Ukrainian civil society with long-term, flexible funding so they can continue their vital work.
- Speak out against restrictions on media and peaceful protest in all areas of Ukraine, including those under government control.

### **Country situations that require Council attention**

#### **Philippines** (Civic space is rated '**Repressed**' by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#))

Serious human rights concerns persist under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr as he marks three years in power. The practice of "red-tagging" human rights defenders and others persists, and counterterrorism legislation including charges of financing terrorism are increasingly used against activists and humanitarian workers.

In March 2025, in a historic step toward justice, former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was arrested for crimes against humanity in relation to alleged extrajudicial killings occurring between 2011 and 2019 and transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

We call on States to:

- Urge the Philippine government to cease red-tagging and the judicial harassment of human rights defenders.
- Consider supporting the establishment of an independent investigative mechanism to address human rights violations and abuses to further accountability and justice.
- Ensure full accountability for violations committed against civil society actors and take steps to rejoin the ICC to address impunity.
- Support civil society's call to abolish the NTF-ELCAC and reform national human rights bodies to ensure independence and inclusivity.

**Türkiye** (Civic space is rated as '**Repressed**' by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#))

Türkiye saw its biggest anti-government demonstrations in more than ten years in March 2025 when Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu was arrested on what were mostly seen as politically fabricated allegations. In retaliation, the government began extensive crackdowns that led to the detention of over 1,400 individuals. Journalists are arrested and physically attacked while reporting the protests, and some media outlets were forbidden from broadcasting. Restrictions on social media sites resulted in information dissemination being hampered.

**We call on States to:**

- Urge the Turkish government to end its oppression of free media while ensuring journalists can operate without facing arrest or physical harm.
- Back efforts to rebuild civic space in Türkiye by supporting independent probes into human rights abuses that occurred during the protests.
- Immediately release all those who have been arbitrarily detained for exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and urge Türkiye to refrain from and condemn any excessive force used against peaceful protesters.