



**Oral statement**  
**UN Human Rights Council – 44<sup>th</sup> Session**  
**Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of association and peaceful assembly**  
**10 July 2020**  
**Delivered by Lisa Majumdar**

Madame President, Special Rapporteur,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report, and for the work the mandate has done to protect freedom of assembly and association worldwide. These fundamental rights underpin the very existence of civil society.

The report highlights that there have been multiple examples of civil society and social movements across the world galvanizing positive change, defending hard-won democratic values and developing innovative practices to address issues of injustice. People coming together to speak out have won better working conditions, furthered equality, ended forms of oppression.

The benefits of a vibrant civil society, and of human rights defenders who are free to do their work, are tangible. In the past months, we have seen that society is central to crisis response and will continue to be central in building back better. There are so many gains still to come.

States who suppress individuals and groups simply for speaking out willfully deny such enrichment.

In Hong Kong, a sweeping security law imposed by China last week risks destroying its free and open civil society. Protesters have already been criminalized by the law. In India, suppression of peaceful protests against a discriminatory citizenship and arrests of human rights defenders who took part in these meetings represent efforts to silence voices against inequality and injustice. In the US, Black lives Matter protests against systemic racism and police brutality have been met with state-sanctioned violence, including the deliberate targeting of journalists. In Egypt a systematic crack-down on civil society, human rights defenders and independent journalists has accelerated in the last several months.

The current pandemic has accelerated and exacerbated existing challenges and there are numerous cases of States weaponizing the COVID-19 pandemic against civil society, from Hungary to Algeria to the Philippines.

The rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly are simply the right to organize and mobilise for a fairer, more just world. This session, the Council members have the opportunity to better protect these rights. We urge all States to support the resolution on peaceful protests, and to commit to ensuring space and voice for those who come together to speak out.

Thank you.

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

International Service for Human Rights

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

FORUM-ASIA

The African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies