



**20th session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 3**

**The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association
Interactive Dialogue 20 June 2012
Delivered by Renate Bloem, CIVICUS**

Thank you Mme President,

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation strongly welcomes both reports but will speak to the inaugural report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Mr Kiai, we concur with you that these freedoms are the cornerstones of democracy. We are pleased with the powerful legal framework you provide that underscores the positive and negative obligations States have to guarantee these rights and we welcome the examples of good practices that exist in some countries to promote the realisation of these rights. Unfortunately they are outnumbered by the vast incidents of denial and repression of these fundamental rights. “

As documented in CIVICUS’ recently released report on the State of Civil Society 2011, at least 88 countries saw different forms of mass citizens’ action last year. While protest movements - led by informal and institutionalised civil society groups - met with varying degrees of success, including in seeking redress of the denial of democratic freedoms and highlighting the nexus between big business and unaccountable government, the corresponding pushback against and restrictions of civil society was also severe.

We note with great concern legal restrictions in many countries to mount barriers against civil society actions and to cut (often foreign) funding to silence independent human rights defenders and associations, as so vividly demonstrated in the case of Ethiopia. The Charities and Societies Proclamation passed in 2009 has practically eliminated this country’s once vibrant human rights community and has had since devastating impact on human rights work in general.

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

We therefore strongly underline your recommendations, but ask for some clarification on the wording of “a regime of notification” for registering associations. In many countries, such as Norway and Switzerland, such measures are not necessary and would in our view rather restrict the freedom of association. However, we wish to highlight your request to adopt soon in one document guiding principles, to create clear benchmarks, in consultation with all stakeholders, to promote, protect and uphold the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Thank you for your attention.