

Countries Commit to Reversing the Decline of Civic Space to Enhance Development

December 5, 2016

From November 28 to December 1, 2016, the [Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation](#) (GPEDC) held its second High-Level Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, to take stock of progress on development effectiveness commitments and to set the agenda for advancing these commitments for years to come.



Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation

ICNL President Douglas Rutzen was a featured speaker in a plenary session, *From Global Goals to Action: Unleashing the Power of Partnerships*, where he emphasized the need for an enabling environment for civil society in order to have effective multi-stakeholder partnerships.

The [Nairobi Outcome Document](#) of the High-Level Meeting—finalized on December 2, 2016 after weeks of advocacy and negotiation—marks a significant accomplishment for civil society freedoms. The document acknowledges the global shrinking of civic space and commits the GPEDC and its members to accelerate progress in creating an enabling environment for civil society:

We recognise the importance of civil society in sustainable development and in leaving no one behind; in engaging with governments to uphold their commitments; and in being development actors in their own right. We are determined to reverse the trend of shrinking of civic space wherever it is taking place and to build a positive environment for sustainable development, peaceful societies, accountable governance, and achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. We commit to accelerating progress in providing an enabling environment for civil society, including in legal and regulatory terms, in line with internationally agreed rights...

Other parts of the document include commitments to “ensure an enabling environment for inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships”; “strengthen and deepen partnerships with ... civil society organisations”; and “foster enabling policy environments for the philanthropy sector, including transparent and efficient legal and regulatory systems.” Commitments were also made to promote civil society participation in development policies, procurement processes, and national budget planning.

The Nairobi Outcome Document aims to advance implementation of the [Busan Partnership Agreement for Effective Development Co-operation](#), which was endorsed by over 100 countries and CSOs in 2011 to make development cooperation work better. One commitment is to “enable CSOs to exercise their roles as independent development actors, with a particular focus on an enabling environment, consistent with agreed international rights, that maximises the contributions of CSOs to development.” As civic space has continued to shrink worldwide despite the Busan Partnership Agreement, this renewed commitment to civic space is a remarkable achievement.

Contributions and negotiations by the [CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness](#) and the [Multi-stakeholder Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment](#) were critical to this outcome. Among other inputs, the CPDE issued a [CSO Communiqué](#), which “urge[d] the comprehensive alignment of country-level legal and regulatory frameworks with human rights standards, and ... effective institutionalisation of space for CSOs in development policy dialogue, planning, and monitoring.” ICNL looks forward to working with these and other partners to monitor progress on the Nairobi Outcome Document’s renewed commitment to civic space.

For more information on this topic, please visit the [Development Effectiveness](#) page on our [Civic Freedom Resources](#) portal.