

# Civil Society Summit

## The Belgrade Call to Action

### An Action Agenda: Positive Measures for Enabling Civic Space towards Maximizing Civil Society Contributions to the SDGs

April 2019

#### 1. A Call to Action

Meeting in Belgrade on the occasion of the 2019 International Civil Society Week, the Civil Society Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), CIVICUS, Action for Sustainable Development, Civic Initiatives and the Balkan Civil Society Development Network have urgently convoked global civil society leaders and organizations to launch the **Belgrade Call to Action**.<sup>1</sup> More than 125 international, regional and national CSOs from 50 countries around the world have endorsed this *Call to Action*.

The *Call* is addressed to Governments and Member States of the United Nations to take urgent action to reverse deteriorating conditions for civil society and attacks on social leaders, human rights and environmental defenders around the world, in the context of the 2030 Agenda. A fully engaged civil society and population are essential if the international community is to truly deliver the promises of Agenda 2030 to leave no one behind in achieving the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Open civic space and peoples' participation provide an essential foundation to achieve key Agenda 2030 commitments to 'leave no one behind', to reduce inequalities, to address gender inequality and women's empowerment, to promote decent work for all, and to realize climate justice and environmental sustainability for a planet under siege.

Today, more than ever, democracies are threatened by nationalism, xenophobia, and hostility towards migrant populations.

This *Call to Action* is a demonstration of civil society unity and determination in the face of mounting disabling legal and regulatory challenges, lack of effective space for meaningful dialogue, hateful, misogynistic and racist narratives promoted by some public actors, and various direct attacks on civic actors. It is launched at a critical moment for the mobilization of thousands of civil society organizations (CSOs) standing together in efforts to amplify voices, actions and demands for transformative changes. Since 2015, many UN Member States have demonstrated an

acute lack of urgent action and ambition on Agenda 2030, the SDGs and measures to combat climate change.

There is too much at stake in routine human rights abuses, the marginalization of rights of women and girls, growing inequalities, the failure to act on the underlying causes of climate change, and continued widespread poverty. All stakeholders – Government, Civil Society, Parliamentarians, Private Sector – need to find common ground and truly work together to deliver Agenda 2030 within the framework of international human rights conventions and instruments. Civil society is a crucial actor on all of these issues.

The time for specific actions, appropriate to each country context, is now. Practical and realistic actions by Member State Governments, supported by civil society, parliamentarians and other development actors, will make a difference to the realities for CSOs and human rights defenders. They represent and work with diverse and marginalized populations at the country level, where change needs to happen. Mounting attacks on civil society, social leaders, and affected communities are undermining these efforts.

## 2. Growing Attacks on Civil Society

Attacks on civil society across the globe have taken many forms – legal, administrative, selected criminalization, stigmatization as “foreign agents” and threats to individuals and organizations, gender-based and other forms of violent repression. These conditions manifest differently in each country context, but are also increasingly generalized across a broad range of countries, with varying levels of democratic practice, in both the Global North and Global South.

- **Restrictive laws and regulations** The use of laws and regulations as tools to undermine, harass and marginalize CSOs: restricting formation, registration and operations of CSOs, restricting the freedom of movement for civil society leaders or human rights defenders.
- **Limited policy dialogue and access to information** Limiting access to quality policy dialogue, particularly for dissenting voices, or those representing marginalized populations, youth, people with disabilities, racial minorities, the LGBTQ\* movement, women and indigenous peoples at the country level. Timely access to public policy documentation and budgets is an essential pre-condition for effective policy dialogue.
- **Systematic violence against human rights advocates** Alarming levels of organized violence, including assassinations, against human rights defenders. Women human rights defenders face additional risks of sexual and gender-based violence as well as gender discrimination within justice systems leading to the criminalization of women defenders.
- **Increasing public intolerance** Growing religious fundamentalisms and political intolerance create a climate that further restricts space for vulnerable groups to make their voices known, and particularly for women and girls to organize, to freely choose the life they wish to live, including full access to sexual and reproductive health rights.

- **Stigmatization narratives** Systematic stigmatization of CSOs and human rights defenders as self-serving, “foreign-influenced” or “foreign agents,” or threats to the ‘stability’ of the nation.<sup>2</sup>
- **Increasing attacks on journalists** Media offer a platform for a multiplicity of voices and public discourse. . In too many countries, journalists are being killed, imprisoned, and harassed simply for doing their job. They are often the ‘canary in the coal mine’, as their work is in the public eye and the crackdown on civic space often starts with autocratic leaders trying to silence journalists.
- **Cyber harassment, surveillance** The use of social media, cybercrime laws, anti-terrorism legislation, and other forms of regulation to use digital communications and exchange as a vehicle for surveillance, harassment, the spread of false information and demonization.
- **Limitations on access to funding** Growing regulatory restrictions on CSO receipt of funding from private, official international sources, including the stigmatization of certain private donors. Increasingly restrictive donor requirements for funding, alongside disproportionate penalties for non-compliance in meeting reporting requirements at the country level, and limits on advocacy under restrictive charity laws, with related “chill effects” on a broad CSO community.
- **Restrictions at the multilateral level** The denial of access to multilateral fora, arbitrary or politically motivated limitations for UN accreditation, country intimidation and reprisals against those who speak out in UN bodies, and the use of Government-Organized NGOs (GONGOs) to discredit other representative CSOs.

According to data found in CIVICUS’ Monitor of civic space, as of December 2018, more than a quarter of the world’s population (27%) live in 23 countries that were classified by CIVICUS as “closed” with no possibilities for independent civil society voices; a further 20% live in 35 countries where civil society was significantly “repressed,” and 33% live in 53 countries where civil society is “obstructed” (civic space is highly contested by power holders).<sup>3</sup> Altogether more than 80% of the world’s population – almost 6 billion people – live in countries where civic space is closed, repressed or obstructed. Such conditions seriously undermine the capacities of civil society – and whole countries and societies – to advance democracy, human rights safeguards, Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

### 3. Limiting Progress for the SDGs

Real and transformative progress in poverty eradication, in tackling hunger, in decent work and sustainable livelihoods for all, in addressing gender and all forms of inequality, and in action for climate justice, will not be possible without a fully engaged civil society and population. The strengths of civil society are its diversity, its rootedness in communities, its direct development experience, and its capacities for public engagement. CSOs contribute to development outcomes for the SDGs through:

- 1) Direct involvement with communities of poor and marginalized populations to support their development efforts;

- 2) Engagement with governments to exchange policy knowledge, working at many levels to ensure greater accountability, help to prevent corruption, and address other challenges of governance;
- 3) Defence of the rights of vulnerable groups and advocating on behalf of those whose voices are sidelined by more powerful actors, where development is highly contested;
- 4) Promotion of transformative change by addressing underlying causes of poverty, hunger, economic inequality, gender inequality or raising new issues and perspectives based on their experience; and
- 5) Building trust and social cohesion, particularly important in rebuilding communities affected humanitarian crises or at risk of political violence, armed conflict or ethnic strife.

Ways to realize a transformative Agenda 2030 can be highly contested in many different country contexts, where Governments have many reasons for restricting CSOs, social movements, or media and where human rights defenders are threatened and attacked. In these different country contexts, such restrictive measures are seriously affecting progress for the SDGs.<sup>4</sup>

Protecting civic space is central to **SDG 16**, to *promote **peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.*** Closing civic space further undermines efforts to build trust where societies are polarized, to ensure access to justice for poor and marginalized populations, and to safeguard key institutions and channels for delivering SDG progress against being captured by elites for their own ends.

**Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (SDG 1)** must be advanced through different economic and social policies, including genuine land reforms. But where Governments restrict civil society and promote economic growth as an end in itself, elites can be insulated against worsening conditions for a major of people living in poverty, and against strong voices challenging corruption and mis-management of institutions important for poverty reduction. In these contexts, Governments miss the opportunity to learn from and advance innovative civil society efforts to address poverty.

Labour rights and social dialogue are key elements for the promotion of **decent work for all (SDG 8)**. The rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, which are enshrined in the indicators for Goal 8, are essential for workers. They enable them to take part in social dialogue, which gives them a voice in policy dialogue with governments and employers to ensure a sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth in which jobs are decent and rights are respected.

Civil society actors, working with people living in poverty and those who have been marginalized, tend to be on the front lines challenging growing inequalities and seeking to **reduce inequality within and between countries (SDG 10)**. There is strong evidence that more equitable access to the benefits derived from common land, natural resources, and other state resources are severely impacted in countries with narrowing civic space. Often it is Indigenous peoples, women,

minorities and rural populations who have lost control of critical economic assets that affect their livelihoods, culture and future prospects. Indeed, their ideas for alternative development paths that are more sustainable for the planet are not being listened to seriously.

The full engagement of civic actors is crucial if the global community is to *take **urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13)***. Around the world, millions of vulnerable people, especially rural and indigenous peoples, are already experiencing the impacts of climate change. Through measures to promote climate justice and a just transition, civil society is mobilizing citizens across the globe and is seeking to protect the livelihoods of billions of people exposed to drought, extreme weather events and permanent impacts of climate change. Young people are demanding transformative change and are not willing to accept current lack of ambition from many Governments.

Closing civic space reduces the influence of affected populations on policies to *end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture*, limiting progress in these areas (**SDG 2**). Land grabbing is more pronounced where the organized voices of small and subsistence farmers demanding just and equitable distribution of land are silenced and hunger more exacerbated where CSOs are unable to draw attention to crisis conditions for affected populations.

*Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls (SDG 5)* is jeopardized when women's rights organizations and women human rights defenders are harassed, stigmatized, and/or face various forms of gender-based violence. Violence and gender discrimination against women defenders are being used as a mechanism of social control and fear. Often women's rights organizations face administrative and hidden barriers in pushing for gender-equitable policies and programs. Their programs and services are being undermined and attacked by rising religious and political fundamentalisms. Women's access to economic resources, to sexual and reproductive rights, to social protection and decent labour conditions, must rely on strong and persistent voices advocating for women and girls' human rights.

Taking measures to reverse closing civic space and to end attacks on human rights defenders is a critical condition for Agenda 2030's promise to "leave no one behind" and to "reach the furthest first". As Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has recently asserted:

"We will not make progress towards achieving the new Sustainable Development Goals unless we can hear the voices of those who have been left behind. ... The protection of the civic space, and the empowerment of human rights defenders, needs to become a key priority for every principled global, regional and national actor."<sup>5</sup>

Civil society organizations are mobilizing across a range of national platforms and local CSOs, including community-based organizations, organizations focusing on environmental justice, trade unions, youth, women's rights, TGBTQ\* issues, disabilities, indigenous peoples and other key communities. They are building a broad-based movement for transformative change. They will be seeking to make their voices heard by world leaders in the lead-up to the UN Special Session on

Agenda 2030 on an inter-related agenda for civil society voice, eradicating poverty, women's empowerment, fighting inequality, climate action and environmental justice.<sup>6</sup> An enabling civic space is a crucial dimension of these efforts.

In Nairobi in December 2016, 161 countries and 56 organizations, under the umbrella of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, together recognized,

“the importance of civil society in sustainable development and in leaving no one behind, in engaging with government to uphold their commitments, and in being development actors in their own right. We are determined to reverse the trend of shrinking civic space wherever it is taking place and to build a positive environment for sustainable development, peaceful societies, accountable governance and achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.”<sup>7</sup>

The time to live up to these repeated promises is now. In 2015, all countries pledged that “*no one will be left behind*” and “*recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental ... [countries] will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.*”<sup>8</sup> UN Member States and all development actors must come together with positive policies and actions to enable civil society to deploy all of their capacities towards realizing the goals of Agenda 2030.

#### **4. An Urgent Action Agenda: Protecting and promoting an enabling civic space by all UN Member States and Multilateral Institutions**

This **Action Agenda** is informed by civil society proposals for an enabling environment for civil society organizations, by human rights approaches and standards in development practices, by principles for democratic ownership and effective development cooperation, and by the October 2018 [Global Call to Protect Human Rights Defenders Everywhere](#),<sup>9</sup> launched in Paris at the Human Rights Defenders Summit.<sup>10</sup>

##### **4.1 Take measures to protect and enable space for civil society, taking account of unique country contexts**

###### All Actors

**1. Take a comprehensive approach** Implement comprehensive measures across government for laws and regulations that enable civil society, for democratic accountability based on human rights and human rights standards, and for the full protection of human rights defenders and gender equality activists. Such measures taken together require a human rights-based approach to governance, development initiatives and development cooperation.<sup>11</sup>

**2. Ensure compliance with international human rights standards** Ensure that domestic laws on the rights to freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly are in full compliance in

law and in practice with international human rights standards. Advocate for the implementation of multilateral commitments, norms and standards relating to civic space.

**3. Review and redress legal and regulatory restrictions affecting civil society and human rights defenders** Review and redress legal and regulatory restrictions on civil society with measures to uphold their civic and political rights, including by prosecuting the rising number of crimes against civil society activists, journalists and other human rights activists, and avoiding impunity or state collusion with these crimes.

**4. Combat and prevent the use of hate speech** and discrimination within political campaigns and public policy discourse in society and by public officials.

**5. Support civil society-initiated monitoring** Support civil society-initiated efforts and various tools to monitor civic space, human rights and democratic accountability, and laws, regulations, and practices that enable civil society. Support the sharing of this information within countries, regionally and globally. Such efforts should be closely coordinated with local civil society and other actors.

**6. Support civil society collaboration across borders** Assist civic collaboration across borders, including the convening of meetings to share experiences and lessons and to formulate response strategies to situations of closing space.

**7. Expand civic space in multilateral bodies** Support specific measures to expand space for direct engagement by civil society in UN and other international organizations and multilateral negotiation processes.

**8. Expand civil society and human rights defenders' participation in multilateral mechanisms** Facilitate robust country-level civic engagement in multilateral mechanisms from all sectors and from marginalized communities, in such processes as the UN Universal Periodic Review, Open Government Partnership, and regional processes such as the African Commission on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights or the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

#### Providers of Development Cooperation

**9. Sustain political leadership on promoting civic space** Ensure committed political leadership at the highest level of government and provider institutions to safeguard the promotion of open civic space as an overarching and specific provider priority in development cooperation and in strategies for the realization of Agenda 2030 / SDGs.

**10. Screen security policies** Screen provider security policies and political decisions, such as anti-terrorism measures or measures governing the right to assembly, to ensure no negative impacts on human rights and on civil society partnerships.

**11. Review and promote enabling funding modalities** Review current funding modalities to facilitate flexible multi-year financial support for civil society, including a) institutional and programmatic support to CSO initiatives; b) deliberate measures that increase direct provider support to local civil society; c) creative avenues to support social movements; d) provisions for exceptional support in situations of emergency for civic organizations, human rights defenders, gender equality advocates facing sustained threats to their well-being;<sup>12</sup> and e) enabling financing regulations, terms and conditions, and audit requirements that promote equitable civil society partnerships and global solidarity.

**12. Be open to alternative channels for finance** Explore alternative strategies to ensure financial support to Human Rights Defenders and other marginalized sections of civil society in countries where access to external finance is facing increasing restrictions. Providers should make every effort to sustain and increase their support for national and local CSOs in countries where they have decided to limit their bilateral aid due to the prevalence of repression and persistent human rights violations.

**13. Undertake regular analysis of civic space for country development strategies** Prioritize space for civil society in guidelines for country development strategies, including programs to strengthen support for rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly in governance, gender equality, environment, labour rights, justice and media.

**14. Support training in regulatory implementation** Support demand-driven training and capacity development for country regulatory bodies affecting civil society.

**15. Strengthen CSO / human rights organizations' resilience in hostile environments** Empower CSO resilience in hostile environments, by supporting capacities to assess risks, including gender specific risks, by designing collective and individual responsive strategies, and by increasing awareness of rights and making available legal advice. Put in place measures for quick visas and travel expenses for at risk human rights defenders.

**16. Enforce human rights standards for foreign operations of businesses** Review on a regular basis the foreign operations of companies domiciled in provider countries for human rights violations, and provide significant sanctions to end these practices. Promote inclusivity and civil society input in business standard setting and monitoring processes, including rigorous mechanisms for complaints and redress where violence against civil society and human rights defenders is linked to extractive and other projects.

**17. Increase public awareness of CSO roles in development** Support civil society efforts to improve national trust in civic institutions and to raise public awareness of the positive roles of civil society in development and why civic space is important for these contributions, including the rights of minority groups, the empowerment of women and girls, and the various SDGs.



## 4.2 Promote inclusion and meaningful accountability in development practice

### All Actors

**1. Promote and enable civic space as a pre-condition for achieving the SDGs** Build and promote the case, in the context of SDG17 for global partnerships, for civic space as a pre-condition for achieving the other SDGs, including poverty eradication, ending hunger, promoting decent work, empowering women and girls, reducing inequality and taking concerted measures in response to widening impacts of climate change. Promote and take all necessary measures to enable and maximize civil society roles and contributions in realizing these critical SDGs.

**2. Uphold citizens' right to initiative** Uphold and promote the right to initiative for all citizens, rooted in human rights standards for freedoms of association, of expression and of political participation, and in the right to peaceful assembly.

**3. Development national SDG plans that reach all excluded groups** Establish inclusive, transparent and accountable processes for ensuring that national SDG and development plans reach all excluded groups, including through regular national and/or sub-national dialogues and accessible mechanisms to hold service providers to account.

**4. Assess conditions and implement plans with civil society for those "furthest behind"** Assess conditions, implement related plans, and report progress for all those considered "furthest behind" – i.e. people living in poverty and all groups otherwise marginalized – through systematic collaboration and constructive partnerships with closely related civil society actors, in all country SDG strategies and plans, and as a key benchmark for advancing the SDGs.

**5. Undertake inclusive processes for gender-based budgeting** Work with women's rights organizations to institutionalize gender based budget analysis and allocate national and local budgets in ways that address gender equality issues in the implementation of development priorities for the SDGs.

**6. Encourage inclusive multi-stakeholder collaboration** Support inclusive demand-driven multi-stakeholder collaboration with civil society, based on genuine interest on the part of all stakeholders, to build trust across sectors and enhance effective implementation of SDG priorities.

### Providers of Development Cooperation

**7. Analyze roles of civil society in achievement of SDGs in providers' countries of priority** Invest in collaborative and sustained analysis of the roles of civil society in supporting the achievement of SDGs in providers' countries of priority for development cooperation. Such measures include conflict-sensitivity, risk and vulnerability analysis, identifying the impact of measures that restrict civic space on CSO roles as development actors, and setting out appropriate responses by the provider of development cooperation.

**8. Increase providers' support for marginalized communities** Increase support for projects, organizations and communities that focus on marginalized groups, which promote their self-development, their participation in decision making at all levels, and which raise awareness of their rights. Increase all forms of support for feminist and women's rights organizations and gender-equality focused groups at all levels, as a critical condition for mainstreaming gender equality in provider programs.

**9. Increased support for CSO coalitions and collaboration on civic space for excluded groups** Increase and sustain support for CSO coalitions at all levels. They play essential roles in supporting excluded communities and groups to engage directly with governments to seek respect for their rights.

**10. Assess and promote gender equality and women and girls empowerment in all SDG initiatives** Assess country conditions for gender equality and women and girls empowerment in all SDG and development initiatives, in collaboration with women's rights organizations and Women Human Rights Defenders.

**11. Assess impact of climate change measures on vulnerable populations** Undertake detailed assessments of the social impact of measures to adapt and mitigate climate change to ensure they do not exacerbate the impoverishment of vulnerable populations, while giving priority to such populations, their communities and organizations, in ramped-up adaptation finance.

### **4.3 Implement and respect democratic ownership for inclusive SDG delivery**

#### All Actors

**1. Strengthen mechanisms for inclusive policy dialogue** Strengthen mechanisms for inclusive policy dialogue and mutual accountability in development cooperation, institutionalizing the direct participation of civil society from the local to the national. Dialogue should be iterative, timely, structured for the exchange of views, transparent, and focused on important and contested issues, with accountability for the outcomes of dialogue.

**2. Strengthening national accountability institutions** Support and strengthen a range of independent country accountability mechanisms including parliament, human rights institutions, courts, media and ombudspersons. Ensure communities and individuals have access to effective grievance mechanisms, including protection against sexual violence. Among these mechanisms should be a national focal point to champion the rights of civil society.

**3. Implement inclusive governance mechanisms relating to SDG plans and implementation** Implement governance mechanisms open to all marginalized groups at all levels respecting the implementation, accountability, monitoring and regular reporting of progress for development and SDG plans.

**4. Implement effective measures for access to information** Ensure timely and easy access to relevant information from all stakeholders, including multilateral development banks regarding country SDG priorities and development plans, implementation and assessment, open to all stakeholders – civil society and peoples organizations, parliamentarians, and citizens – in both provider and partner countries.

**5. Nurture CSO accountability to constituencies** Support and nurture CSO accountability to constituencies and communities by a) encouraging effective and robust voluntary CSO self-regulatory initiatives; b) structuring provider accountability in ways that incentivize community accountability; c) supporting efforts to reduce dependencies on external funding; and d) supporting an expanded outreach to communities.

#### Providers of Development Cooperation

**6. Support inclusive processes for policy development and implementation** Encourage reform processes that prioritize inclusive and cross-sectoral approaches to policy development, whereby civil society has the opportunity to work with government / parliamentarians early in the policy process.

**7. Provide demand-driven technical support to CSOs for policy dialogue** Ensure that domestic CSOs engaged in policy dialogue receive appropriate institutional and technical assistance, on a demand basis, to enable effective participation.

**8. Respect and implement free, prior and informed consent in development practice** Ensure all investment plans by financial institutions adopt effective requirements for the protection of human rights, respecting the right to free, prior and informed consent for Indigenous Peoples, and for the facilitation of full participation of all affected populations, including freedom of association and collective bargaining for workers.

#### **4.4 Take urgent and concerted action to challenge major human rights violations<sup>13</sup>**

##### All Actors

**1. Give priority to the challenges facing Human Rights Defenders** Acknowledge and give priority to the complex challenges faced by Human Rights Defenders, affected by discrimination, gender, gender-identity and sexual orientation, disability, location, and migratory status, and ensure that they can act in an environment free from violence and discrimination.

**2. Pay special attention to human rights challenges of marginalized groups and communities** Acknowledge and give priority to the particular human rights challenges facing peoples' organizations, religious and racial minorities, women's rights organizations, trade unions, Indigenous peoples, and community-based environmentalists.

**3. Take all measures to protect and promote the safety and interests of women and Women Human Rights Defenders** Address impunity and lack of access to justice for women; support women affected by the structural causes of inequalities and violence; ensure that Women Human Rights Defenders can work free of discrimination, intimidation and gender-based violence; and support locally-led strategies for empowering women and girls.

**4. Unequivocally condemn attacks on Human Rights Defenders** Publicly and unequivocally condemn physical and psychological attacks, threats and intimidation against all Human Rights Defenders without discrimination, and refrain from using language that stigmatizes, abuses, disparages or discriminates against them. Adopt all necessary measures to address the root causes of threats and attacks against Human Rights Defenders, including holding companies to account where they are responsible or complicit in such attacks. End impunity for such attacks and unconditionally release all detained Human Rights Defenders and all prisoners of conscience.

**5. Implement national protection mechanisms** Establish, with the participation of Human Rights Defenders and CSOs, national protection mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders at risk, with gender sensitive and intersectional approaches, and adequate resources.

**6. Deter reprisals for engagement with international human rights bodies** Take all necessary measures to prevent and deter acts of intimidation and reprisals against Human Rights Defenders in relation to communications and interactions with international human rights bodies.

#### Providers of Development Cooperation

**7. Maintain regular contacts with human rights organizations** Support Human Rights Defenders through ongoing contact with local human rights organizations.

**8. Adopt protocols for quick responses to threats to Human Rights Defenders** Adopt protocols for responding to threats and attacks against Human Rights Defenders in the context of development activities, including close consultation with the targets of such threats, and taking advantage of and supporting the protection experiences that the defenders themselves and their communities are developing at the local level.

**9. Take all necessary public and discreet diplomatic measures** Implement public and discreet diplomatic measures when requested by domestic civil society and human rights actors, and in emergency situations guarantee protection of individuals. States should ensure regular and adequate training for diplomatic representatives on these issues.

**10. Increase funding for human rights protection** Increase funding for Human Rights Defenders protection and the protection of civic space without undermining funding for the work of human rights organizations and other CSOs.

**11. Review and control trade in surveillance technology** Regulate the sale, supply and export of dual-use items such as surveillance and cyber-surveillance technology and software, restricting trade in these goods to countries where their use may lead to human rights violations.

**12. Effective measures against companies/states that are responsible for / complicit in reprisals against human rights defenders** Take effective measures to sanction companies or states that use reprisals and restrictions against organizations and human rights defenders in countries where they have investments to advance their economic interests.

This **Action Agenda** sets forth a range of practical measures that all Member States and International Organizations can implement. Taken as a whole, its implementation would dramatically alter conditions facing thousands of Civil Society Organizations and Human Rights Defenders around the world and significantly advance Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

Civil society acknowledges and welcomes many current initiatives on the part of some governments and providers of development cooperation. We call upon the friends and allies of civil society to join with us to launch pro-active and collaborative political leadership to implement and promote this Agenda with all Member States and Development Stakeholders.

Civil Society is fully committed to the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030. But our efforts will be in vain, if we cannot count on new measures and actions at local, national, regional and global level to reverse the debilitating trends in shrinking and closing civic space.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This *Action Agenda* draws from a number of recent reviews of conditions facing civil society and proposals for action, in the context of commitments to implement Agenda 2030. Human Rights Defenders World Summit, 2018, *Action Plan*, accessed at <https://hrdworldsummit.org/action-plan/>; “We’ve Had Enough: A Call to Action to Protect Women Human Rights Defenders & their Communities,” November 2018, accessed at <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/2018/11/29/weve-had-enough-a-call-to-action-to-protect-women-human-rights-defenders-their-communities/>; International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, *Effective Donor Responses to the Challenge of Closing Civic Space*, May 2018, accessed at <http://www.icnl.org/news/2018/Effective%20donor%20responses%20FINAL%201%20May%202018.pdf>; ACT Alliance / IDS, Naomi Hussein et al., *Development needs civil society. The implications of civic space for the SDGs* (forthcoming May 2019); Oxfam International, *Space to be Heard: Mobilizing the Power of People to Reshape Civic Space*, July 2018, accessed at <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/space-to-be-heard-mobilizing-the-power-of-people-to-reshape-civic-space-620523>; CIVICUS Monitor Tracking Civic Space at <https://monitor.civicus.org/>; and Brian Tomlinson, “Implementing a Human Rights Based Approach: Lessons from the experience of providers’ international assistance,” in CPDE, *Policy Research on the Implementation of a Human Rights Based Approach in Development Partnerships*, IBON Institute, January 2018, accessed at <http://www.csopartnership.org/edc-resources-hrba>.

<sup>2</sup> In the words of the Human Rights Defenders World Summit 2018 Action Plan: “At the root of this rhetoric lies a dangerous presumption that some people are less human than others. This ‘politics of demonization’ has witnessed countries long committed to human rights, increasingly turning their backs on the very idea of human rights.” [1]

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<sup>3</sup> Author's calculation based on a review of the CIVICUS Monitor, December 2018, with population statistics from the World Bank for 2016. See <https://monitor.civicus.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> This section draws from the evidence and analysis of ACT Alliance / ISD, *op. cit.*, (forthcoming), *op. cit.* on the relationship between closing civic space and the lack of progress for several SDGs under review by the study.

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Bachelet, Address to the Human Rights Defenders World Summit, Paris, 29 October 2018, accessed at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23794&LangID=E>

<sup>6</sup> See for example the mobilization for a Peoples Movement for a Just and Sustainable World initiated by the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, CIVICUS, ActionAid, Oxfam, Amnesty International, Global Citizen, ONE, 350org, World Wildlife Fund, as well as faith groups and other regional and national platforms, through Action for Sustainable Development at <https://action4sd.org/>.

<sup>7</sup> Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, Nairobi Outcome Document, December 2016, paragraph 18, accessed at <http://effectivecooperation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/OutcomeDocumentEnglish.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> *Transforming our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015, accessed at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://hrdworldsummit.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> The premise of this **Action Agenda** is that implementation of these measures for civic space is an essential pre-condition for the successful implementation of a range of actions for the realization of specific SDGs and targets, irrespective of the sector. For a comprehensive civil society approach to Agenda 2030, civil society campaigns for the SDGs, and action for climate justice, see *Action for Sustainable Development* (<https://action4sd.org/>), *Climate Action Network International* (<http://www.climatenetwork.org/>), the *Global Call to Action Against Poverty* (<http://www.whiteband.org/>), and *Together 2030* (<https://www.together2030.org/>).

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of human rights based approaches in development see CPDE and IBON, *Policy Research on the Implementation of a Human-Rights-Based Approach in Development Partnerships*, January 2018, accessed at <http://www.csopartnership.org/edc-resources-hrba> and Brian Tomlinson, "Implementing a Human Rights Based Approach: Lessons from the experience of providers' international assistance," in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> For example, the Lifeline Assistance Fund for Embattled Civil Society Organizations accessed at <https://www.csolifeline.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> This section in particular is informed by the *Action Plan* adopted by the Human Rights Defenders World Summit, 2018, *op. cit.* and "We've Had Enough: A Call to Action to Protect Women Human Rights Defenders & their Communities," *op. cit.* For substantial elaboration of measures to protect and promote human rights defenders see this Action Plan.