



CIVICUS House,
24 Gwigwi Mrwebi (formerly Pim) Street,
Newtown 2001, Johannesburg, South Africa.
PO Box 933, Southdale 2135,
Johannesburg, South Africa.
tel +27-11-833-5959
fax +27-11-833-7997
email info@civicus.org

CIVICUS statement on the MDGs

"Include us or fail" – Civil society groups warn of looming MDG failure without equal partnership

Johannesburg. 16 September 2010. The lack of reference to civil society and its role in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals by key decision makers is a major barrier to progress in achieving them within the next five years. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation believes that the MDGs cannot be achieved without recourse to democratic freedoms and political processes that support the participation of citizens and civil society.

In the lead up to the high-level Summit in New York on the MDGs, the outcome document drafted by UN member states contains scant reference to the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) particularly in the section on MDG 8, which speaks to a global partnership for development. The Summit, which is taking place from 20-22 September is expected to be attended by a galaxy of world leaders meeting to discuss strategies to accelerate progress on the MDGs between now and 2015.

Leading civil society activists have warned that systemic restrictions on the freedoms of expression, association and assembly which are the lifeblood of civil society are preventing CSOs from discharging their responsibility to engender greater transparency and responsiveness in official actions.

"Civil society is crucial but it is under threat," Mary Robinson, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and member of The Elders group of eminent global leaders told [Every Human Has Rights](#) (hosted by CIVICUS).. "We need to ensure the voices of civil society are heard."

"They are the reality check, the accountability people and their voice is absolutely essential if we are going to ensure that we can deliver on the Millennium Development Goals."

Her comments echoed concern about the "serious worsening" of human rights voiced by over 500 leading civil society members at the CIVICUS World Assembly in Montreal last month.

CSOs independently evaluate whether objectives set by governments are met, and shape public opinion in holding government agencies to account for failing to deliver at the local, national and international level. In many instances, CSOs take responsibility for actual delivery of services and assure representation of all voices in development strategies – including of those most affected by the non-achievement of the MDGs.

“The attitude of governments across the board so far has been to limit civil society to simply being a vehicle for service delivery and restrict its ability to question and shape public policy,” laments Ingrid Srinath, Secretary General and CEO of CIVICUS. “Trends from Cape Town to Cairo, Managua to Manila and New Delhi to Moscow indicate that civil society organisations are increasingly being thwarted in their efforts to ensure transparency and accountability of government agencies, through restrictive legal measures and undemocratic practices.”

The MDGs are eight international development goals that all UN member states and at least 23 international organisations agreed to achieve by 2015. The MDGs cover a wide range of issues that are basic to human existence such as eradicating extreme hunger and poverty, improving maternal health, reducing child mortality and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. They also include aspirations to significantly improve the quality of our lives like promoting gender equality and empowering women and achieving universal primary education. Notably, they incorporate two concerns on which the collective well being of humanity rests i.e ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development.

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is a global movement of civil society dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society across the world.

CIVICUS hosts the Every Human Has Rights campaign www.everyhumanhasrights.org which features a series of interviews with members of the Elders on poverty and human rights: <http://www.everyhumanhasrights.org/home/9-human-rights-news/61-the-elders-videos>.

For more information please contact CIVICUS:
Rashmi Mistry (rashmi.mistry@civicus.org), EHHR campaign officer, or
Rowena McNaughton (rowena.mcnaughton@civicus.org), media officer
Office Tel: +27 11 8335959