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Statement on the occasion of the World NGO Day 2017

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Statements by the Spokesperson

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Today we celebrate the World NGO Day, we celebrate the key civil society's contribution to public space and their unique ability to give voice to those who would have went otherwise unheard. A functioning democracy depends on the right of citizens to exercise freely these rights that are safeguards against corruption and instability as they foster open dialogue and debate in society. NGOs are key drivers of development, conflict prevention and sustainable peace in a world so hard hit by conflict and inequality.

The European Union continues to support civil society, NGOs and human rights defenders, both in terms of diplomatic action and funding. One of the key EU's priorities under the Global Strategy is to engage with and empower civil society, supporting an enabling environment for its action because we rely on civil society to play an active role in the life of every country, to the benefit of everyone.

There has been a backlash against civil society over the past years as governments, in a significant number of countries, seek to suppress opposition or criticism with a clear trend towards an increasingly restricted space for independent civil society, as well as outright threats made against individuals and organisations.

The EU is firmly opposed to any unjustified restrictions to the rights of Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly or to the work of civil society. We have adopted a Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy and an Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019 in which Freedom of Association and Peaceful assembly is one of the key priorities on human rights for the EU.

The EU promotes these rights in its human rights dialogues with third country authorities, at the UN Human Rights Council, by supporting the Human Rights Defenders resolution at the UN General Assembly and the mandates of UN Special Rapporteurs monitoring the current trend of shrinking democratic space for civil society.

Civil society organisations are the main recipient of financial support under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). A new European Human Rights Crises Facility was established in 2015 to support civil society organisations operating in some of the world's most difficult human rights contexts. The EU has also provided continuous financial support to Human Rights Defenders who need to be protected politically, legally or physically. We have launched a comprehensive EU mechanism for Human Rights Defenders, "[ProtectDefenders.eu](https://protectdefenders.eu)", which includes a shelter programme offering protection to Human Rights Defenders at risk, allowing them to continue their work. Since October 2015, "[ProtectDefenders.eu](https://protectdefenders.eu)" has granted emergency support to 2500 endangered Human Rights Defenders and has trained 1600 to strengthen their ability to respond to threats and challenges related to their work.

We will continue to strengthen civil society organisations, to listen to their voice and to make their voice heard.

Author

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Contact the Press Team of the European External Action Service