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

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On the World Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Day, we honour all civil society actors who, every day, are at the forefront of the fight for human rights, the respect of democratic values and the rule of law. The EU commends their role in supporting and giving a voice to the most vulnerable as well as their essential contribution to building peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

In 2022, the European Year of Youth, we pay special tribute to youth organisations as well as young human rights defenders around the world. They are crucial actors of change and their commitment and courage are all the more needed to build a sustainable, fair and equal world and to shape a better future for all.

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Today, with the unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation, international peace and rule of law are under attack. The EU stands firmly by the side of the Ukrainian and Russian people, its civil society and youth, whose future and voices are threatened by President Putin's disregard of democracy, human rights and international rules.

Moreover, in many parts of the world, we are witnessing an increasing trend of regression of civic space, in practice and through legal and administrative measures. These include barriers to NGO registration, restrictions on access to resources, including foreign funding, onerous vetting rules and burdensome reporting requirements. Such measures severely curtail universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. At the same time, civil society actors, including human rights defenders, are confronted with physical attacks, reprisals, harassment, acts of intimidation, smear campaigns and increased online surveillance.

This trend cannot continue. States and societies can only be resilient and have long-term sustainable security when democracy is strong, human rights are respected and civil society is able to operate freely. The EU is committed to defending and promoting a safe and enabling environment, online and offline, in which civil society can operate free from hindrance and insecurity. We also continue championing the crucial role of civil society in their own countries as well as in multilateral fora.


NGOs are key partners in designing, implementing, and monitoring European policies, programmes and projects. We recognise NGOs as valuable and efficient implementers of human rights, humanitarian aid and development work, due to their closeness and commitment to communities and their local and topical expertise.


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Between 2014 and 2021, the EU provided approximately €10 billion to support civil society organisations, representing the world's largest provider of support to local civil society in partner countries. The EU has also been a leading donor for the protection and support to human rights defenders, with some 53,000 defenders and their families receiving support via [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://protectdefenders.eu) [↗] since 2015. With the NDICI Global Europe we have reconfirmed the centrality of our support to civil society and human rights defenders for the years to come.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are part of the EU's DNA and so is the partnership with civil society. Engaging, empowering and supporting civil society actors will always remain at the core of EU's action.



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