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World NGO Day: Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell

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Statements by the HR/VP

On world Non-Governmental Organisation Day, celebrated on 27 February, the European Union applauds the fundamental contribution made by civil society organisations to the promotion of human rights, good governance, democracy and the rule of law. As such, they are key partners for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We are witnessing an unprecedented crackdown on civil society in many countries - restrictive legislation on foreign funding, restrictions for registration and association of civil society organisations, anti-protest laws, gagging laws, laws that criminalise online dissent and expression, the blocking of access to websites and social media and, in some cases, violent attacks and harassment.

This trend needs to stop.

The EU is committed to the protection and empowerment of civic actors, including human rights defenders, and to the promotion of space for civil society. The EU will continue to meet with human rights defenders, monitor their trials, visit them in detention, and raise their cases with governments. The EU also supports key international actors, such as UN Special Rapporteurs on human rights defenders, freedom of association, and freedom of expression.

The EU is the world's largest donor to civil society. The European Instrument for Democracy and Human rights (EIDHR) is one of the largest EU instruments dedicated to supporting civil society. Testament to its importance, the European Commission has proposed to keep its level of funding under next financial framework at a high level, with €1.5 billion for 2021-2027. This instrument facilitates direct cooperation with isolated or marginalised civil society actors, including through the allocation of direct grants to those operating in particularly difficult human rights and democracy contexts. Since 2005, the EU has supported more than 30,000 human rights defenders.

Today and every day, the EU stands up for a strong and pluralistic civil society. We will continue to promote a safe and enabling environment, in which civil society can operate free from hindrance and insecurity.

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