

Joint Statement of Members of the Community of Democracies' Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society (WG EPCS)

Members of the Community of Democracies' Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society call attention to the dramatically declining civic space in Tanzania and the decreasing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Members of the Working Group note with great concern the continued arrests of political opposition leaders, harassment and detention of journalists, the shutdown of independent news outlets, disbarment of lawyers, the repression of the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and threats to freedom of expression for members of civil society. This is in addition to the passage of legislation since 2015, and particularly since 2019, that hinders the ability of all political parties and civil society to operate.

This deterioration of civic space is all the more troubling in light of the upcoming national elections on October 28. Tanzania's history of peaceful multi-party elections stretching back 25 years has made it a model on the continent; but recent events, including conduct in the 2015 general election and more recently the 2019 local elections, undermine this record. Tanzania now has an opportunity to demonstrate a renewed commitment to democracy by organizing and following through on free and fair elections in 2020.

To this end, it is vital that the Government enable all members of civil society, including political parties, independent journalists, lawyers, religious leaders, nongovernmental organizations, women, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI and other persons in vulnerable situations, to operate freely and carry out their various activities, including observation of elections, civic education, and advocacy, without hindrance. In addition, to address challenges such as the global struggle against COVID-19, corruption, food security, and economic development, the Government must work collaboratively with civil society and ensure the free flow of and access to information.

We call on the Government of Tanzania to respect freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, both offline and online, and to hold free and fair elections. We also urge the Government of Tanzania to honor its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and all other human rights obligations and commitments.

WG EPCS Member Signatories: United States, IFEX, CIVICUS