



**United Nations Human Rights Council 44th Session
Interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the rights to peaceful assembly and of association
10th July**

Exceptional emergency measures to fight COVID-19 should not be used to restrict civil society space or participation.

This is the time to innovate and expand opportunities for the voices of vulnerable and underrepresented groups to be heard.

We welcome the Special Rapporteur's report, highlighting the importance of protecting and expanding civic space with and for young people.

Nevertheless, it is time to pay particular attention to children. Children are powerful actors of change within civil society. They have been at the forefront of the climate change movement, and have called for social justice, better education and democracy.

Yet they fail to be recognized as human rights defenders and continue to face risks just like adults, in the exercise of their civil and political rights, including arrest, detention and ill-treatment. They face additional risks because of their age, and just because they are children, their voices are often not taken seriously. They experience stigmatization and age discrimination, intersecting with gender-based, race and socio-economic discrimination. For example, in some countries, children are not considered competent or experienced enough to legally establish their own organizations or to open a bank account.

If we want to build back better, children's civil and political rights need to be protected and their participation in decision making needs to be proactively supported and encouraged.

We call on the UN and Member States to:

- Implement legal & policy frameworks guaranteeing all children's civil and political rights enshrined in the CRC
- Create safe and child-friendly online and off-line spaces for child human rights defenders, where they can safely organise, assemble, and engage with decision makers
- Seize the accelerated digital shift to enhance inclusivity and ensure more voices from underrepresented and marginalized groups at all levels, including in UN fora
- Support child-led groups, including girl-led groups, with flexible and sustainable funding and non-financial support

We would welcome further guidance from the Special Rapporteur in a future dedicated report on the challenges faced by children on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and practical steps to facilitate their meaningful, safe and inclusive participation in online and off-line public spaces, to be developed in consultation with children in all their diversity.

Signatories:

1. Child Rights Connect
2. Plan International
3. Save the Children
4. SOS Children's Villages International
5. Defence for Children International
6. World Vision International