



**19th session of the
Human Rights Council
Item3**

**Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
Enabling Environment for Civil Society**
Delivered by Renate Bloem

Thank you, Mme President,

Persistent crackdowns on civil society have intensified in many parts of the globe, with increasing trends in brutal opposition to peaceful protests, persecution of human rights defenders, restrictive legislation against CSOs and a disabling environment for LGBT rights defenders. CIVICUS urges the Human Rights Council to take proactive measures and guarantee an enabling environment for civil society in line with international human rights obligations. At a minimum the following conditions should be guaranteed to all civil society actors: freedom of association; freedom of expression, the right to operate free from unwarranted state interference, the right to communicate and cooperate, the right to seek and secure funding and the state's duty to protect.

Protest movements against the denial of democratic freedoms have been met with a barrage of illegal and cruel tactics to suppress public demonstrations and governments have utilized military arsenals to silence protestors. As we speak, all sorts of atrocities are being carried out in Syria against pro--democracy protestors where at least 8000 people have reportedly been killed. Murders and physical attacks on civil society activists remain rife in many countries around the world, and often inadequately investigated, emboldening the perpetrators.

The legal and policy environment for civil society is also showing a global trend of deterioration. Disabling legislation and policies remain in operation in a number of countries that prevent civil society organizations and human rights defenders from carrying out their mandate. At this critical juncture, CIVICUS strongly urges the Human Rights Council take the following actions to protect human rights defenders and promote an enabling environment for civil society:

1. Prioritize the protection of human rights defenders and an enabling environment for civil society in countries where democratic freedoms are severely restricted.
2. Urge all UN member states to extend an open invitation to Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights Defenders, Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association and Freedom of Expression.
3. Urge all UN member states to promptly investigate the persecution of human rights defenders.

I thank you for your attention