

Joint Statement on the Promotion and Protection of Civil Society
September 23, 2013

We, the governments of the United States, Australia, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Ireland, Japan, Libya, Lithuania, Mexico, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, and the United Kingdom, taking note of the important work of the Community of Democracies, the Open Government Partnership, and the Lifeline Fund, met on September 23 along with representatives of civil society, the philanthropic community, the private sector, and the United Nations on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Our purpose was to reinforce the central role of civil society in working with governments to address common challenges and to coordinate action to promote and protect civil society in the face of ongoing assault around the world. We affirmed that the strength and vibrancy of nations depend on an active civil society and robust engagement between governments and civil society to advance shared goals of peace, prosperity, and the well-being of all people. We noted our deep concern that many governments are restricting civil society and the rights of freedom of association and expression, both online and offline.

To combat this alarming trend, our governments committed to work together to respond to growing restrictions on civil society that undermine its ability to perform its crucial role. We will ensure effective coordination of the multiple efforts already underway toward this end, including through the U.N. system, the Community of Democracies, the Open Government Partnership, and Lifeline, and commit to strengthen our support for these existing mechanisms. We will enhance our support for the work of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. We will lead by example to promote laws, policy decisions, and practices that foster a positive space for civil society in accordance with international law, and oppose legislation and administrative measures that impede efforts of civil society. We will undertake joint diplomatic action whenever necessary to support civil society in countries where it is under threat, and to defend the fundamental freedoms of association and peaceful assembly.

We will also work to develop new and innovative ways of providing technical, financial, and logistical support to promote and protect the right of citizens and civil society to freely associate, meaningfully engage with government, and constructively participate in processes to improve the well-being of their countries. Throughout all of these efforts, our nations will continue to engage with representatives of civil society to help us understand and respond to the challenges they confront.

We commit to gather again at the opening of the 69th United Nations General Assembly to review our progress toward these objectives. We will work in concert over the coming year to ensure a robust, effective international response to the proliferation of restrictions being placed on civil society. We call on representatives of civil society, the philanthropic community, the private sector, and other governments to partner with us in supporting and defending civil society.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

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