

CIVIL SOCIETY STANDARDS

The Governing Council (GC) of the Community of Democracies (CoD), recalling the commitment to support civil society in the Warsaw Declaration and in the statements of various Ministerial meetings (the Seoul Plan of Action, the Santiago Commitment, and the Bamako Consensus) reaffirms its belief in the valuable role of civil society in all aspects of democratic governance and development.

Recognizing the importance of a robust civic space and an enabled and empowered civil society, the GC plans to coordinate actions by the member states of CD to promote and foster protection of civil society at home and abroad in the face of restrictions on civil society and civic space around the world. We affirm that the strength and vibrancy of democratic nations depend on a robust civic space, active civil society, and meaningful consultation between governments and civil society to promote peace, prosperity, national development, and the well-being of all people. We note our deep concern that many governments are imposing restrictions on civic space, especially on the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, both online and offline, and that are incompatible with democratic principles.

The member governments of the GC are committed to work together to enhance civil society participation and to respond to growing restrictions on civic space, in law and practice, that undermine civil society's ability to perform its crucial role.

- We seek to ensure effective coordination of the multiple efforts already underway toward this end, including through the U.N. system, and to enhance our support for these existing mechanisms in order to protect and strengthen civil society.
- We strongly support efforts to protect civic space undertaken by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council through its periodic review process, as well as by relevant U.N. Special Rapporteurs, as well as other relevant UN and regional special procedures.
- We will lead by example and advocate to promote laws, policy decisions, and practices that foster enabling civic space consistent with international legal obligations, and oppose legislation, policies and practices that unduly impede civil society.
- In support of the principles above, we will endeavor to engage with civil society on how to protect, promote, enable and engage with civil society.

- We also intend to share best practices in supporting and enabling civic space and engaging with civil society as dialogue partners.
- We will endeavor to undertake diplomatic and coordinated action whenever necessary to support civil society space in countries where it is under threat, and to defend the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, without discrimination of any kind, including through the Working Group on Freedom of Expression and the Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society.
- We also intend to work to develop new and innovative ways of providing technical, financial, and logistical support to promote and protect the right of all to freely associate, in order to be able to meaningfully engage with government and effectively participate in processes to improve the well-being of their countries.

Throughout all of these efforts, the GC and the member states are to continue to engage with representatives of civil society and other stakeholders, including by consulting with the International Steering Committee representing the Civil Society Pillar of the CD, to help us understand and respond to the challenges they confront.

We are determined to remain seized of this issue. We intend to work in concert over the coming years to ensure a robust, effective international response to the proliferation of restrictions being placed on civil society. We call on representatives of civil society, national human rights institutions, the philanthropic community, the private sector, multilateral bodies, and other governments to partner with us in supporting and defending civil society.

Notably, we plan to work to distill principles and develop best practices on how governments should relate to civil society and enable robust civic space and seek broad support for such guidance. We will explore how to strengthen the promotion and protection of rights enabling civic space that are enshrined in what is often referred to as “the International Bill of Human Rights” (encompassing the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) as well as in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders).