



COMMUNITY
OF DEMOCRACIES

Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society

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The Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society fosters collaboration among states, civil society and international organizations to counter the backlash and shrinking of space that citizens and civil society organizations face around the world. By combining the diplomatic influence of democratic states, the knowledge and tools of civil society organizations with the collective power of the broader democratic community, the Working Group stimulates coordinated diplomatic action to encourage governments to amend restrictive laws that stifle citizens' voices.

CIVIL SOCIETY: THE ENGINE OF DEMOCRACY

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in fostering inclusive and democratic societies. They advocate on behalf and represent the diverse interests of the population, including its most marginalized and vulnerable groups, and can enhance a government's awareness and understanding of the needs of its people.

Over the last decade, global trends show that CSOs are facing an increasing number of threats in many countries. A number of states are introducing draconian laws that undermine civil society's independence, restrict access to funding and limit their ability to express themselves, assemble and associate in addition to onerous registration and reporting requirements. Some civil society actors, such as human rights defenders, LGBTI activists or women's rights groups, are also increasingly being harassed or intimidated while doing work to promote human rights.

Such laws reject the principles of civic participation and the belief that citizens should have a say in the decisions that affect them.

The Working Group has been effective in coordinating diplomatic actions to counter legislation that run contrary to international human rights laws. As a way to guarantee citizens the right to organize themselves and promote shared values, the Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society engages via diplomatic means at international bodies, such as the United Nations and provides technical assistance activities to prevent the adoption of laws that target civil society.

AREAS OF WORK

The Working Group achieves its objectives through the following areas of work:

Quiet Diplomacy: Enabling civil society space through diplomatic tools, such as the call for action, which serves as an early warning mechanism to facilitate information sharing and coordinate diplomatic action by concerned international partners.

Technical Assistance: Providing technical assistance (i.e. legal and constitutional drafting expertise) to governments interested in ensuring that their laws create a positive, enabling environment for civil society.

Outreach and Events: Seeking opportunities to raise the issue of restricting civil society at regional and multilateral fora, including the Community of Democracies, UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly as well as other international events.



MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION



Canada has chaired the group since its inception in 2009.

The Working Group is made up of 14 governments (Botswana, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Estonia, Denmark, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania and the United States) and the European Union.

Five civil society organizations with expertise in laws governing civil society (Article 19, CIVICUS, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, World Movement for Democracy and Act Alliance), and three advisory organizations (UNDP, the UK Charity Commission and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association) are also members.

For further information about the Working Group, please contact the Permanent Secretariat at WGCivilSociety@community-democracies.org

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES

The Community of Democracies is an intergovernmental organization that drives the global democratic agenda through common action.

Since its establishment in 2000, the Community has brought the world's democracies together to advance the democratic principles and promote the standards enshrined in the Warsaw Declaration Toward a Community of Democracies that was signed by 106 countries.

