**Topic: How the global clampdown on civil society is restricting youth participation**

According to the State of Civil Society Report 2016 by CIVICUS, "Last year was a dismal one for civil society around the world. CIVICUS colleagues tracked serious threats to one or more civic freedoms in over 100 countries. Particularly for those activists who dare to challenge economic and political elites, the environment in which civil society operates has continued to deteriorate”.

Today, civil society globally is under serious threat. Civil society activists face traditional forms of repression, such as imprisonment, harassment, disappearances, and execution, while at the same time, governments have pursued legal and legislative avenues to limit the space in which CSOs operate. ​In many cases, this has resulted in the introduction of restrictive NGO laws which limit freedom of association and serve to drastically shrink the democratic space.

Across the world, youth and student groups are often among the primary change-makers in society, leading protests and struggles for democratic reform, accountability and respect for human rights. In many cases, it is youth and student groups who are at the cutting edge of demand for a wide variety of social reforms, such as gender equality, racial equality, LGBT rights, etc. Additionally, growing restrictions to the online freedoms and digital rights in many parts of the world are further impacting negatively upon online social movements and communities, which are often led by the youth.

In the context of a rapidly shrinking space for civil society and threats to digital rights, the youth are disproportionately affected because they are the greatest agents of change in society, on- and offline. To be effective and meaningful, the global pushback against restrictions to civic space must have the youth at its heart.

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