



WORLD MOVEMENT *for* DEMOCRACY

Confronting the Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century

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Democracy will not flourish unless citizens can freely engage in politics and social change, and for many years civil society groups have been providing citizens with the means to do so peacefully. While civil society organizations are thus central to building and defending democracy, they face serious threats around the world. In addition to traditional efforts to suppress dissent and civil society activism, various governments have now begun imposing sophisticated legal or quasi-legal measures to restrict the work of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The proliferation of new “NGO laws,” for example, seeks to frustrate, rather than encourage, the work of democracy and human rights groups.

As members of the Eminent Persons Group of the World Movement for Democracy’s Defending Civil Society project, therefore, we proudly endorse the World Movement’s report of the same name and the historically accepted international principles it articulates for informing proper government-civil society relations: the right of individuals to form and join civil society organizations; the right of such organizations to function without state interference; the rights to free expression and advocacy and to communicate freely with domestic and international partners; the right to seek and secure resources, including across borders; and the state’s positive obligation to protect NGO and broader civil society rights.

The *Defending Civil Society* report, co-authored by the World Movement for Democracy secretariat and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), is based on extensive research and wide consultation with NGOs around the world, particularly those working on the advancement of democracy and human rights. *Defending Civil Society* provides illustrative examples of legal barriers facing civil society; defines the principles, noted above, that must be defended against violation by an increasing number of governments; and calls for building solidarity among, and in support of, NGOs now confronting the spread of restrictive legal environments.

To protect and enhance the space in which civil society groups operate, therefore, we urge governments in all global regions, the international community, and citizens worldwide to join our endorsement of the *Defending Civil Society* report and its findings. Together, we can begin to roll back this latest attack on civil society rights.

In Solidarity,

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His Holiness
The Dalai Lama

The Honorable
Vaclav Havel

The Honorable
Anwar Ibrahim

Saad Eddin Ibrahim

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Desmond Tutu