Thank you Mr. President.

CIVICUS welcomes Mr. Forst’s report and his focus on protection, promotion, and amplifying the work of human rights defenders, particularly in the context of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

We laud the showing of innovative ways for sustaining and enlarging civil society space and networks, for raising awareness, mitigating risks, and independently assessing as well as documenting violations at challenging times under restrictive governments.

Moreover CIVICUS finds “self-identification” by human rights defenders a crucial step to demand their rights according to the Declaration of Human Rights Defenders. We also applaud expanding the definition of human rights defenders to potentially everyone who is engaged to uphold the rights for others, not only to activists and journalists. In addition, changing the narrative to the positive value of human rights defenders’ vital work, will also enlarge and protect their image with the general public at large.

However, CIVICUS is concerned that the emphasis on HRDs/CSO own self-protection is not enough balanced with state duties to protect and create an enabling environment.

For some human rights defenders, it is no longer an option or condition to take ‘less threatening’ or ‘less risk taking’ tactics and strategies to speak out and freely demonstrate their rights and demands, particularly in countries where the freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are under threat.

Therefore we call on States and all other stakeholders to embrace the 7 principles and implement the recommendations, urge governments mentioned to accept outstanding visits and highly urge all members of the Council to adopt the forthcoming resolution on HRDs.

Thank you, Mr. President.