

Report of the CIVICUS Board of Directors Meeting, 07 – 09 November 2023, Nairobi – Kenya

The CIVICUS Board of Directors held its second physical meeting of 2023 in Nairobi, from 7th to 9th of November 2023. [This followed the first meeting held in London in May 2023.](#)

The Board changed the location of this meeting from Johannesburg (CIVICUS global head office) to accommodate two Board members, who have previously faced a difficult South African visa process. One of them was unable to obtain a visa in time to attend the 2022 November Board meeting in Johannesburg. Nairobi compared favourably to other viable alternatives (Lusaka and Buenos Aires) from a cost perspective and offered better logistical and access advantages.

The Chair kicked off the meeting by reflecting on the prevailing operating context for civil society, particularly its limiting effect on ability to organise and hold governments to account. Within this difficult context, he underscored the importance of CIVICUS' work around the globe.

The Board considered a broad range of issues on the first day, including reflections from the Secretary General (SG) on key developments across the organisation and some planned interventions. The SG highlighted the transition in the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and formally introduced the two new SLT members to the Board: Chief Officer, Innovation & Sustainability, Tamryn Lee Fourie and Chief Officer, Advocacy & Solidarity Action, Jessica Corredor Villamil. The SG noted the new learning and development framework as well as CIVICUS' interactions with its networks, donors, and key stakeholders.

The Board discussed its role in relation to the SLT in responding to issues that pose potential reputational risk to CIVICUS. It reiterated its confidence in SLT members' capacity to respond to emerging issues within their respective programming mandates, while recommending some broad principles to assist in managing issues that potentially present broader reputational risk to the organisation.

The Board received Committee reports from the various Committee Chairs. The Nominations Committee report following a relatively successful Board elections is worth highlighting. The process resulted in three new CIVICUS Voting members joining the Board for a three-year term starting January 2024 to December 2026. The three are Paulina Ibarra from Chile, and former Youth Action Team (YAT) members, Blessing Ewa from Nigeria, and Yi Kang Choo from Malaysia. Sonia Kwami (current Board Vice Chair) and Mario Roset were re-elected to serve a second and final term.

The Board received an update from the Secretariat on plans to progress CIVICUS' Communications Strategy and its Media Acceleration Plan.

The Board considered plans submitted by the Secretariat for the 2024 Innovation Awards and noted a few important considerations. It emphasised a "value for money mindset" in the planning process and highlighted the need to identify and address risks faced by potential awardees. The Board also called for greater clarity on the nomination process for potential awardees.

The first day of the Board meeting ended with an exercise for Board members to enhance the Board's ways of working.

The Board Chair opened the second day by inviting Board members to share reflections of their conversations with invited members of Kenyan civil society and local CIVICUS partners, during an interactive session organised by CIVICUS the previous evening. Highlights included a call for close cooperation and partnerships in anti-corruption and democracy initiatives across countries and regions, borne out of similarities in the anti-corruption struggle in Kenya and countries in South America; application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by civil society as a force for good; and the need for closer cooperation between international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and local civil society organisations (CSOs), among others.

The Board proceeded to consider key administrative matters leading to the following decisions:

- Adoption of the 2022/23 Annual Results and Annual Financial Report.
- Approval of the Risk Register.
- Scheduling the next full Board Meeting for June 2024 to enable substantial Board involvement in the budget approval process.

The Board considered CIVICUS engagement with its networks, starting with a look back to the past and tracing the journey to date. This was followed by robust discussions with key networks Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), represented by Kirsi Marttinen, and the YAT, represented by Zahra Al Hilaly and Ian Makamara. The discussions addressed various aspects of the working relationship and dynamics between CIVICUS and these networks. It was noted that AGNA and YAT networks would in due course respectively sign a Memorandum of Understanding and Terms of Reference.

The Board considered the updated Costed Strategy, Resource Diversification Plans and Principles and Procedures on Sub-granting. Key outcomes from this discussion were the decision to adopt the Costed Strategy and a request from the Board for a calendar of fora where Board members are engaged in the hope that they can exploit fundraising opportunities presented on behalf of CIVICUS.

The Board Chair invited reflections from three Board members who were stepping down from Board service: Patricia Lerner from the United States of America, stepping down after serving for two terms (January 2018 – December 2023), Ana Addobbati from Brazil, and Vandita Morarka from India, stepping down after serving a single term (January 2021 – December 2023). It was noted that Ana and Vandita are eligible for a second term by presenting their candidacy at any future Board election.

The Board ended the formal sessions by considering plans for the International Civil Society week (ICSW), including potential themes, possible regional hosting considerations and resourcing models. On the question of themes, the Board emphasised strategic coherence between global and regional issues, connecting global debates and struggles for peaceful just, equal, and stable society. The Board noted that it must align with CIVICUS' vision, mission, values, and mandate and be ambitious. It should ideally be able to move from People Power to People Action, cutting across all target groups including the most excluded members of the society. The Board noted that the resourcing models should be influenced by the theme and remain ethical, while cautioning against an undue focus on breaking even.

On possible host regions, the Board noted that the host country should have enabled civic space and leaders with a global vision. Logistical requirements should be minimal, and safety and security of participants should be guaranteed. The country must be willing to accept diversity, express public support for hosting the event and possibly located in the global south. The lead organisation should be a network organisation, a CIVICUS member, have a working relationship with the government and able to

secure diplomatic support towards hosting the event. It should be locally respected, uphold and promote accountability and fiscal integrity and demonstrate capacity to host the event. It was noted that the Secretariat will resubmit an updated concept note taking note of the Board's input.