



Bridging Borders to Protect Civic Space

KEY ASKS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY

May 2025

We, a group of 35 civil society actors from El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Palestine, Jordan, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Malaysia, convened for five days in early 2025 to discuss Bridging Borders to Protect Civic Space. During our time together, we learned from one another's contexts, built transnational solidarity, sought to nurture our wellbeing, and reinforced our collective resolve to protect civic space. We share the following key learnings and asks in the spirit of solidarity and shared commitment to protecting civic space, realizing human rights, and nurturing a healthy civil society.

PROTECTION OF RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC SPACES

Together, we were reminded of the fundamental necessity of solidarity, especially for those living under authoritarian regimes. Sharing knowledge and developing strategies for collaboration and partnership across our different contexts strengthens our abilities to protect civic space, challenge restrictive laws, and advocate for the implementation of existing protections. We must use a multi-pronged approach which engages all key systems and stakeholders through advocacy and nonviolent tactics.

WE ASK OF DONORS & INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS:

1. Provide greater opportunities for collaboration, networking, and knowledge exchange across our countries, regions, and sectors.
2. Establish funding for real-time, rapid response and support for human rights defenders at risk.

WE ASK OF INTERNATIONAL POLICYMAKERS & UN MEMBER STATES:

3. Strengthen accountability mechanisms for human rights violations, including restrictions on our freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, through international mechanisms like the International Criminal Court.
4. Reform the UN Security Council to ensure equal application of international law and accountability for violations of international law.
5. Demonstrate a commitment to upholding the principle of 'Do No Harm' when working with civil society actors, and a focus on improving personal security, mental wellbeing, and enjoyment of basic human rights.

COLLABORATION AND SOLIDARITY ACROSS REGIONS

We recognize that our strength lies in our ability to build networks, share strategies and expertise, and learn from one another. While the contexts of our struggles may differ, our approaches, experiences, and aspirations unite us. For this reason, participation in global platforms and convenings remains essential.

WE ASK OF DONORS & INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS:

1. Facilitate greater collaboration within and across our networks, and offer donor funding models that foster collaboration instead of siloed approaches.
2. Convene and nurture safe spaces for open dialogue and mutual learning.
3. Make greater use of online platforms and tools to facilitate joint statements and actions, and establish a resource center to bring together expertise and perspectives from across all regions.

WE ASK OF INTERNATIONAL POLICYMAKERS & UN MEMBER STATES:

4. Develop an international accompaniment process to not only show solidarity, but act in solidarity with fellow civil society partners across the world.
5. Work together with civil society across sectors and regions to strengthen and expand civic space. This includes enabling inclusive policymaking, sharing protective strategies, and jointly advocating for enabling legal frameworks that safeguard fundamental freedoms, ensuring efforts are connected, coordinated, and grounded in mutual support

STORYTELLING, NARRATIVES, AND ADVOCACY

We acknowledge the power of storytelling in our advocacy. More than ever, social media algorithms, government censorship, and misinformation distort the truth, sowing fear, division, and hatred. We have the power to counter harmful and misleading narratives with evidence-based advocacy, citizen journalism, and documentary evidence. Across our contexts, we as civil society actors are targeted for sharing our stories, and we continue to grapple with threats of reprisal which impact the safety and wellbeing of ourselves, our partners, and the communities we serve.

WE ASK OF DONORS & INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS:

1. Strengthen efforts at all levels to raise awareness of the realities faced by our communities, including minorities, particularly through a research-based approach to advocacy and storytelling.
2. Capacity-building to enable us to tell our own stories for impactful advocacy.
3. Provide funding for and investment in community radio, TV, and newspaper platforms to promote citizen journalism and debunk authoritarian narratives.

WE ASK OF INTERNATIONAL POLICYMAKERS & UN MEMBER STATES:

4. Protect journalists and civil society actors from reprisals, threats, and intimidation, and governments must be held accountable for violating freedom of expression.
5. Commit to countering misinformation and online hatred.

SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES AND WELLBEING

We have learned that the wellbeing of those who defend human rights is fundamental to the sustainability of our movements. Burnout, insecurity, and underfunding threaten our movements, and so we must collectively work towards a culture of care.

WE ASK OF DONORS & INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS:

1. Prioritize long-term, process-driven, and flexible funding that centers wellbeing, collective care, and community resilience.
2. Approach wellbeing not as a one-time intervention, but instead as an integral part of programming and organizational culture.
3. Integrate flexibility into funding mechanisms to facilitate creative collaboration and to ensure timely responses to emerging threats to civic space.

WE ASK OF INTERNATIONAL POLICYMAKERS & UN MEMBER STATES:

4. Ensure financial and administrative auditing of public institutions for a fair distribution of resources.
5. Advance a reorientation of global agendas to be driven by the communities most affected, rather than by institutions of the Global North.

We commit to carrying forward these messages and asks, and to strengthening communication and coordination among our organizations and movements to enhance our solidarity and action.