

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



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Statements by the HR/VP

Around the world, NGOs, civil society and human rights defenders protect and promote human rights, democracy, as well as sustainable and inclusive development every day. They often do this unnoticed, far from the limelight and, at times, at great personal risk.

On World NGO Day, we pay tribute to their engagement, the impact of which should not be underestimated or taken for granted.

Over the last year, some governments have used the COVID-19 pandemic as a convenient excuse to crackdown on human rights and democracy. We know that the socio-economic consequences of the global health crisis will be unbalanced and long lasting, and that inequalities and social exclusion will continue to increase worldwide.

NGOs around the world have been playing a fundamental role in responding to the coronavirus crisis. They are documenting human rights violations, providing direct health services to communities or ensuring social assistance to the most vulnerable. We should not forget that NGOs are key partners of authorities in the assessment, design and implementation of responses to the pandemic.

However, NGOs worldwide are operating in a shrinking or even closing space. Civil society organisations face growing constraints ranging from burdensome reporting and registration requirements to restrictions on foreign funding, while NGO workers face physical threats, harassment and even killings.

Restrictions and attacks against NGOs are unacceptable. We do not only condemn this, we are also protecting those at risk and promoting an enabling environment for civil society. In the past 6 years, the EU has provided financial support to some 45.000 human rights defenders through the Protect Defenders Mechanism. This support will continue.

The EU is the leading worldwide donor for local CSOs in partner countries, with an annual budget of €2 billion. This partnership will be reinforced by the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

In the post-COVID-19 world, NGOs are the lynchpin of “living together”. They will remain an essential partner in our efforts to build back better, to protect the rights of everyone and everywhere, leaving no one behind.

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### Rebuilding stronger and more democratic societies

Today we celebrate the International Day of Democracy. As the world slowly recovers from the outbreak of the pandemic, we are confronted with the multiple threats posed to democracy in societies across the world. It is time to ensure that the universal democratic values we uphold are defended to

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