

OUR Commitment to expand civic space and advance democratic accountability in East Africa

Conference Communiqué

Preamble

We, civil society representatives and partners from Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, convened at Metropole Hotel in Kampala Uganda on 6th and 7th September 2018 to discuss ways in which we can safeguard and advance civic space and democratic accountability;

Acknowledging that there is a challenge of shrinking civic space in the region and affirming our desire to safeguard and expand our opportunity to contribute to governance and development;

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of shrinking space and the reality that we can no longer ignore or approach it in isolated ways;

Working in a hostile environment of mistrust by government and difficult donor conditionalities;

Understanding the complexity of the underlying issues, including actions taken by several actors to undermine the civic space;

Alarmed and appalled by the smear campaign and propaganda against civil society organizations, growing use of violence and torture against civil society, media and those in the political opposition including the recent attacks on politicians, artists and journalists in Uganda and Tanzania, the targeting of whistleblowers in Kenya and persecution and prosecution of online and other activists across the three countries;

Disturbed by the growing violation and disregard of the rule of law, constitutionalism and tendencies by some governments including changing laws and constitutions when they are called out and threats to independent arms of government;

Distressed by the abuse of laws and regulations and use of extralegal means including anti-terror, financial laws and cyber regulations to close civic space; the introduction of amendments or new laws that are in direct contradiction with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and existing constitutions;

Concerned with the slow pace of adoption of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance a decade after its promulgation and the East African Protocol on Good Governance after its initial tabling in 2011;

Committing to furthering the East African integration towards a political federation with specific emphasis on the promulgation of the Protocol on Governance and the fulfillment of Articles 3, 6 and 127 of the Treaty for the establishment of the community; and

Reaffirming our commitment to promote civic space and democratic accountability in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania by acting in solidarity among ourselves and the people of East Africa to promote our peaceful coexistence;

Thus resolve as follows:

That despite the above challenges, we shall pursue individual and collective actions as articulated hereunder that represent our collective aspirations to push back against shrinking civic space in our region, as outlined below:

- A. Strengthen our institutional resilience** by constituting ourselves into an alliance to work in solidarity to advance advocacy and engagement with our governments and the community, document the threats and trends in declining civic space and use all legal and other means available in national, regional and international frameworks to safeguard civic space.
- B. Call for the urgent prosecution of all those involved in the use of violence and torture, and violations of human rights and civic space** as guaranteed by our respective national constitutions, the East African Treaty, the African Charters on Human and People’s Rights and on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ensuing protocols and conventions.
- C. Call for the urgent ratification** of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance by our states.
- D. Call for the urgent consideration and adoption** of the pending East Africa Protocol on Good Governance.
- E. Work closely with the multiple available platforms** for civil society, private sector, media, professionals, academia, and development partners to build a citizens movement to further the collective aspirations of the people of East Africa enshrined in the Treaty for the establishment of the East African Community.

