



**30<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council  
Item 4 General Debate,  
Delivered by Renate Bloem**

Thank you, Mr. President,

Last week we celebrated the International Day of Democracy and Secretary General Ban ki-Moon called **Civil Society, the oxygen of democracy**. Later this week, in New York, world leaders will make a historic pact to eradicate extreme poverty, reduce inequality, promote peace and justice, and safeguard the environment when they sign off on the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. Civil society contributes in myriad ways to development programmes and assists states and intergovernmental organisations in finding innovative solutions to complex problems.

To perform these functions, civil society needs to be able to speak truth to power. Sadly, civil society's ability to speak truth to power is being impeded in far too many countries around the globe.

In particular, we would like to highlight severe assaults on civil society in:

- **Azerbaijan**, where several prominent human rights defenders have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms after patently unfair trials.
- **Bahrain** where harassment, arbitrary imprisonment and torture continues of civil society activists demanding democratic rights. There has been no progress on release of political prisoners and human rights defenders even after the fifth joint cross regional statement delivered by Switzerland to the Council last week.
- **Burundi**, where the human rights situation continues to severely deteriorate. Murderous attacks have been carried out on human rights defenders. Several civil society activists have had to flee the country or suspend their activities.
- **Saudi Arabia**, where women human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists and bloggers are subjected to severe forms of repression and harassment.
- **Sudan**, where security forces have arrested, sexually assaulted and arbitrarily detained dozens of opposition party members, human rights defenders, students and political activists in the run up, during and after the April 2015 election
- **Uganda**, where a repressive NGO bill is being considered to undermine the independence of civil society and create an atmosphere of fear against those speaking truth to power.

We urge the Council to step up appropriate measures, including resolutions, to help these countries to find their ways to guarantee fundamental freedoms to their people and an enabling environment for Civil Society to do its work. Thank you Mr. President