

**Human Rights Council 35th session
(6-23 June 2017)**

Item 3 General Debate

Joint statement

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the core group on civil society space, namely Chile, Ireland, Japan, Sierra Leone and Tunisia, as well as [number] civil society organisations, listed on the extranet.

Mr President

We first took the initiative of a Council resolution on civil society space in 2013. We did so in light of what we saw as two equally true but very different realities:

- first, the transformative role which civil society can and does play, alone or in partnership with other stakeholders; and
- second, that civil society space is all too regularly, and unfortunately increasingly, restricted and threatened.

These two points are closely related – in many cases, it is exactly that positive potential for change, inherent in ordinary people working together in new and innovative ways, which provokes threats and repression. But such negative responses are not only contrary to human rights law, they are, as recently termed in the final recent report of Special Rapporteur Kiai, “self-destructive” and “short-sighted” (A/HRC/35/28) - a vibrant and pluralistic civil society can be of tremendous value in responding to societal challenges and assisting our citizens and societies to thrive.

Bearing in mind this dual reality of opportunity and challenge, as well as the interlinking and mutually reinforcing nature of the core human rights concerned, we sought to explain and give better visibility to the concept of *civil society space as a human rights concern*.

And so this topic concerns civil society at its broadest – not only civil society actors in the field of human rights, but also those working at all levels and with greater or lesser levels of organisation on challenges including health and humanitarian crises, realising development, protecting the environment, countering corruption and building corporate accountability, empowering persons belonging to minorities or espousing minority or dissenting views, combating racism, supporting crime prevention and even conflict prevention and resolution as experience in our States, including in particular the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet shows.

As we did in the resolutions adopted to date – 24/21, 27/31 and 32/31 – we condemn and reject all threats, attacks, reprisals and acts of intimidation against civil society actors. We again recall that States must ensure that domestic legal and administrative provisions and their application in practice should facilitate and protect an independent, diverse and pluralistic civil society. And we urge all States to adopt the best practice recommendations set out in resolution 32/31 by, inter alia, taking steps to

- ensure a supportive legal framework and access to justice;
- contribute to a public and political environment conducive to civil society;
- provide for access to information;

- provide for the participation of civil society actors in public debate; and
- provide for a long-term supportive environment for civil society.

As we see daily in this room, the substantive participation of civil society makes this Council's debates and work, including the UPR, richer and more meaningful. More needs to be done to recognise civil society as having an equal stake in discussion in other multilateral fora too. We deeply regret, for example, that civil society voices have been blocked in the NGO Committee twice this year. We look forward to the OHCHR report scheduled for presentation at HRC38 (June 2018) on procedures, challenges and best practices in respect of civil society involvement with regional and international organisations. We hope that those best practices can feed into a process of reflection, in all fora, on how processes and procedures for participation of civil society may be further improved.

The next resolution on the subject of civil society space will be presented at HRC38 (June 2018). [Bearing in mind pressure on the Council's agenda, we encourage other States to consider similarly biennialising their initiatives, where possible.]

In addition to continuing to build on best practice examples, in future we intend to explore in greater detail other aspects, including those identified in the resolutions to date, such as:

- civil society and the private sector;
- civil society's role in advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- civil society and children;
- funding to civil society;

and so on.

We are convinced that work on this topic is more important than ever. We look forward to working with all delegations, both state and civil society, in taking this initiative forward in an open and constructive way.

Thank you