

The Belgrade Call to Action

**A Civil Society Call to Stand Together to
Defend Peoples' Voices for a Just and Sustainable World**

Reverse the Closing and Shrinking Space for Civil Society

**Stop the Increasing Attacks on Human Rights Defenders and the Undermining
of Democratic Participation**

Renew the Prospects for an Inclusive Agenda 2030 and the Full Realization of the SDGs

Launched in Belgrade, April 8, 2019

We, leaders from Global Civil Society, coming from civil society organizations, activists and campaigners from all parts of the World, on this day in Belgrade call on international and national civil society to stand together and declare aloud: **Enough is enough! Stop the relentless attacks on civil society, social leaders and human rights defenders!**

The global community is currently moving down a path that will leave hundreds of millions of people behind; **real and transformative progress towards achieving the systemic changes for people and planet promised by Agenda 2030 will not be possible** without a fully engaged civil society and people's genuine participation through their organizations and communities.

It is deeply troubling that more than eighty percent (80%) of the world's population --- 6 billion people living in 111 countries --- face a situation where either the conditions are closed for civil society (23 countries), or where civil society is highly repressed (35 countries), or where civil society faces substantial legal and political obstacles (53 countries). [CIVICUS Civil Society Monitor] **In these countries there is little chance for a fully engaged and mobilized civil society**, which is an essential foundation for democracy, human rights safeguards, and progress on the SDGs and for a transformative Agenda 2030.

We urge all Member States of the United Nations to take concrete urgent action to reverse these trends.

Despite rhetorical promises of action by many Member States to "reverse the trend of shrinking civic space wherever it is taking place," **attacks on CSOs, social leaders and human rights defenders continue unabated.** [Nairobi Outcome Document, Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation]

Civic actors across many sectors are being threatened, persecuted and killed - including those supporting and representing rural communities, Indigenous peoples, journalists, trade unions, women's rights activists, LGBTQ* activists, youth, people living with disabilities and environmentalists. They are being harassed through arbitrary arrest, detention, the targeted use of legal and regulatory measures and restrictions on CSO finances. Others are deliberately discredited as criminals or "foreign agents." Civic leaders are being physically harmed, with women's human rights defenders facing sexual harassment and abuse. All because they seek to protect peoples' human rights, while promoting democratic participation on issues that affect their lives.

Real and transformative progress, leaving no one behind, in achieving core SDGs - including eradicating poverty (SDG1), eliminating hunger (SDG2), addressing gender and all forms of inequality (SDG5), reducing inequalities (SDG10), promoting decent work and sustainable livelihoods for all (SDG8), and taking action for climate justice and a just transition (SDG13) - will not be possible without a fully engaged civil society and

population. The strengths of civil society are its diversity, its rootedness in communities and territories, its direct development experience, and its capacities for public engagement.

SDG 16, for peace, justice and effective institutions, is well beyond reach, in places where civic space is closed and repressed, where civil society cannot freely act with poor and marginalized populations to contribute to and safeguard accountable and inclusive institutions.

The time for rhetoric and noble international statements and declarations is over. **The agenda is urgent, and the time to act is now.** Practical action is possible. We cannot wait until there is little space for CSOs and their leaders, for human rights activists and for peoples' voices and actions!

This **Belgrade Call to Action** is calling for specific commitments and actions, appropriate to each country, with an overarching reference in the **Political Declaration of the 2019 High Level Political Forum**, and with a timetable by which Member States can be held accountable.

We call on all Member States, meeting in September 2019:

1. **To take concrete steps to protect and enable space for civil society**, including enabling laws and regulations, democratic accountability based on human rights norms and human rights standards, and the full protection of civil society under attack - such as social leaders, human rights defenders and gender equality activists.
2. **To embed inclusion and meaningful accountability to people** in development practices.
3. **To implement and respect democratic country ownership** of national development plans and implement transparency and accountability for inclusive SDG delivery.
4. **To lead by example with concerted action** to challenge major human rights violations, including deteriorating conditions facing peoples' organizations, trade unions, women's rights organizations, indigenous peoples, and community-based environmentalists, among many others.
5. **To recognise the importance of the inter-connected themes in achieving Agenda 2030** — civil society voice, eradicating poverty, women's empowerment, fighting inequality, decent work, climate action and environmental justice.

Implementing an **Action Agenda** based on these commitments will require robust, pro-active and collaborative political leadership on the part of all Member States, Development Stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations.

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

We commit to raise these urgent concerns and demand action at all inter-governmental and preparatory meetings as the international community reviews progress in Agenda 2030 in the coming months and years.

This **Call to Action**, with an accompanying **Action Agenda**, is being launched simultaneously in countries around the world to draw attention to its urgency.

Belgrade

April 8, 2019

Endorsing Organizations

The **Belgrade Call to Action** is currently endorsed by 146 civil society organizations from more than 60 countries worldwide. These organizations include major International NGOs, Regional and National CSOs from many diverse sectors - education, human rights, health, social development, climate and environment, among others.

Accountability Now	Germany
Act Alliance	Global
Action for Humanity and Social Progress	India
Action for Sustainable Development	United Kingdom
ActionAid	Global
AEJT- BENIN	Benin
African Monitoring Observatory on Climate, Waters, Earth, and Cultures (AMOClimWEC)	Benin
Afrika Youth Movement	Africa
AfroLeadership	Cameroon
AFVMC Assistance to Families and Victims of Clandestine Migrations	Cameroon
AidWatch Canada	Canada
Alliance Sud	Switzerland
Amnesty International	Global
ANND	Morocco
Arkemtria Social	Mexico
Asia Democracy Network (ADN)	Korea
Asian Civil Society Platform for Sustainable Development	Asia
Association Mauritanienne pour la Transparence et le Développement (ATED)	Mauritania
AWHES	Pakistan
Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN)	Balkans
BEST	China
Brot für die Welt	Germany
Burundi Child Rights Association	Burundi
Canadian Council for International Cooperation	Canada
CareMe E-clinic	Rwanda
Center for Youth Activism	Macedonia
Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education	Kenya
Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur	India
Civic Initiatives	Serbia
Civica Mobilitas	Macedonia
CIVICUS	South Africa
Civil Citizen	United States
Civil Society Advocates	Cyprus
Civil Society in Development	Denmark
Civil Society Initiative	Iraq
Civil Society Partnership for Effective Development	Philippines
Civil Society Reference Group	Kenya

Confederación Colombiana de ONG (CCONG)	Colombia
Constitution and Reform Education Consortium	Kenya
Corruption Brakes Crusade (COBRA)	Uganda
Center for Promotion of Civil Society (CPCD)	Bosnia And Herzegovina
Croatian Platform for International Citizen Solidarity	Croatia
CSYM HUDUMA- Christian Spiritual Youth Ministry	Tanzania
Defend Defenders	Switzerland
Diakonia	Sweden
Dynamics OSCAF	Francophone
Dytech	Africa
Ethiopia Civil Society Forum	Zambia
European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW)	Ethiopia
European Women's Lobby	Europe
femLINKpacific	Europe
FemPlatz	Pacific
FOND	Serbia
Fondation Bill Clinton Pour la Paix FBCP	Romania
Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan	DRC
Forus	Kyrgyzstan
Foundation OpenSociety Macedonia	Global
Freedom House	Macedonia
Front Line Defenders	United States
Fundacion Cambia tu Calle	Ireland
Geospatial Tanzania	Chile
Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)	Tanzania
Global Campaign for Education	Global
Global Peace Chain Mauritius	Global
Global Responsibility	Mauritius
Globalt Fokus	Austria
Greenpeace	Denmark
Group Come Out	Global
Hui E! Community Aotearoa	Serbia
IBON Foundation	New Zealand
Igarape	Philippines
Impulse Center	Brazil
Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self Determination & Liberation	Azerbaijan
Individuell Manniskohjapl	Philippines
Instituto de Comunicacion y Desarrollo	Sweden
Inter Pares	Uruguay
Interaction	Canada
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law	United States
International Women's Alliance	United States
International Youth Alliance	Global
INTRAC	Bulgaria
	United Kingdom

Iraq Al-Amal Association	Iraq
Just Associates	United States
Just Forests	Ireland
Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF)	Kosovo
Kenya Community Development Foundation	Kenya
Light for the World	United States
Michael Imodu National Institute for Labour Studies	Nigeria
Movement towards education and youth empowerment	Sierra Leone
MPAP	Pakistan
Multipolar	Argentina
NGO Collective for Food Security and Rural Development (COSADER)	Cameroon
NGO Nash Vek	Kyrgyzstan
Nigeria Network of NGOs	Nigeria
Norwegian Peoples Aid	Norway
Olive Charitable Trust	Uganda
PAO	Iraq
Partners Albania	Albania
PASCI B	Benin
Peoples Coalition on Food Sovereignty	Philippines
PHE Ethiopia Consortium	Ethiopia
PIANGO	Pacific
PLAN International	Global
Platforme des Femmes Leaders du Mali	Mali
Poverty Eradication Network	Kenya
Promo-Lex Association	Moldova
Public Space Network	Kenya
Queer Cypress Association	Cyprus
RACI	Argentina
Reality of Aid Africa	Kenya
SPEDYA-Africa	Ghana
Strategies for Peace, Education, Research & Development	Kenya
Struggle to Economize Future Environment (SEFE)	Cameroon
Success Capital Organisation	Southern Africa
TAG-A-LIFE International	Zimbabwe
TECHO	Latin America
The Danish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights	Denmark
The East African Sexual Health & Rights Initiative (UHA)	Kenya
The IREDE Foundation	Nigeria
Together First	United Kingdom
Trócaire	Ireland
Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development	Uganda
Uganda Debt Network	Uganda
Uganda National NGO forum	Uganda
Volunteer Activists	Netherlands
Warande Advisory	Kenya

West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
Womenkind Worldwide	United Kingdom
World Council of Churches	Global
World Movement of Democracies	United States
World Vision Albania	Albania
World Wide Fund for Nature /WWF	Global
YUVA	Turkey
Grate ne Sherbim Publik (WPS Albania)	Albania
NGO Federation of Nepal	Nepal
Femmes et Enfants en Détresse (FEED-NIGER)	Niger
Albanian Imaging Technician Association (AITA)	Albania
Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS)	India
WWF Adria	Croatia
Development Wheel	Bangladesh
New Vision	Albania
National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations of Liberia (NSACCSOL)	Liberia
Rivers without Boundaries Coalition	Mongolia
Karapatan Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights	Philippines