

Joint statement of CSOs

We commend the Special Rapporteur for her important and timely report, which comes as the international community prepares to review progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The right to speak, to know, and to be heard is an enabler of achieving sustainable development and fulfilling economic, social and cultural rights. It empowers individuals and communities to participate in decisions that affect their lives and to hold governments and companies accountable for their actions.

However, [only 15% of the world's population](#) – or around 1 in every 7 people – live in countries where they can seek, receive, or share information freely and safely. Across the globe, those on the frontlines of sustainable development and using their voice to expose corruption and other illegal activities – including journalists, media workers, human rights defenders, lawyers, and other civil society actors, especially from indigenous communities – are facing censorship and severe attacks, including killings, often with impunity. There is a pervasive culture of secrecy worldwide, where access to information laws are non-existent or not implemented in line with international standards, critically undermining sustainable development. The communities most affected by poverty are least able to impart and obtain information and are excluded from public debate, especially relating to basic services.

As we approach the **Sustainable Development Goals Summit**, it is critical that States take concrete action to protect freedom of expression and create the preconditions for sustainable development. In particular, States must:

- Create multi-stakeholder initiatives to allow the meaningful public participation in various issues of sustainable development, with a focus on women, indigenous communities, persons living in poverty, persons with disabilities, youth, and refugees, internally displaced persons and people on the move;
- Effectively, impartially, independently and promptly investigate all threats and attacks against those on the frontlines of sustainable development, particularly journalists, media workers, human rights defenders, and other civil society actors;
- Enact or revise existing right to information laws to ensure they are in line with international human rights standards, including the principle of maximum disclosure in the public interest; and,

- Cease internet shutdowns and other restrictions and take concrete measures to expand internet access and affordability, including by creating an enabling and inclusive regulatory environment.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Signed by:

- ARTICLE 19
- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
- DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
- IFEX
- Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
- International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
- International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)
- Access Now
- Human Rights House Foundation
- World Movement for Democracy
- CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)