

# Securing Civic Rights

Promoting Civic Participation through the Civic Charter

## Civic Charter Community Workshop

### Concept note

**Date:** w/c 4 March 2019, exact dates tbd

**Venue:** Thailand, exact venue tbd

*“The CIVICUS Monitor reports that at present there are serious systemic problems with civic space (the space for civil society) in 109 countries, the majority. In 2017, attacks on civic space came even in countries where they were rarely seen before. It seems that the enemies of human rights and social justice have grown more confident. Perhaps they think they are winning.*

*But they are wrong. In country after country, the year saw civil society at our finest: defending rights, demanding proper services and speaking out about corruption, election fraud and constitutional rigging.”*

*CIVICUS, State of Civil Society Report 2018*

### The space for civic participation is shrinking even further

#### Oppressing citizens’ freedoms has become mainstream

During the past two years several activists of the [Civic Charter](#) Community were imprisoned, and many citizens and their organisations suffered from increased oppression and persecution.

#### “My country/community/family first” egotism is replacing the ethic of solidarity

Increasing numbers of citizens in rich countries do not want to share their wealth with refugees fleeing from war and poverty. Around the world, walls are being built to protect the minority of the rich against the majority of the poor.

#### Scientific facts and objective reporting are confronted with “alternative facts” and blatant lies

As even the President of the world’s most powerful country bases his communication on invented facts and obvious lies, as he bans journalists asking critical questions from his press conferences democracy rapidly loses its foundations.

*With the development of the Civic Charter the International Civil Society Centre has provided a key strategic tool and crystallisation point for the international fight to secure civic rights. Launched in 2016, the Civic Charter makes the case and creates the basis for civic participation. It brings together in an understandable manner provisions from UN conventions and other international agreements, making it a strategic tool for activists to advocate to their governments in defence of their rights to participate.*

*To date the Civic Charter has been signed by over 1200 civic activists and over 300 organisations. The Civic Charter wants to systematically empower citizens to defend their rights. It brings key activists together to exchange information and learn from each other how to promote their local and national agenda and to enhance international solidarity. The Civic Charter provides resources and training for activists and their organisations in order to improve the effectiveness of their work defending the space for citizens to participate.*



## **At the same time more and more citizens stand up to fight for their rights**

... and many of them base their fight on the provisions of the Civic Charter:

In Congo Brazzaville, a coalition of civil society organisations formed to promote the Civic Charter. 30 volunteers were deployed for ten days to inform Congolese citizens about their rights using the Civic Charter.

In Uganda, activists from ActionAid used the Civic Charter to begin the dialogue about protecting people's right to participate in shaping Uganda's society with the Uganda Police Force.

In Macedonia, our partner CIVIL runs a pilot project "The Civic Charter – How will I benefit?" to explore possibilities for establishing cross-sectoral cooperation and partnerships for adoption and consistent implementation of the Civic Charter. Their first major success: an official endorsement of the Civic Charter by the Government.

In Kenya, activists are using the Civic Charter in a series of community dialogues aimed at educating the community about police killings of activists by highlighting principle 8 of the Civic Charter, the duty to protect.



In Germany, Japan, and Australia, activists adapted the Civic Charter to advocate to their respective G20 leaders to raise the issue of shrinking space for civil society at the G20 Summit in July of 2017.



In Finland, the CSO Platform Kepa used the Civic Charter as the basis for a discussion with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs about people's participation.

The e-learning platform Funzi has created a mobile course on the contents of the Charter: <https://funzi.mobi/learn/civil-society-today1?language=en>.

### **Civic Charter activists support each other in their fight for civic rights**

Based on the successful format of the Civic Charter Stakeholder Workshops in 2016, 2017, and 2018 the International Civil Society Centre will convene another meeting of 'Civic Charter champions' and other activists to

1. Learn from each other how best to defend citizens' rights to participate in shaping their societies: the workshop will systematically evaluate experiences of participants and other civic activists, identify the most effective strategies for securing civic rights and elaborate concrete proposals for how to promote civic participation.
2. Further develop a Civic Charter community that continues working together after the workshop, advising each other and providing solidarity and support in situations of persecution and oppression: the workshop will strengthen existing collaboration across national borders and encourage new ones, help to further develop international communication channels between activists, and prepare the ground for international advocacy and solidarity in specific situations of local or national oppression.
3. Strengthen the spirit of resistance and encourage each other in the often desperate fight for civic rights: the workshop will provide opportunities to discuss personal pressures and receive advice on how to cope with the challenges front-line activists and their organisations are facing. The workshop will also provide strategic support on some of the most pressing issues facing front-line civic activists, such as digital communications security.

In order to make sure that the workshop reflects the needs and interests of participating activist the agenda will be developed in close cooperation with registered participants. The workshop will be co-facilitated by experienced activists.

Some of the topics the workshop may focus on include:

- Co-creating a rapid response protocol
- How to build effective alliances
- How to document shrinking civic space
- How to establish powerful regional networks

Participants will be selected predominantly from the community of Civic Charter signatories. The International Civil Society Centre will open a call for applications to participate in the workshop. The selection process will secure a global representation with a focus on civic activists from the Global South. Selection of participants will also take into consideration appropriate representation in regard to gender as well as topic focus.