

Human Rights Council 51st session

(12 September-07 October 2022)

Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Joint statement on Civil Society Space

Mr President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the core group on civil society space, Chile, Japan, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and my own country, Ireland.

Since 2013, this cross-regional core group has emphasised that a strong, independent and inclusive civil society space empowers communities, contributes to good governance and plays an essential role in promoting and protecting human rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us all valuable lessons, not least in emphasising the importance of trust, dialogue and exercise of rights when responding to health emergencies as outlined in your report. We commend the proactive role of civil society in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing life-saving services, advocating for people-centred policy decisions, promoting vaccination campaigns, raising awareness and disseminating information about the pandemic and response measures, including sometimes to remote communities.

However, we are also deeply concerned by reports of repression of critical voices as well as exploitation of laws and regulations aimed at combatting disinformation to intimidate, criminalize and restrict civil society actors' work. While the increased use of digital space during the pandemic provided significant opportunity for engagement it has also exacerbated risks and restrictions to civil society space.

We urge all States to take immediate steps and implement the recommendations of the OHCHR report, namely invest in inclusive and diverse participation, provide space and means for an empowered civil society and vibrant debate; and over all, ensure a protective environment to ensure the meaningful, effective and safe engagement of civil society.

Thank you.