



Embargoed: 0800 GMT, Monday, 29 April 2013

Global development efforts undermined by rising threat to civil society

International development efforts are being undermined by the rising tide of legal restrictions, funding cuts and violence faced by civil society around the world, according to a new report from [CIVICUS](#), the global civil society alliance.

The new report - *The State of Civil Society 2013* - catalogues the experiences of activists and non-governmental organisations across the world. It concludes that the optimism within civil society of 2012 has evaporated.

The report argues that new post-2015 international development goals should include an aim of improving the 'enabling environment' for civil society, so that other goals of poverty reduction, conflict prevention and inequality are not undermined.

The report, which draws on around 50 expert contributions from around the world, also shows that while civil society is increasingly using social media to mobilise citizen action and scrutinise governments, restrictions on websites and social media are increasingly being used as tools to keep citizens in the dark. The report shows that around a third of all internet users globally have experienced some kind of national-level restriction on their freedom to communicate, with over 45 states, most notably China, having imposed restrictions of some kind.

The report says that the euphoria and positivity of the Arab Spring has been lost amid the chaos, corruption and clampdowns on civil society that have ensued in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. It shows that conditions for civil society have become worse in many parts of the world over the last year, including:

- Attacks on activists continue, including the killing of 75 trade unionists around the world (with Latin American countries such as **Colombia** of most concern) and some 800 cases of attacks against writers documented in 108 countries.
- Imprisonment of activists for criticising official policies in countries such as **Bahrain, Cambodia** and **Ethiopia**.
- Reprisals on activists from **Bahrain** and **Sri Lanka** who took part in the Human Rights Council session in Geneva on their return home.
- Regressive laws restricting civil society that place new barriers to the right to peaceful assembly in **Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Canada, Malaysia** and **Russia**, and that give the state power to declare a civil society organisation unlawful in **Kenya, Tanzania** and **Uganda**.
- Restrictions on foreign funding of civil society organisations in countries such as **Bangladesh** and **Russia**.
- Funding cuts to civil society organisations that support international development in many donor countries such as **Canada, the Netherlands** and **New Zealand**.
- New restrictions on gay rights activists in many countries in countries such as **Lithuania**,

Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.

Amidst the challenges facing civil society, the report also highlights good practices around the world and reasons for optimism. Civil society continues to benefit from relatively high levels of public trust - consistently scoring higher in major surveys than governments, companies or the media – and civil society organisations are finding innovative ways of tackling intractable social problems.

Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, Secretary General of CIVICUS said: “Our report catalogues a litany of threats to civil society, from outright violence against civic leaders to legal restrictions on civil society organisations to dramatic funding cuts.

“As we head towards new global development goals, if more is not done to promote an enabling environment for civil society, efforts to reduce poverty, tackle inequality and resolve conflict will be fatally undermined.”

“New technologies are making it easier to access information, connect with other like-minded people, and mobilise large numbers of people. But restrictions on websites and social media are increasingly being used as tools to keep citizens in the dark and prevent them from scrutinising corruption.”

In his foreword to the report, **Jay Naidoo**, activist and former South African Minister, said: “Today, as we stand at the edge of a precipice, we see a growing ferment in the world. It is this alienation and disconnect between leaders and citizens that has led people to taking to the streets; from the historic Arab Spring to fierce student battles for free education in Chile and Quebec, to the anti-corruption battles in India and the deadly struggle for a decent wage of the Marikana mineworkers in South Africa.”

In her foreword to the report, **Catherine Ashton**, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said: “A vibrant and independent civil society is an essential ingredient of effective and stable democracy. It is precisely because of the importance of civil society to European foreign policy that I am growing increasingly concerned about the efforts of some states to bar, constrict, or control the work of NGOs. In too many cases, the voices of civil society are being stifled and the space in which they can express their views is shrinking.”

Notes to editor:

1. **CIVICUS**: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is a global alliance of civil society. Founded in 1993 and headquartered in Johannesburg, CIVICUS is dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens’ freedom of association are challenged. CIVICUS has more than 1000 members and partners in more than 100 countries. For more information, go to www.civicus.org
2. The **State of Civil Society Report** is the annual flagship publication of CIVICUS. The 350-page report includes nearly 50 contributions from experts and civil society leaders from around the world. Alongside the report, CIVICUS is publishing a draft methodology for an Enabling Environment Index (EEI) that seeks to measure how well countries around the world are doing on creating positive conditions for civil society. The report and supporting documents will be available online from 0800 GMT, Monday, 29 April at <http://socs.civicus.org>.
3. In recent years, there have been several **international commitments** reaffirming the centrality of a vibrant civil society to promoting democracy and development. For example, in the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation 160 countries and territories endorsed an

agreement to implement fully respective commitments to enable civil society organisations to exercise their independent role as development actors, with a particular focus on an enabling environment. In March 2013, some 70 UN Member States supported a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council that reaffirms their commitments to creating conditions that protect Human Rights Defenders.

4. **Launch event.** The report will be officially launched at CIVICUS House (24 Gwigwi Mwerbi Street, Newtown, Johannesburg, South Africa) at 10.00am local time on Monday, 29 April 2013. [Map](#)

Contacts:

Kiva LaTouché, kiva.latouche@civicus.org, Tel: +27 11 833 5959, Mobile: +27 76 032 2992
Mandeep Tiwana. Mandeep.tiwana@civicus.org Tel: +27 11 8335959, Mobile: +27 72505 0557

ENDS



CIVICUS House, 24 Gwigwi Mrwebi Street, Newtown, Johannesburg, 2001, South Africa
PO Box 933, Southdale, Johannesburg, 2135, South Africa
tel +27 11 833-5959 | **fax** +27 11 833-7997 | **email** info@civicus.org