



Declaration from the Civil Society Pillar
“Challenges and opportunities for democracy and development
from the Civil Society perspective”

We, the delegates of civil society from different regions of the world:

As participants of the Community of Democracies VIII Ministerial Conference in San Salvador, El Salvador, Central America, we join our voices to reaffirm our belief in the central role of human rights and the importance of civil society actions in all dimensions of governance and democratic development, as well as in the construction of peace. We remember the CoD commitment to support civil society, which was undertaken in the Warsaw Declaration and in many ministerial meeting declarations (The Seoul Action Plan, the commitment of Santiago, and the consensus from Bamako), as well as in human rights instruments that are regionally and internationally acknowledged.

We express:

- Our concern for the increase of restrictions for civil society imposed by States – by means of violence in some cases – in different parts of the world, limiting the right of freedom of association, expression, peaceful gatherings, and access to resources; some have even criminalized them.
- Our acknowledgement of the importance of having a plural, active, independent and empowered civil society that has freedom of expression, considering the critical role that civil society has as a political entity to ensure democratic governability in countries around the world.
- Our interest in improving the quality of life and human rights for vulnerable groups such as peoples of African descent, indigenous people, LGTBI, women, elderly, children and youth.

We call upon the Member States of the Community of Democracies to:

1. Ensure the protection and independent functioning, without interference, of civil society organizations and movements, committing themselves to defend and promote the rights of association, freedom of expression, and peaceful gatherings.

2. Promote and deepen the dialogue with civil society to join efforts to face growing challenges and search for political, legal, and institutional solutions to eliminate barriers imposed on civil society in different parts of the world.
3. Guarantee wider participation of citizens in a full and effective way in the process of consultations and election of representatives in public, permanent and temporal spaces with civil society participation; eliminate partisan, interest group, and arbitrary criteria; allowing civil society to express itself independently through voice and vote.
4. Guarantee under the principles of universality and proportionality that civil society organizations have the necessary resources for their work and for the promotion and strengthening of democratic governability, either through the creation of a National Foundation for Democracy or other institutional mechanism that provides financial and technical resources, as well as the support of the OSC so that they can obtain the resources from national and international cooperative sources that allow them to do their work.
5. Guarantee effective citizen participation in the promotion of transparency, accountability, public information access, open government, and the fight against corruption and impunity; along with the practice of social audits and the implementation of participatory democracy in public policies to overcome the culture of confidentiality, secrecy, and opacity in the public sector.
6. Implement public educational processes that involve families, schools, the community, and governments to consolidate a citizen culture based on principles and values of democracy and human rights.
7. Incorporate technological advances in communication to the community, to ensure free and immediate access to information and communication in order to provide effective tools for analysis and training on all key elements for sustainable development.
8. Promote permanent bodies of discussion and training about tools for cultural democratic emancipation through civil society, with emphasis in a philosophy that promotes participation and empowerment of citizens, beginning with their first formal educational experiences.
9. Create national and permanent committees and observatories for proposing and monitoring public educational processes, with the participation of civil society and educational institutions from the government, with the objective of promoting democracy as a culture of peace.

10. Promote and disseminate the principle of equality and non-discrimination to every person, no matter their sex, beliefs, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, political view, or any other attribute that can be the subject of discrimination.
11. Stop the increase of hate crimes and femicides, among others related to discriminatory actions such as human trafficking, penalization of homosexuality and violations to human rights of the LGTBI community, and migrants, as well as the blocking of opportunities and access to economic, social, and cultural rights.
12. Increase efforts to eliminate all kind of violence to the most vulnerable groups in our society.
13. Drive and improve public policies for sexual and reproductive health for women and girls, and carry out actions for the depenalization of abortion where legislation allows it.
14. Increase and ensure the financing of national budgets aimed at social development so that they enhance the population's welfare and contribute to higher human development levels of the present and future generations to aspire to a sustainable economic growth, based on equality for our societies, endowed with increased progressivity of tax systems.
15. Implement integral public policies, based on a rights approach, that boost opportunities to enhance inclusion conditions and the reduction of socio-economic, cultural, environmental, and political inequality among our people.
16. Establish a mechanism for prompt response to assist critical situations in matters of human rights violations in territories where independence and sovereignty are in dispute.
17. Fight impunity, presenting regular reports to civil society, and promote equal participation of civil society organizations at intergovernmental levels, including national and regional networks.

We recommend that all member states from the Community of Democracies:

1. Establish coordination and cooperation mechanisms for the development of good practices in the area of public policy oriented to reverse inequality and fight poverty, taking into account multidisciplinary perspectives.



2. Commit themselves toward Sustainable Development Objectives (Agenda Post 2015) as well as toward the establishment of effective monitoring systems to assess their progress, and the development of fiscal measures for the implementation of their activities.
3. To the Communities of Democracies: Establish a joint work plan with all delegates from the Pillar of Civil Society in order to strengthen this space for the next two years.
4. To the governments: To maintain a permanent dialogue with civil society to guarantee in all member states the rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as in other declarations, such as those regarding indigenous peoples.
5. Encourage and promote the development of national networks within the ISC and social movements that aim at democratic promotion in each one of the member countries of the CoD, including unions, professional associations and social movements.
6. Establish joint monitoring mechanisms with the Pillar of Civil Society to assess compliance with democratic standards and the exchange of best practices in the global consolidation of democracy.
7. Establish monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of this declaration through the preparation of annual reports.
8. Develop, improve and strengthen democratic institutions of checks and balances at the national level.

**San Salvador, El Salvador, Central América.
July 22, 2015**