

Rebuilding Trust in a Time of Crisis: Taking a STAND for SDG16+ 2026 Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+¹

I. INTRODUCTION

As the world approaches 2030, the promise of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is slipping dangerously out of reach. Conflict is at record-breaking levels, with multiple and overlapping armed conflicts, interstate tensions and civic space and global gender backlash present in all regions of the world². Rather than isolated emergencies, the world today is increasingly shaped by a polycrisis, in which interconnected political, economic, climate, and governance shocks reinforce one another across borders, ultimately undermining progress on the 2030 Agenda as a whole. As the 2025 United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's report outlines³, we are no longer facing mere stagnation; we are witnessing regression on the progress already achieved in 18% of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, SDG16 offers a toolbox for navigating this polycrisis through the pursuit of building more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Making progress on these aspects is at the same time a prerequisite for achieving progress of all other Sustainable Development Goals⁴. Still, progress on SDG16 remains significantly off track, which is further exacerbated at this moment when multilateralism is under severe strain, trust in institutions is eroding, and the UN system is being pushed to adapt to new geopolitical and societal realities. Precisely for these reasons, SDG16 can emerge not only as a development objective, but as a framework for rebuilding trust, strengthening governance, and stabilising cooperation in a fragmented international order⁵.

To guide the international community in navigating and addressing these challenges, the 2026 Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+ was developed through consultations and contributions from diverse actors worldwide, grounded in the realities faced by local peacebuilders, human rights defenders, legal aid service providers, grassroots organisations, and local communities. The Declaration outlines key recommendations that call for action, reminding us that implementation cannot succeed without support for those on the frontlines of inequality, injustice, and environmental breakdown. The Declaration highlights global trends and their impact on the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and brings to the fore concrete policy recommendations needed to correct the course. At a moment of deep uncertainty around prospects for multilateralism and international cooperation, this Declaration⁶ builds on its previous editions and calls for all stakeholders to take a stand for SDG16+ and for the broader vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Regaining trust in multilateralism can only be achieved through inclusive, participatory and multi-actor approaches, along with the recognition that peaceful, just, and inclusive societies are essential foundations for sustainable development as a whole.

1. Interested organisations are invited to endorse the 2026 Declaration via this link: <https://forms.gle/t1jdGQti6yHxbuaA>.

2. Conflict Index and Conflict Watchlist, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), 2026; *The Strategic Blind Spot: How Neglecting Peacebuilding Undermines Global Security*, Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), 2026.

3. *Work for the review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Report of the Secretary-General* (E/CN.3/2026/13), United Nations, Economic and Social Council, 2025.

4. *Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16* (p. 6), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); United Nations Human Rights, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2025.

5. The 2025 *Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16* finds that none of the 12 targets under SDG16 are on track and that 15% of them are moving in the wrong direction.

II. CALL TO ACTION

The recommendations outlined below are grounded in the need to restore effectiveness, inclusiveness, and trust in multilateral governance by responding to the real challenges that communities face on the ground. In this context, civil society plays a crucial role not only in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda but also in holding Member States, international institutions, and all relevant stakeholders accountable to the commitments they have made. Across regions, civil society organisations (CSOs) continue to sustain local peacebuilding efforts, defend human rights, expand access to justice, support vulnerable communities, and preserve democratic participation despite increasingly restrictive environments. Local peacebuilders, community justice workers, educators, women leaders, and youth organisations continue to foster dialogue, strengthen community resilience, and create space for participation despite insecurity, exclusion, limited resources, and growing threats to civic space.

At this crossroads, **STAND**ing for SDG16+ means turning commitments into action across the five interconnected priorities of this Declaration, namely **S**trengthening civic space, democracy, and civil society; **T**ransforming financing systems towards economic justice; **A**ccount(ability) for people-centred justice and rule of law; **N**urturing peacebuilding through conflict, violence, and atrocity prevention; and **D**efending human rights, fundamental freedoms, and inclusion. These priorities reflect both the depth of the crises demanding urgent response and the breadth of action required to address them. Each section presents a diagnosis of the current landscape alongside concrete, actionable recommendations for Member States, donors, the UN system, and civil society. Meaningful progress toward the 2030 Agenda will ultimately depend on the commitments made by states, but also requires the multilateral system to create the political, financial, and institutional conditions for civil society and local actors to meaningfully participate in shaping and implementing solutions at all levels. At a time of growing pressure on multilateral cooperation, **standing** for SDG16+ is both a call to action for all stakeholders to stand for SDG16+ and for the broader vision of the 2030 Agenda.

S TRENGTHEN: CIVIC SPACE, DEMOCRACY & CIVIL SOCIETY

A strong and vibrant civil society is a prerequisite for building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, restrictions, and attacks on civil society organisations present serious challenges to the inclusion SDG16 seeks to achieve.

- Across the world, democratic norms are being eroded by the rise of authoritarian and anti-rights ideologies, which have led to the dismantling of judicial institutions, rollbacks on media freedoms and human rights, and widespread misinformation and disinformation that are further fueled by political polarisation. The CIVICUS Monitor notes that in 2025, only 7.2% of the world's population lives in open or narrowed civic space meaning environments where civil society can operate freely without repression⁷. Further, the 2025 Democracy Report from V-Dem finds that 72% of the world's population now lives under autocratic rule, with autocracies outnumbering democracies globally.
- Threats to civil society actors and “shrinking civic space” are marked by the intensification of persecution, legal repression, and propaganda. Around the world, human rights defenders,

6. This declaration builds on its previous editions – especially the [2024](#) and the [2025 Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+](#).

- journalists, local peacebuilders, women leaders, grassroots justice defenders, and youth activists increasingly face smear campaigns, surveillance, digital repression, online censorship, and targeted attacks. Many are forced into exile due to hostile environments and the weaponisation and proliferation of foreign agent laws to target dissent⁸.
- CSOs face surveillance, funding restrictions, and even forced closures. Amid these challenges, some of the structural institutions meant to ensure accountability (such as ombudsman offices) have faced financial and political constraints, and a weakened rule of law offers little recourse for actors at the national level, while impunity for violations of human rights is a global trend.

As channels for democratic participation, such as those to express grievances and influence public decisions, are closing due to a lack of funding and restrictive legislation, locally-led organisations and already marginalised groups become further under-represented in decision-making and policymaking. These challenges exist for civil society at the national level, but they are global in nature. As anti-rights and authoritarian tactics and narratives spread across borders, these challenges have been felt across regions and therefore require multilateral, international action.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) We call on Member States to **enact and enforce legislation protecting civic space, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, and review and revise existing legislative frameworks to ensure consistency with human rights and gender equality**, allow for a solid legal basis for NGO operations and protect against undue interference with civil society activities. Global frameworks must **safeguard democratic principles** to ensure national governments reverse the trend of executive intervention with courts, prosecutors, and independent oversight bodies, as well as end the misuse of emergency powers, anti-terror legislation, foreign agent laws, or similar restrictive legal powers to silence dissent and skirt public accountability.
- b) Governments and the United Nations System must **reaffirm the central role of civil society, namely local and grassroots organisations**, in the implementation of UN agendas, including the 2030 Agenda. Governments hold a responsibility to support measures that enhance the **representative, participatory, and democratic character of the United Nations**, such as making use of the format of citizens' assemblies, consideration of setting up a parliamentary body, and establishing an International Civil Society Day by the UN General Assembly, with a view to proactively developing positive narratives of civil society leadership and impact to counter disinformation and delegitimisation.
- c) Member State champions of SDG16+ must hold governments **accountable for civic space and human rights commitments**, including through the Universal Periodic Review, human rights mechanisms, and Voluntary National Review processes. Further, they must secure the establishment of **safeguards and standards for civil society participation across all UN processes**, moving from ad hoc consultation and tokenistic inclusion to structured and meaningful engagement.
- d) Governments that engage in actions that restrict civil society or undermine the rule of law should

7. *Global Summary: Civic Space Dynamics, Monitor*, 2025 Findings, CIVICUS, 2025.

8. *Foundations of Freedom: Civic Space*, Freedom House, October, 2025.

face **strong, consistent, and principled responses by the international community** - and in particular, government “champions” of democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms must speak out and hold other governments accountable.

e) We call on donors and donor countries to scale up **investment in civic space protection**, including for legal aid, digital security, and organisational resilience for CSOs operating in hostile environments, for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), and women-led and women-serving organizations given the disproportionate threats they face namely as shrinking civic space and anti-gender actors.

T RANSFORM: FINANCING & STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES TOWARDS ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Amid alarming downward trends in Official Development Assistance (ODA) across all donors, including the dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that took place in 2025, it is clear that funding levels for sustainable development remain insufficient, while the international financial architecture is ill-equipped to deliver transformative change for people and the planet.

- According to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), in 2025, bilateral ODA fell by 26.4% to USD 126.4 billion, while multilateral ODA declined by 12.7% to USD 47.9 billion, bringing it to 4.2% below 2019 levels⁹. This presents the largest recorded drop in ODA's history.
- Further, while the Sustainable Development Goal 17.22 target commits to ODA contributions of 0.7% of donors' gross national income (GNI), DAC member and associate countries amounted to 0.26% of these countries' combined GNI.
- Meanwhile, in 2025, global military expenditure increased to USD 2887 billion, the 11th year of consecutive rises, as noted by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute¹⁰. This is a stark contrast between ODA decline and military expenditure.
- UNCTAD estimates that public debt in developing countries has now reached USD 31 trillion¹¹. The 2026 Financing for Sustainable Development Report (FSDR 2026) notes that debt service in developing countries reached 20-year highs in 2024, with about half of low-income countries at high risk of, or already in, debt distress¹².
- Given limited funding for sustainable development and constrained fiscal space for countries to deliver on their commitments, everyday people face the consequences of austerity measures and the redirecting of budgets towards debt servicing or military and defense spending. When people cannot access basic public services, they are likely to lose trust in public institutions.

The challenges that exist both for civil society actors seeking funding to support their work and for developing countries in need of assistance to meet their development goals are intertwined and marked by vulnerability to shifting donor priorities. It is with this in mind that the recommendations highlight both actions to transform funding models for civil society actors at national and local levels and steps to address power asymmetries and inequities in the international financial architecture.

9. A historic decline in foreign aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA data, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2026.

10. Global military spending rise continues as European and Asian expenditures surge, Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2026.

11. A World of Debt, UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2025.

12. Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2026: Implementing the Sevilla Commitment, United Nations, 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) **Member States must honor their Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments and resist redirecting development financing** toward security sectors and military expenditure, maintaining the transparency and integrity of funding between countries and transparent public budgeting at the national level.
- b) Donors must **prioritise flexible, long-term, core funding that reaches local organisations¹³** and communities by decreasing risk aversion in donors and financial institutions. Donors must prioritise and maintain multi-year agreements that allow organisations to plan strategically while reducing cumbersome administrative overhead. Wherever possible, donors must co-design funding strategies with communities and frontline CSOs rather than imposing donor priorities while also ensuring that grassroots organisations can access funding opportunities equally.
- c) Governments must pursue **binding, regulated debt relief for highly indebted developing countries**, recognising that debt servicing competes directly with investment in governance and sustainable development. This, in turn, requires greater representation of global south countries in decision-making spaces, including at the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. At the national level, governments must **respect and secure civic space to enable civil society, academia, and journalists to safeguard human rights and public services** - while ensuring their ability to operate without repression or interference, in accordance with international human rights standards - to ensure people-centered policymaking and resource allocation.
- d) Civil society actors and other **champions of SDG16 must build cross-sectoral alliances** linking SDG16 to economic justice, climate finance, inequalities, and gender justice. This will strengthen implementation across the 2030 Agenda.

ACCOUNT[ABILITY]: FOR PEOPLE-CENTERED JUSTICE, THE RULE OF LAW AND ENDING IMPUNITY

Persistent justice gaps remain a major obstacle to SDG16 and require advancing a people-centred approach to justice - one that prioritises the needs and lived realities of individuals rather than focusing solely on institutional procedures. Closing the global justice gap also requires transforming legal systems to become more responsive, inclusive, accessible, and grounded in legal empowerment. This includes prioritising the resolution of pressing legal needs - such as land rights, combatting gender-based violence, and labour protections - while fostering public trust through the humanisation of judicial processes, community-based approaches, including community paralegals and other grassroots approaches, and the removal of systemic barriers that prevent individuals, particularly marginalised groups, from accessing justice and exercising their rights.

- 5.1 billion people - roughly two-thirds of the world's population - lack meaningful access to justice because they cannot solve everyday legal challenges, are excluded from the protection the law provides, or live in conditions of extreme injustice. Of these, 1.5 billion people face civil,

13. For more information, see: [A Call to Action on Locally Led Development](#), Locally Led Development, 2026.

- administrative, or criminal justice problems they are unable to resolve - deterred by cost, complex procedures, lack of trust, or the simple absence of services that meet their needs¹⁴.
- The OECD estimates that countries themselves lose between 0.5 and 3% of GDP annually due to the costs of unresolved justice needs of their citizens. It has been estimated that every dollar invested in justice is likely to return at least \$16 in benefits from reduced conflict risk alone, alongside countless other intangible benefits¹⁵.
- Civilian deaths in conflict increased by 40% globally in 2024, and in 2023-2024, four times more women and children were killed in armed conflict than in the previous two-year period¹⁶. With only 125 state parties to the ICC's Rome Statute, and with many of the world's military powers remaining beyond the ICC's reach, significant accountability gaps remain, and impunity continues to widen.

Experience shows that investments in people-centered justice and legal empowerment - enabling communities to know, use, and shape the law - build people's power to hold institutions accountable and strengthen the ability of governments and institutions to respond to the fundamental needs of communities. Additionally, strengthening accountability mechanisms at national and global levels is critical to closing the gap between the protections that the law promises and the reality of ever-deepening atrocities and impunity that has become rampant in today's world.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

a) Governments must **prioritise and treat people-centred justice as a governing principle by recognising and embedding access to justice, legal empowerment, the rule of law, and human rights considerations across all core functions of government** - from budget allocation, public service delivery, and oversight institutions, to land governance, healthcare, and education. This includes creating and protecting the **enabling environments for legal aid providers and community justice actors** through formal legal recognition, where appropriate, and through mechanisms that safeguard practitioners from political interference, harassment, and closure. This also means prioritising justice for under-represented communities, including for women and girls, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable populations.

b) Governments **must adequately finance people-centered justice, legal aid, and legal empowerment programmes**. Public investments must flow to where justice needs are greatest, particularly for community-based mechanisms, including community paralegals and mobile legal clinics that reach rural, marginalised, and conflict-affected populations, as well as local alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Donors must also similarly prioritise integrating justice into all their programmes in a cross-cutting way, recognising that justice is foundational to development. Donors should also scale up multi-year core funding for networks of practitioners, with flexible and simplified requirements and procedures that allow this funding to reach communities where needs are greatest.

14. *Justice for All: Report of the Task Force on Justice*, PathFinders, 2019.

15. Ibid.

16. *Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16: Indicators on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); United Nations Human Rights, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2025.

c) Governments must **ratify the Rome Statute and its amendments** and recognise the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), while also collectively speaking out against attacks on international judicial institutions and taking other appropriate actions to counteract such attacks.

d) Member States must also **initiate a reform of the use of the veto within the UN Security Council**, building upon efforts such as the Veto Initiative and commitments made in the Pact for the Future, as a way to push back on Permanent Members of the Security Council's attempts to skirt accountability for breaches of international law, including international humanitarian law. Member States must also **consider and agree on a Treaty on Crimes Against Humanity**, which can be used as a critical tool for accountability for other grave injustices.

e) All **governments must fully implement the UN Convention against Corruption**, including through open contracting, beneficial ownership registries, and meaningful civil society oversight of public finances. This includes governments **investing additional resources and widening the mandates of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs), or other oversight mechanisms** that can play a critical role in holding governments accountable to political, budgetary commitments, and the rule of law overall. Governments should also heed calls to support establishing **an International Anti-Corruption Court**, which can help fill critical gaps in accountability for corruption at all levels.

NURTURE: PEACEBUILDING THROUGH CONFLICT, VIOLENCE, AND ATROCITY PREVENTION

Conflict is at record-breaking levels, with multiple and overlapping armed conflicts and interstate tensions present in all regions of the world¹⁷. The geopolitical landscape and funding environment at present increasingly prioritise short-term, militarised responses over long-term conflict prevention, diplomacy, and peacebuilding. This is compounded by shrinking civic space and a narrowing of legitimate debate on security in many countries, where critical voices questioning military approaches are easily depicted as naïve, disloyal, or 'unrealistic'. Further, the effects of violence and conflict are felt far beyond the battlefield.

- Rising conflict has contributed to a rise in global military spending (USD 2.88 trillion in 2025¹⁸) and, as such, a diversion of funds from peacebuilding and development.
- Conflict is a destabilizing force that can undermine any of the SDGs. The impacts of conflict reverberate across societies, with disruption to maritime trade, supply chains, and energy sectors, exacerbating inequalities and poverty as a result. Normalisation of violence, coupled with the availability of weapons and arms, contributes to violence of many kinds, including mass shootings, the expansion of armed militias, organised crime networks, and domestic violence¹⁹. Additionally, military expenditure and weapons manufacturing are among the largest contributors to the climate crisis²⁰. The growing culture of militarisation reflects a deeper erosion of social trust and a weakening of the belief in human security as a pathway to peace²¹.

17. *Conflict Index and Conflict Watchlist*, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), 2026; *The Strategic Blind Spot: How Neglecting Peacebuilding Undermines Global Security*, Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), 2026.

18. *111 Years Later: Still Choosing Peace*, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), 2026.

19. *Global Organized Crime Index 2025: Crime at a crossroads*, Global Organized Crime Index, 2025.

- As most violence happens outside of conflict-zones, understanding the interventions needed to address conflict prevention and non-conflict violence is of critical importance and presents potential for significant economic and societal benefits²².
- Due to rising authoritarianism, anti-gender, anti-religion, and anti-rights ideology, there is a global backlash against gender equality and gender-sensitive approaches to peace and conflict policy and programming.
- While record-breaking levels of conflict hit women and girls the hardest, a gender-based violence crisis persists, with nearly 1 in 3 women – an estimated 840 million globally – having experienced partner or sexual violence during their lifetime²³.

Sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through military deterrence. It requires rebuilding trust, strengthening inclusive institutions, investing in social protection and prevention, and promoting prevention-oriented and community-led approaches to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. In this regard, peace education, dialogue-based approaches, and locally grounded human security models play a critical role in fostering long-term social cohesion and resilience.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) **Rebalance military spending and redirect funds** with a recognition that resolution of conflicts relies on prevention and peacebuilding. In turn, governments must **invest in policies and programs that reduce, address, and prevent violent conflict and atrocities**, particularly by ensuring that a portion of foreign assistance budgets is devoted to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This requires reframing **security in a human security sense, pushing beyond militarised approaches** to peacebuilding and prevention.
- b) Member States must **fund and implement the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2250** commitments. This includes the establishment of National Action Plans on Youth, Peace, and Security and Women, Peace, and Security with dedicated funding; monitoring; and genuine participation, including resources directed to women- and youth-led organisations. Member states must ensure implementation of WPS and YPS are treated as essential elements to peace and security, not just an add-on.
- c) The global community must invest in **locally-led peacebuilding, conflict prevention and atrocity prevention** efforts, including, but not limited to: emerging technologies with the tools needed to address digital drivers of conflict, peace education as a practical skill in schools and communities; dialogue and participatory mechanisms for conflict prevention, including those led by indigenous communities; and monitoring of human rights abuses and atrocities to promote accountability in tandem with safe spaces for civil society, women and girls, and youth. Further investment must be made to **strengthen cross-border solidarity among civil society peacebuilders**, including meaningful knowledge exchange between Global North and Global South organisations, with means to integrate community-generated evidence into peacebuilding and centring the voices of those most directly affected by conflict, especially women and girls.

20. Feminist Interventions: Resisting The Militarization Of The Climate Crisis, Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO); Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP), 2023.

21. Indirect impacts of firearms on states or communities, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

22. Beyond the Battlefields: Practical Strategies to Halving Global Violence in Our Homes, Streets, and Communities, The Center on international Cooperation at New York University (NYU CIC), 2024

23. Lifetime toll: 840 million women faced partner or sexual violence, World Health Organization (WHO), 2025.

d) We call on governments to **position conflict prevention, especially gender-sensitive conflict prevention** that uplifts women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, as a necessary investment for the success of the various sectors of your entire foreign assistance and security agendas.

e) We call on the UN system and governments to carry out an **integrated approach that elevates principles of peace, justice, conflict, security, and gender equality across the SDGs**, with recognition that investment in SDG16+ can address sources of instability while identifying structural drivers of conflict requiring further action across the SDGs - unemployment, exclusion, inequalities, shrinking civic space, and weak social cohesion.

f) We call on governments and corporations to ensure **due diligence and transparency in all operations that may impact conflict dynamics** and halt activities, including arms production and transfers, poorly regulated arms trade, surveillance technologies, and extractive projects that fuel violence and repression.

DEFEND: HUMAN RIGHTS, FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS & LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

The intensifying crises of anti-democratic backsliding, attacks on civil society and human rights defenders, as well as widening trends of exclusion and discrimination, continue to demonstrate how far the world remains from the inclusive societies envisioned under SDG16. These dynamics are not only social but increasingly institutional. When international frameworks fail to uphold and protect inclusive norms, such practices risk becoming normalised at the national level. As a result, inequalities are reinforced, access to opportunities is reduced, and confidence in institutions continues to erode, revealing that inclusion cannot be assumed even where formal legal protections exist.

- Recent UN data from 119 countries show that one in five people globally report having experienced discrimination on at least one prohibited ground in the previous year, with even higher levels in the least developed countries. Persons with disabilities, women, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poorer populations are disproportionately affected, often facing overlapping forms of exclusion.
- According to the Flagship report of the Pathfinders Alliance on Inequalities and Exclusion, analysis showed that across 55 countries examined, people from the most marginalised ethnic, racial, or linguistic groups are nearly three times more likely to be among the poorest households. This exclusion also carries a direct security cost, with countries with high levels of education inequality between ethnic and religious groups facing double the risk of violent conflict, with exclusion of ethnic groups from political power correlating to an even higher risk of conflict²⁴.
- In 2024, at least 502 human rights defenders, journalists, and trade unionists were killed across 44 countries, with an additional 123 disappearances across 37 countries. While these figures dramatically undercount the actual instances of threats to rights defenders, it exposes the profound cultures of impunity that have taken hold at both the national and global levels.

In 2015, governments made the foundational commitment of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one

behind.” Today, it can unequivocally be concluded that these efforts remain unmet and are in many cases severely backsliding. The convergence of anti-democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, rampant discrimination, and targeted attacks on those who speak truth to power exposes systemic and structural challenges that must be overcome in these final years to 2030 and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) To fulfill their hallmark commitments to “Leaving No One Behind”, governments must turn rhetoric and political commitments into **concrete and adequately resourced national action plans**, including dedicated budget lines and disaggregated data collection, and expanding processes related to SDG implementation and follow-up that are inclusive of civil society and grassroots communities.
- b) Member States and the international community must ensure that the **UN Human Rights Council and Treaty Bodies are vehemently defended, fully resourced, and expanded or upgraded**, recognising their role as critical mechanisms for accountability. Additionally, governments that are notorious **human rights abusers should be prohibited from serving in the Membership of the Human Rights Council**, and mechanisms must be put in place to expel council members for human rights violations.
- c) **Governments must actively support and foster an enabling environment for independent media and journalism**, including by refraining from or pushing back against rhetoric that delegitimises or endangers journalists and media institutions. Governments must also urgently **establish state-funded protection mechanisms for journalists and human rights defenders within their countries**, with key “champions” of democracy coordinating to hold governments accountable for the unacceptable killings, attacks, and disappearances of journalists and rights defenders. Additionally, all governments that have not currently adopted or fully implemented right-to-information laws must do so without further delay.
- d) **Governments must enact binding legislation** on the development and deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) and surveillance technologies, and **establish independent oversight bodies** empowered to investigate regulatory violations and hold offenders accountable. **Governments must also hold corporations and platforms legally accountable** for the algorithmic amplification of disinformation and content that incites violence or erodes the fabric of societies. This should come through adopting and enforcing human-rights compliant laws to regulate online harms.
- e) We call on civil society organisations at all levels to **build and sustain collaboration and coalitions across siloes**, with a particular focus on shared challenges related to “existential threats to civil society” - including anti-democratic backsliding and the shrinking funding environment. It will also require civil society to strategically engage donors, governments, and other key champions to build a shared ownership of the response to these threats, which will be critical to identify and take forward concrete areas of collaboration, action, financing, and institutional support for strengthening civil society resilience.