

## Item 8 General Debate

### Joint Statement

Madame President,

The Vienna Declaration recognizes the important role of non-governmental organizations in the promotion of all human rights activities at national, regional and international levels, and emphasizes the importance of continued dialogue and cooperation between Governments and non-governmental organizations.

In a time of crisis, civil society is vital to developing and implementing the solutions. The President's Statement on the human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, adopted by this Council last month, reaffirms this.

We fully understand that the pandemic has created an unprecedented situation. Indeed, COVID-19 has exacerbated existing restrictions on participation worldwide *with closing spaces on assembly, association and movement*. Numerous countries have enacted emergency legislation which serve to stifle criticism and curtail freedom of the press. Not only do these measures counter the principles enshrined in the Vienna Declaration, they inhibit our collective ability to forge collective solutions. It is crucial that civil society voices are not excluded from the Council. That all those who are affected by the decisions made in this room are fully able to participate – virtually or otherwise. This is particularly the case for our civil society colleagues in the global south, who face intersectional barriers to participation.

*The Human Rights Council must lead by example and set the highest standards on civil society space and participation, including through its working methods, by ensuring a process that is accessible, transparent, inclusive and responsive to civil society voices.*

We urge Human Rights Council members and observers to make every effort to ensure that restrictions on participation do not set new precedents at the Council which would make it less effective and less inclusive, hindering its ability to address human rights.

We thank you.

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Child Rights Connect

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

Humanists International

International Commission of Jurists

International Service for Human Rights

Save the Children

Sexual Rights Initiative

World Organisation Against Torture