



**Joint Press Statement by the Civic Space Initiative**  
**For Immediate Release**

**States must implement crucial UN Human Rights Council resolution on civil society space, and cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and of association.**

**05 July 2016**

**The Civic Space Initiative\* (CSI) welcomes the adoption of a UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution committing States to protect civil society space, and a resolution renewing the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the freedom of peaceful assembly and of association for three more years.**

“At a time when governments and non-state actors are actively suppressing civil society voices, this resolution by the world’s premier human rights body articulates key steps to protect and promote civil society rights,” said Dr Danny Sriskandarajah, Secretary General of CIVICUS. “We urge national governments to both inform their publics about this resolution and also begin a process of dialogue with civil society to earnestly implement its provisions.”

The resolution commits States to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for civil society ([A/HRC/32/L.29 as orally revised](#)). It urges states to:

- Ensure that civil society actors can seek, secure and use resources.
- Maintain accessible domestic procedures for the establishment or registration of organizations.
- Ensure that civil society can input into potential implications of legislation when it is being developed, debated, implemented or reviewed.
- Adopt clear laws and policies providing for effective disclosure of information.
- Ensure access to justice, and accountability, and to end impunity for human rights violations and abuses against civil society actors.

The resolution further requests the High Commissioner to report in 2018 on best practices for ensuring civil society involvement with regional and international organisations, including the United Nations.

“In recent years, a number of governments have introduced measures to constrain civic space at the national level, and they have now set their sights on weakening resolutions at the Human Rights Council,” said Douglas Rutzen, President and CEO of the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. “The CSI is grateful for the collective leadership of Chile, Ireland, Japan, Sierra Leone, and Tunisia in promoting passage of a strong resolution to safeguard civil society space, and we express our appreciation to the thirty-one member states\*\* that voted in favor of the resolution.”

244 civil society organisations [jointly called](#) for the rejection of amendments led by Russia, China and South Africa to attack the heart of the resolution. Though these amendments failed, Russia was joined by HRC member states China, Congo, Cuba, Nigeria, South Africa, and Venezuela in voting against the civil society space resolution as a whole. Nine states abstained on the vote. \*\*\*



“We regret that democracies such as Nigeria and South Africa voted against civil society space at the UN, giving cover to authoritarian governments that routinely repress the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly”, said Thomas Hughes, Executive Director of ARTICLE 19. “An independent, diverse and pluralistic civil society is essential to sustainable development, security and the realisation of human rights. All States must act on this resolution to ensure the space for them to operate free from hindrance. “

With these international standards at its disposal, the CSI urges the HRC to pay greater attention to country situations in which civil society space is under threat, in particular to ensure the protection of individual civil society actors most at risk.

Separately, the HRC adopted a resolution to renew the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association for an additional three years ([A/HRC/32/L.32 as orally revised](#)).\*\*\*\* It mandates the Special Rapporteur to monitor the global environment for freedom of assembly and association, report twice annually to the UN, conduct country missions and send communications to governments. The HRC will appoint the new Special Rapporteur in March 2017, when the tenure of the current holder, [Maina Kiai](#), concludes.

“The Special Rapporteur has been crucial to amplifying civil society’s concerns over ongoing restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and the CSI welcomes future opportunities to engage with the new mandate holder,” said Ryota Jonen, Director of the World Movement for Democracy.

The CSI is committed to engaging with governments and other stakeholders to ensure that the international human rights standards adopted at the HRC are implemented nationally, to enhance the enabling environment for civil society, and to defend that space where it is at risk.

#### **Notes to editors:**

\* The Civic Space Initiative is: [International Center for Not-for-Profit Law](#), [ARTICLE 19](#), [CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation](#), [World Movement for Democracy](#) and [the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law](#).

\*\* The HRC member states voting in favour of the resolution were: Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Cote d’Ivoire, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Latvia, Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, Netherlands, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Switzerland, Macedonia, Togo, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

\*\*\* Member states abstaining were: Bolivia, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam.

\*\*\*\* The resolution is the initiative of the Czech Republic, Indonesia, Lithuania, Maldives, Mexico, and United States of America.

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