



European Center for  
Not-for-Profit Law

**Oral statement**  
**UN Human Rights Council – 44<sup>th</sup> Session**  
**Item 2: Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights**  
**2 July 2020**  
**Delivered by Lisa Majumdar on behalf of CIVICUS, ICNL, ECNL, Article 19 and the World**  
**Movement for Democracy**

Madame High Commissioner,

Thank you for your timely report. This is a statement on behalf of the Civic Space Initiative, including CIVICUS, Article 19, ICNL, ECNL and the World Movement for Democracy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated existing challenges to civic freedoms.

The CIVICUS Monitor shows that it has exacerbated the ongoing use of restrictive laws; restrictions on funding; reprisals, attacks and acts of intimidation; the ongoing violent repression of mass mobilisations for change; and the wilful exclusion of civil society from decision making processes. It has provided cover for executive overreach and spurred new growth in the use of surveillance technologies.

According to ICNL-ECNL's [Civic Freedom Tracker](#), at least 145 countries have enacted 280 measures in response to COVID that further affect civic freedoms and human rights.

But it has also revealed the centrality of civil society in crisis response: in providing critical information and services to communities, running feeding schemes and health screenings, providing aid and monitoring abuses.

Civil society has again proved itself to be an integral stakeholder. And time of crisis is a time of opportunity. As has been so often said, this is the time to build back better.

We have seen many examples of good practice to draw on. Several States are developing specialised online platforms for better consultation on emergency measures. Others are establishing oversight bodies inviting the public to share views on the measures governments have taken, or conducting surveys to gauge public response on government handling of the crisis.

We call on all States, in their response to the crisis, to:

1. Create avenues for inclusive participation and feedback and reach out to those most at risk and those most likely to be excluded.
2. Ensure transparency and access to information to enable civil society to respond with the most accurate information available.
3. Ensure that existing channels of civil society participation, at local, national and international levels are maintained – and possibly expanded – in the COVID-19 context.

4. Undertake thorough human rights impact assessments to ensure that measures and actions in response to the crisis do not infringe human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We have seen time and time again positive change emerge when people are able to organise, speak out and take action. A strong and vibrant civil society is a core pillar of a thriving democracy. We must not allow emergency responses to undermine democratic gains.