



# 2022 STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT

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**COVER PHOTO:** People protest against the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the Shibuya area of Tokyo, Japan on 5 March 2022.  
Photo by Yuichi Yamazaki/Getty Images

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Welcome to the 2022 State of Civil Society Report from CIVICUS, the global civil society alliance. This year's report, the 11<sup>th</sup> in our annually published series, takes a new, condensed and more accessible format. In January 2022, CIVICUS launched **CIVICUS LENS**, our rolling commentary and analysis initiative that covers the key current stories involving and affecting civil society. This report draws from and summarises that analysis, directly informed by the voices of civil society around the world. It offers a snapshot of civil society's world as it stands at the mid-point of 2022: a world characterised by crisis and volatility, where regressive forces are mobilising a fierce backlash, but where dogged civil society mobilisation is still winning vital battles.

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## OVERVIEW

### RISING PRICES FUEL PROTEST DEMANDS FOR MAJOR CHANGE

The price of pretty much everything is going up, in country after country. The cost of essentials like food and fuel is rising most of all, and Russia's war on Ukraine is worsening the situation, further pushing up prices of basics. Many governments are failing to protect their people from the impacts. Many people, already strained by the pandemic, are struggling to make ends meet while they see fossil fuel companies benefiting from a boom. They are angered by profiteering and price gouging. When the costs of essentials rise, protests usually follow.

When protests take place in authoritarian and repressive contexts where other means of expressing dissent are blocked, they are often widespread and massive, and quickly grow to encompass a wide variety of demands beyond their initial trigger: demands the political system is unable to concede. People push not just for different economic policies and new political leaders but also to change the system.

This is what happened in **Sri Lanka** in March and April 2022, when economic meltdown prompted by a combination of mismanagement and rising prices brought everyday life to a halt and prompted mass protests, uniting previously disconnected parts of society to demand a new form of government

where unaccountable presidential power is curbed. In **Kazakhstan** in January 2022, a sudden sharp rise in fuel prices led to demands for political and economic reform.

The Kazakhstan protests were met with violent repression, including at the hands of Russian forces determined to stamp down on demands for democracy. Violence is a common state response when protesters call for the redistribution of power. But state violence is still sometimes insufficient to stop protests winning change. Further widespread protests sparked by unliveable economic conditions, along with workplace organising to **demand labour rights**, can be expected in the coming months – and in some cases those demanding change will win.

## DEMOCRACY UNDER ATTACK – AND THE STRUGGLE TO SAVE IT

Military coups have made a comeback, as coup leaders leverage the overriding preoccupation of international allies with migration control, stability, security and economic opportunity above human rights. Armies have taken control of **Burkina Faso**, **Guinea** and **Mali**, potentially normalising non-civilian rule again in West Africa, and of **Sudan**. Such coups are generally preceded by a decline in the quality of democracy and widespread public dissatisfaction at the failure of leaders to address pressing problems, meaning that some people celebrate coups, at least initially.

Military takeover isn't the only way to subvert democracy. In **Tunisia** the elected president is carrying out a coup in instalments, having dismissed parliament, taken control of the judiciary and launched a process to rewrite the constitution. The situation is similar in **El Salvador**, where a president who commands a legislative supermajority is removing checks and balances and tightening restrictions on civil society.

Where this leads can be seen in **Nicaragua**, where President Daniel Ortega has succeeded in his long mission of completely hollowing out democracy from the inside, to the point where he was able to hold an entirely fraudulent election, enabled by mass repression. In **Turkmenistan**, the result was so little in doubt that the outgoing president could hand over the office to his son like a family heirloom.

So often only the ceremony of democracy is on offer, with no prospect of power being contested.

China continues to offer the global exemplification of a state under tight presidential control with zero democratic freedoms. It's an influential model that China promotes and autocrats around the world seek to replicate. China is now imposing this approach on **Hong Kong**, whose new leader is the security chief who brutally suppressed the 2019 democracy protests.

The toxic tide of right-wing populism isn't over yet either. It got its highest-ever vote in **France's** April 2022 presidential election and in elections in **Portugal**, normalising racist and xenophobic political discourse. In the USA, Trumpism has become the right wing's dominant ideological strain. **Hungary's** Viktor Orbán triumphed in April 2022 despite his close links to Vladimir Putin.

In the **Philippines** in May 2022, years of systematic disinformation and shameless rewriting of history paved the way for an alliance of two authoritarian dynasties to win: the son of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos was elected president, with the daughter of the outgoing authoritarian President Rodrigo Duterte as vice president.

In many other election campaigns beyond the Philippines, disinformation is reshaping political discourse. It's intensively being mobilised **within Russia**, preventing much of the public from seeing the reality of its unjustified war on Ukraine. Disinformation also helped stir the protests that

shut down **Canada's** capital in February 2022. Many forces are spreading and profiting from disinformation, including domestic hate groups, international anti-rights networks and rogue states, but with common aims: to normalise extremism, attack rights and sow division. Reasoned political debate is only getting harder as sections of the public are convinced by blatant falsehoods and conspiracy theories.

But there are also successes in mobilising common fronts to kick out political leaders who foster polarisation and stoke hatred. This was seen in the **Czech Republic** in 2021 and **Slovenia** in 2022. More of these victories are possible if pro-democracy voices unite, organise and offer people looking for new ideas plausible alternatives.

In many countries elections are characterised by political volatility and fragmentation, with large groups of voters convinced that incumbents no longer have the answers and willing to embrace political outsiders, particularly when they promise action on corruption. This is driving some change that offers hope for progress in advancing rights, including following recent elections in **Australia**, **Chile** and **Honduras**. But the pendulum can just as quickly swing the other way, and the rejection of incumbency can bring regressive as well as progressive outcomes.

## 3 PROGRESS AND PUSHBACK IN CHALLENGING EXCLUSION

Excluded groups are on the frontlines of attacks on rights, including those offered by politicians who exploit easy targets and pit different population groups against each other. Migrants and refugees are one such frequent target: the racism behind the customary hostility they receive has been exposed by western countries' entirely **different treatment** of the millions escaping the war in Ukraine.

There is currently a relentless attack on abortion rights led by right-wing politicians working in harmony with anti-rights groups in Poland and the USA, among others. But despite the challenges there are successes, with recent steps forward across a span of Latin American countries, including **Colombia**, **Ecuador**, **El Salvador** and **Mexico**, where restrictions have been removed or eased. Change often results from court victories that follow years of legal action, combined with political advocacy and mass mobilisation. Often changes don't go far enough and governments drag their feet on implementing laws and court judgments, but they all open up further space for action.

At the same time advances bring backlash, mobilised by powerful and well-resourced anti-rights groups often linked to US-based conservative foundations with strong ties with fundamentalist religious groups. This was seen in a recent attempt in **Guatemala** to introduce jail sentences for

abortion, withdrawn following strong domestic and international criticism.

Mass displays of the strength of the global women's movement, including **International Women's Day** mobilisations, are important for communicating resistance to repression and aspirations for change. But women too often remain at the whim of politics. In **Afghanistan**, women stripped of rights by the Taliban regime now feel abandoned by the international community. In **India**, Muslim women are in the crosshairs of attacks by Hindu nationalists, targeting them for both their religion and their gender.

LGBTQI+ rights are another vital frontier in the fight for respect and dignity, with attacks often instrumentalised by opportunistic politicians seeking political advantage, seen recently in the vilification of LGBTQI+ people in **Ghana** and **Hungary**. But globally the normalisation of LGBTQI+ rights is spreading, with a changing **Chile**, in the process of writing a rights-based constitution, recognising marriage equality, and the people of **Switzerland** overwhelmingly voting to do so in a referendum. Even in hostile contexts such as **Honduras** and **Jamaica** important advances have come, through civil society winning cases in the regional human rights system.

Steps forward often come after years of campaigning by civil society, which is increasingly modelling and proving the value of diversity. A new, young and diverse generation is forging social movements beyond conventional structures to realise change, demanding racial justice, women's and LGBTQI+ rights, Indigenous rights and the rights of migrants

and refugees as an intrinsic part of advancing democratic freedoms, fairer economies and climate justice. More change can come if new and diverse movements are nurtured and enabled.

## 4 NOW OR NEVER FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Climate justice is at the forefront of these struggles because a warming world is an intrinsically unfair world where inequalities are intensified. The inherent injustice of climate change has been made visible in the disproportionate impact of extreme weather events that most affect those who have the least, including extreme heat in **India**, devastating floods in **South Africa** and unprecedented wildfires in **Turkey**, among many others. Crises such as these expose the weakness of government response, with civil society left scrambling to help those in need.

And time to act is running out. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) **recent reports** make clear that greenhouse gases must be cut drastically in the next few years to have any hope of limiting temperature rises to 1.5°C. It is civil society that is demanding urgency.

The ultimately disappointing outcomes of the **COP26** climate summit are an invitation to go back to putting street pressure on institutional processes. Activism including mass marches, climate strikes and non-violent civil disobedience can be expected to build again ahead of COP27 in

Egypt, where governments are urged to commit to more ambitious emissions cuts. But a major problem is that civic space is closed in Egypt, making it hard for civil society to mobilise around the summit. Without civil society pressure, sufficient climate action will not come, making it a bizarre choice to hold climate summits in countries that restrict civic space.

Vital street action will continue to be supplemented by other tactics. Climate litigation is growing, leading to some significant court breakthroughs, such as the 2021 judgment **in the Netherlands** that forced Shell to commit to emissions cuts. Shareholder activism towards fossil fuel firms and funders is intensifying, and pension funds are coming under growing pressure to divest from fossil fuel companies. In some recent elections in countries that are heavy greenhouse emitters but that have also experienced severe climate impacts, such as **Australia** and **Germany**, more voters are making climate a priority. Action on all fronts is growing.

Russia's war on Ukraine has fostered renewed awareness of relationships of energy dependency and the impunity that states rich in fossil fuels enjoy: Europe's need for Russia's gas is mitigating international pressure on Putin and helping to fund his war. There has never been a better time to heed civil society's calls to switch from fossil

fuels to renewables, adequately fund global south resilience and ensure the costs of transition aren't borne by those who already have the least.

## **RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION SHOWS GLOBAL GOVERNANCE NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE**

Russia's war on Ukraine is the latest event to expose the inadequacy of international institutions that are supposed to ensure peace and uphold human rights.

The United Nations (UN) Security Council, hamstrung by the veto-wielding role of Russia as one of its five permanent members, has been able to do nothing. The holding of a rare **special session** of the UN General Assembly only highlighted the failure of the Security Council. While the Assembly's non-binding resolution offered an opportunity for many states to express outrage, some notably failed to condemn Russia's clear violations of international law and human rights, exposing relationships of influence and patronage. States with restricted civic space have proved far less likely to condemn Russia's aggression than more democratic ones.

There's a wider pattern of states ignoring international rules – and not just to start conflicts, but also

to exert transnational repression against exiled dissidents – and seeking to influence international institutions by selective funding, the **capture** of top positions and undue pressure on other states over their voting decisions.

Civil society does its best to engage with international institutions but is frequently afforded the lowest priority, often **denied access** to the key arenas, with the private sector a privileged participant, even when, as with climate summits, companies are part of the problem.

The ineffectiveness of international cooperation and the ability of powerful states to override the rules has also been exposed by COVID-19. The development of a **pandemic treaty** offers hope that lessons will be learned before the next pandemic hits, but it will only be effective if it makes room for civil society in both its development and implementation.

The UN has become hidebound and bureaucratic, slow to react, far from the proactive body it was envisaged as. And while it often says the right thing – its voice on issues such as climate change and the food crisis is loud – it isn't always heard. The pandemic and Russia's war make clear the need for an effective UN as part of a rules-based international order. It's time to take civil society's UN reform proposals seriously.



## ECONOMY: DEMANDS FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Protests to demand economic justice have shaken countries in every region, including authoritarian states where protesting brings significant dangers. People are protesting against poverty, inequality, rising prices, unemployment, regressive taxation, neoliberal economic policies and high-level corruption, mobilising collective action when governments fail to listen to them and institutional politics doesn't speak to their needs. People continue to organise, as workers, to claim basic labour rights denied by companies often working hand-in-hand with governments, and a fairer share of corporate profits.

### PEOPLE TAKE TO THE STREETS

Globally the cost of living is going up, and the price of essentials such as fuel and staple foods is increasing the most. Food prices have been rising for years, but they have recently experienced violent hikes, first due to the pandemic and now because of Russia's war on Ukraine. Over **250 million** more people are expected to be pushed into poverty in 2022.

Around the world many live on tight margins where even small shifts can leave them worrying where their next meal is coming from. Because of this, an increase in the cost of essentials is the most predictable indicator of **protests**.

This was seen in **Indonesia** in April 2022, when students protested over the cost of cooking oil, an issue directly linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It was a similar story in **Spain**, where increases in food, energy and fuel prices brought thousands to the streets in early 2022; ominously, far-right party Vox tried to capitalise on discontent, as such parties commonly do. In **Cuba**, protests were triggered by food and medicine shortages. Meanwhile in **Malawi**, it was a rise in already high mobile phone and data charges what sparked protests in 2021.

Many protests, particularly in 2021, also expressed anger at the economic effects of the pandemic and lockdown measures, sometimes combined with protests over governments' handling of the



pandemic and high contagion and death rates. In **Tunisia**, people have repeatedly protested against high unemployment and economic strife, a problem made worse by the pandemic and something the country's increasingly dictatorial president – see below – has failed to address. In **Paraguay**, protests erupted out of frustration with corruption in the public health system and the government's ineffective pandemic response.

## ECONOMIC PROTESTS TRIGGER WIDER DEMANDS

Protests responding to seemingly minor triggers often evolve quickly to articulate demands for the reversal of regressive policies such as economic austerity measures, and action on high inflation, declining living standards and worsening inequality. Economic demands are dovetailing with political demands, with people calling out their government and politicians as unaccountable, corrupt and ruling for the benefit of the rich, and demanding fundamental political change.

In Sri Lanka protests began in March 2022 when a mismanaged economy hit crisis point. People voiced their anger at electricity blackouts, food and fuel shortages and soaring inflation, and soon called for the president to quit, along with the many members of his family who also held government roles. But beyond this protesters demanded constitutional change to limit executive power, so no president can make

decisions without checks and balances and accountability. Significantly, people united in protest across divides – including on ethnic and religious lines – that politicians so often take advantage of.

**The protests are largely driven by angry, frustrated, disappointed citizens. They have been triggered by the ramification of the economic crisis. The protesters are demanding long-term legal and institutional changes to the current governance system that must start with the resignation of the Sri Lankan president Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the Rajapaksa family, the ruling family. Largely led by young people and students, these protests represent a political awakening of an unprecedented scale."**

[RUKI FERNANDO](#), Human rights activist and writer, Sri Lanka

Mass mobilisations came in Colombia too, where a protest wave was triggered in April 2021 by a proposal to raise tax rates and eliminate tax exemptions. As in Sri Lanka, young people were at the forefront, and their protests were accompanied by major labour strikes. Protesters' demands soon widened to encompass structural issues of poverty, inequality and violence, exacerbated by the government's failure to implement the 2016 peace agreement and further deepened by the pandemic. Protests were met with brutal force, with dozens killed and hundreds injured and detained.

A brutal response was also the state's answer to rare protests in Kazakhstan. In January 2022, the price of car fuel doubled when the government adopted a free-market approach. The policy

was reversed within days but people stayed on the streets, demanding change in the numerous problems that make their lives hard: corruption, oligarchic power, economic inequality, poverty and the denial of democracy. The president dismissed his government but then unleashed a policy of brutal violence and mass detention, enabled by Russian security forces imported to stamp out demands for democracy across Russia's border. Over a hundred people were reportedly killed.

Inflation was a driver of protest in conflict-torn Yemen, in **March 2021**, triggered by the lack of payment of public sector salaries, and again in **September**, in response to the falling value of the currency. It was a similar story in **Iran** in early 2022, when public employees, including teachers,

protested at the rising cost of living and stagnating salaries. Even Oman saw rare protests in 2021 as young people **called for** economic reform, an end to corruption, jobs and improved living conditions. In **Ghana**, young people also took the lead, mobilising under the #FixTheCountry banner against economic troubles magnified by government mismanagement and corruption.

In Argentina, negotiations of a deal with the International Monetary Fund prompted **protests** in 2021 and 2022 as people sought to resist the imposition of economic austerity policies of the kind that usually bring public service cuts and increased tax burdens on the least well-off. The move that prompted protests in **El Salvador** in September 2021 was however unusual: the populist president's – see below – surprise decision to make bitcoin a second national currency, with protests articulating concerns about rising inflation, economic mismanagement and presidential overreach.

## IMPACTS AND CONCESSIONS

In many cases, protests were met with violent repression as they grew and articulated demands for major change. Even when successful they often paid this high price.

Perhaps the most successful economic protest movement in 2021 was also that where the state extracted the heaviest cost: **almost 700 people** died while camped out during the year-

long **Indian farmers' protests**, triggered by new laws that ripped up decades of regulations that guaranteed farmers a market and minimum prices for their goods, leaving farmers fearing for their livelihoods. Camped on the outskirts of India's capital, New Delhi, the farmers attracted widespread public sympathy. Fearing electoral punishment, strongman Prime Minister Narendra Modi eventually backed down and scrapped the farming laws in November 2021, but had he acted sooner, many lives would have been spared.

Other protests achieved impacts that stopped short of breakthroughs. In Colombia, the tax plan was **withdrawn** and replaced by a more moderate proposal. In Cuba, the government **allowed** travellers to bring back medicine, food and hygiene

products with no limitations or taxes. In Malawi, an **economic recovery plan** was introduced in response to protests. In Sri Lanka, protests have so far led to the resignation of the prime minister and cabinet and the loss of the ruling party's majority.

In most cases, the fundamental changes protesters have demanded are yet to come. In those contexts it can be said that there remains considerable protest latency, with movements likely to re-emerge to rearticulate demands in response to the next economic shock.

Protests will continue because they have not only arisen from historic centres of protests, such as workers' confederations and teachers' unions, but from multiple protest hubs in cities and highways around the country where people mobilise with different motivations and due to a variety of situations."

[MEMBERS of the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners Foundation and the Defend Freedom Campaign, Colombia](#)

## STRUGGLES FOR LABOUR RIGHTS

The pandemic has changed some people's relationship with work, and in many cases people have become more outspoken in making demands for labour rights.

Many workers – the multitudes whose jobs meant danger of infection, providers of frontline services and workers delivering orders from online companies that flourished during lockdowns – felt unnecessarily exposed to risk, unacknowledged or underappreciated, and are seeking to raise their

status. Migrant workers and people who earn a daily wage particularly suffered during lockdowns and had few avenues available other than protest. Workers for companies that benefited from the pandemic – such as Amazon – are asking for windfall profits to be shared in the form of better pay and conditions. People are demanding that existing labour standards are not sacrificed in neoliberal economic recovery plans.

**Taiwan's** food delivery workers are among those seeking to unionise in response to the increased pressure placed on them by the pandemic. In Honduras, healthcare workers who played a vital role in pandemic response **protested** to demand jobs after thousands were left out of work following the expiry of temporary contracts. Protesters insisted they had been promised permanent jobs but the government went back on its pledge. Migrant workers from Myanmar, based in a special economic zone in Laos, **protested** after not being paid for months by their employer; the zone was put in pandemic lockdown and guards reportedly stopped workers leaving. Greek workers repeatedly took strike action in 2021 in response to labour law changes allowing employers to force people to work longer hours. Although thousands **blocked traffic** in Athens, the law was passed.

Teachers' strikes have become commonplace, as inflation has made low salaries unliveable, but strikers often face restrictions and retaliation. In February 2022, teachers in **Zimbabwe** went on strike over pay demands, and according to

their unions 135,000 out of the roughly 140,000 employed in public schools were penalised with a three-month suspension. In **Vanuatu**, similar action met with restriction as the authorities denied permission for a month-long strike called by the teachers' union.

In Nigeria, university teachers went on a lengthy strike for better pay and funding for education; students supported them through a movement aimed at urging the government to negotiate so that the problem can be solved, future strikes can be averted and students can resume their education.

What the Fund Education Coalition wants is for the Nigerian government to accede to workers' demands in the educational sector. With all education workers currently on strike, it was only rational for students to join them."

[OLORUNFEMI ADEYEYE](#), Fund Education Coalition, Nigeria

Lesotho saw a **national strike** over several weeks in May 2021 by workers in garment, shoe, leather and textile factories to demand a 20 per cent pay rise, consistent with the rising cost of food. The minimum wage had been frozen since 2019, and even though the Labour Code requires the government to review it, it had failed to do so, blaming the pandemic. The following month, the government agreed to increase the minimum wage by 14 per cent, stopping short of protesters' demands. The government also extracted an unnecessarily high price for its climbdown: security forces attacked striking workers, with reports of two deaths and multiple injuries.

## CAMPAIGNING BREAKTHROUGHS

Although the odds are often stacked against change, gains can be won. In early 2022, two important labour victories came in India. In February, Shahi Exports, India's largest garment company, **agreed** to pay out around US\$4 million in unpaid wages, representing nine months of back pay, to some 80,000 workers. Workers took part in a two-year dispute over the company's refusal to pay the annual cost-of-living increase in the legal minimum wage. The company, a major high-street supplier, also faced international campaigning.

International pressure proved crucial for another breakthrough in April 2022. Following a civil society campaign triggered by the murder of female Dalit worker Jeyasre Kathiravel by her supervisor on the factory floor in 2021, a **landmark agreement** was negotiated to eliminate gender-based violence and harassment in factories of the Eastman Exports company. The Dindigul Agreement was reached by the company and the Tamil Nadu Textile and Common Labour Union, the Asia Floor Wage Alliance and Global Labor Justice - International Labor Rights Forum, along with H&M, the high-street chain Eastman Exports supplies. At least 5,000 mostly female Dalit workers will benefit in the first year. With both these advances, efforts are already underway to push other companies to fall into line.

The Dindigul Agreement includes an enforceable brand agreement (EBA), a type of legally binding agreement in which multinational companies commit to use their supply chain relationships to support a worker-led or union-led programme at particular factories or worksites. This agreement is the first of its kind in India, the only EBA to cover spinning mills and the first to include explicit protections against caste-based discrimination, a problem that intensified during the pandemic."

[JEEVA M](#), Asia Floor Wage Alliance

Years of civil society campaigning for decent work standards paid off in Uzbekistan in March 2022, when the International Labour Organization concluded that the country had **eliminated** forced labour and systematic child labour in its annual cotton harvest. These abusive practices, directed by the state, were long widespread in the world's

seventh-biggest cotton grower, affecting around two million adults and half a million children. Their elimination is thanks to the Cotton Campaign, a civil society coalition formed in 2007, which **organised** a boycott of Uzbek cotton, signing up many brands and retailers, and urged international organisations to put pressure on the government.

We have remained convinced of the importance of centring our campaigning around the demands of affected workers and civil society and the need to be guided by independent monitoring and reporting. And we have learned that advocacy for labour and human rights is a marathon, not a sprint. There is power in collective action and commitment by broad coalitions united with a purpose."

[ALLISON GILL](#), Global Labour Justice International Labour Rights Forum

## A RESURGENCE OF UNION ORGANISING

The USA is currently a hotbed of struggles to unionise workplaces. Few companies did as well out of the pandemic as Amazon, which saw its **profits** and share price soar as homebound people ordered online, making founder Jeff Bezos one of the world's richest people. Amazon vastly increased its workforce too, to the point where **almost a million** people now work for it in the USA alone.

Having experienced the downsides of working through the pandemic, Amazon workers started to demand a fair share of the company's success. In multiple US cities, warehouse workers are seeking to unionise so they can have collective bargaining over pay and conditions. The company is answering by applying a comprehensive set of **anti-unionisation tactics**, such as the deployment of rapid response teams including **former military personnel** and compulsory workplace anti-union meetings and propaganda. It used these tactics to win a vote against union recognition at its warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, although the result was subsequently overturned and the outcome of a second vote remains disputed. But a breakthrough came in April 2022 when workers

at a warehouse in Staten Island, New York **voted** to join a new independent union, becoming the first unionised Amazon warehouse in the USA.

Amazon workers are providing inspiration to others. In April 2022 an Apple Store in Atlanta, Georgia became the **first** of the company's 272 US stores to file an application for a union recognition vote. In December 2021, a Starbucks branch in Buffalo, New York, became the first outlet owned by the company to **vote to unionise**. Since then, at the time of writing, **another 16** branches have joined them; only one outlet has voted against unionisation. In May 2022, workers **launched** a unionisation drive in upmarket grocer chain Trader Joe's. As momentum builds, key lessons on how to organise are being learned and shared between workers in different outlets, mobilising practical solidarity.

Starbucks calls its staff 'partners' but, like Amazon, resists unionisation. It too has hired an anti-union law firm and held anti-union meetings. In both companies, numerous staff have reported they have been fired, suspended or had their hours cut after being active in unionisation efforts, often on the pretext of **petty offences**. These actions sit

at odds with the image enjoyed by companies that serve a socially liberal consumer base, which often market themselves on the basis of their supposed values. But retaliation only appears to be strengthening the resolve of employees to unionise, and as people become aware of the realities behind the labels, public support for labour unions is **growing**.



## DEMOCRACY: CHANGE AND REGRESSION

The processes and institutions of democracy continue to come under attack in many places, including through military coups, the degradation of democratic institutions by elected leaders and continuing far-right influence in multiple countries. All these put strain on civic freedoms. At the same time there is political volatility and fragmentation. In some countries, elections are seeing new political forces succeed in defeating autocratic and divisive leaders, and in many others the main trend is a rejection of incumbency as voters seemingly cast around for anything new to invest hopes in, particularly when politicians position themselves as outsiders and promise to tackle corruption. Political volatility can create opportunity for civil society, but also unlock growing threats.

### MILITARY COUPS ARE BACK

Military coups are not a thing of the past. Armies have taken control of Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, potentially normalising non-civilian rule again in West Africa. The military also seized control of Sudan following the ousting of civilian members of the transitional government, while the death of Chad's President Idriss Déby in April 2021 prompted the army to **dissolve** the government and put Déby's son at its head. Coup leaders are taking advantage of the overriding preoccupation of international allies with migration control, stability, security and economic opportunity above human rights.

Events marked an abrupt turnaround in Burkina Faso and Sudan, which once brimmed with the

revolutionary promise of democracy. These are countries where people have recent experience of ousting longstanding undemocratic leaders and resisting initial military efforts to co-opt revolutions.

Coups like these are generally preceded by widespread public dissatisfaction at the failure of elected leaders to address pressing problems such as poverty, corruption and insecurity, including jihadist insurrection in Burkina Faso and Mali. As a result, coups often enjoy some popular support, with some people taking to the streets in celebration.

West Africa's coups have come in a context where there is an overall deterioration in the quality of democracy, often characterised by flawed elections and constitutional reworking to erase presidential

term limits, as **preceded** Guinea's coup. These moves tend to meet with little international scrutiny and condemnation, as compared to coups themselves. International reaction only comes when it is too late.

**“The role of international institutions has been one of damage control rather than damage prevention. The UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan was deployed to Sudan in 2020 but throughout the months prior to the coup and the escalating tensions and differences between the parties leading the transitional period it remained totally absent. Its mediation role only materialised at a later stage, after the axe had already fallen. Regional institutions such as the African Union and the Arab League have played a marginal role.”**

[ABDEL-RAHMAN EL MAHDI, Sudanese Development Initiative](#)

This regressive trend offers a big test of international organisations that are meant to uphold democratic standards, including the Economic Community of West African states. The challenge is that people have been served a thin and procedural version of democracy, in which periodic elections of questionable quality are held as a box-ticking exercise; the very idea of democracy is devalued as a result.

Military rulers usually promise to apply a quick fix, ousting corrupt leaders and pledging to clean things up before handing power back to civilian rule. But often these promises come without a timeline and military rule becomes entrenched. Mali's junta once promised elections in 2022 but then **delayed** the deadline as far as 2025. Military

presidents have a habit of enjoying power and it's common for them to don civilian suits and hang onto office by holding flawed elections.

Public support for coups is variable. In Sudan in particular, where the experience of revolution is more recent, people have **continued to protest** in numbers to demand the restoration of democracy, braving brutal repression.

## DEMOCRACY SUBVERTED FROM WITHIN

Military takeover isn't the only way to subvert democracy. In Tunisia, President Kais Saied is carrying out a stealth coup, having dismissed parliament, taken control of the judiciary and

electoral commission and launched a process to **rewrite the constitution** from which political opponents are excluded. Because he swept away dysfunctional party politics and because the coup has come in stages, many were initially reluctant to call it a coup. But the president now holds unchecked power while several opponents languish **in jail**: the label fits.

“Civic space is shrinking. Although civil society is not yet under direct threat, we believe our turn is coming. We have noticed that Tunisian decision-makers hate intermediary bodies, so they have shut down parliament, attacked the judiciary and boycotted the media. We are probably next on their list, so we need to be very alert.”

[AMINE GHALI](#), [Al Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center](#), Tunisia

El Salvador's populist President Nayib Bukele has been busy sweeping away checks and balances on power since his upstart party won a supermajority in legislative elections in 2021. He's **changed** the constitution in his favour, packed the courts, tightened restrictions on civil society and independent media and, despite running on an anti-corruption ticket, **dismantled** a key anti-corruption watchdog. Disturbingly, he did all this with popular support, only **running into trouble** due to a bizarre decision to introduce bitcoin as a parallel national currency in June 2021 – see above – which ably made the case for why checks and balances are a good idea.

“After the legislative elections, which Bukele won by a wide margin, legal certainty ceased to exist. As soon as the new legislative assembly formed in early May, it dismissed the judges of the Constitutional Chamber and the head of the Attorney General's office. We had come to trust that the Constitutional Chamber would protect us from arbitrariness, but that certainty vanished in an instant. Shortly afterwards, the new Constitutional Chamber enabled the president's immediate re-election for a second term, so far prohibited by the Salvadoran Constitution.”

[EDUARDO ESCOBAR](#), [Acción Ciudadana](#), El Salvador



Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador offered an example of how elected leaders try to game the mechanisms of democracy for their own ends: in April 2022 he bizarrely held a recall referendum on himself, something nobody asked for, in an attempt to boost his legitimacy. The aim seemed to be to position himself as the voice of the people and strengthen his **attacks** on civil society and the media. The ruse however backfired: he gathered a large vote from his supporters but on an extremely low turnout, as most people stayed away to avoid legitimising his manoeuvre.

**The ruling party and president captured and used a tool that is supposed to be activated by citizens dissatisfied with the job done by the chief executive. It**

**was the ruling party that promoted the president's recall. They stirred up confrontation with the National Electoral Institute to question its autonomy. They cut its budget for the installation of ballot boxes and broke the law by conducting prohibited campaigning from the government lectern. They deepened polarisation and the stigmatisation of those who publicly considered the vote a farce."**

LEOPOLDO MALDONADO, [Article 19](#)

To see where such moves can lead, look no further than Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega, who has finally succeeded in his long mission of completely hollowing out democracy from the inside. In November 2021, thanks to **systematic repression**, he held an entirely fraudulent election to rubber-stamp another presidential term. Anyone who might stand up to him, from civil society to former political allies,

has now been jailed on spurious charges or forced into exile to escape prison.

**It is not only Nicaraguans who do not recognise the results of these elections: more than 40 countries around the world have not recognised them either. The government conducted a fraudulent election to gain legitimacy, but it failed to do so because no one recognises it at the national or international level."**

[ANONYMOUS NICARAGUAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER](#)

In Turkmenistan, such is the nonsensical nature of elections that the president was assured he could hand the office over to his son with minimal disruption, while continuing as the power behind the throne. Long rule was also assured in Djibouti, where President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh had a fifth

term **rubber-stamped** after running against a token opposition candidate. In Belarus, dictatorial President Alexander Lukashenko hung onto power through a campaign of mass incarceration when mass protests followed his blatantly fraudulent re-election in 2020, sustained by Russia's financial support. In February 2022, a constitutional referendum that lacked all substance of democracy extended Lukashenko's powers and conveniently erased Belarus's military neutrality just days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine had begun.

China has long been infamous for its zero-tolerance approach to democratic freedoms. That has extended to Hong Kong in the wake of the 2019 **democracy protests** that dared stand up to Chinese power. Leaders of the democracy movement are

now in jail or exile, and the Chinese government is making Hong Kong indistinguishable from the mainland, unilaterally ripping up the guarantees made when British rule ended in 1997. Through a manoeuvre that qualified as an election in name only, in April 2022 a single candidate for chief executive was endorsed by a tiny, handpicked electorate sworn to fealty. The unsurprising winner, John Lee, was the security chief who brutally crushed the democracy protests, making clear what China's priorities are.

Further restriction scarcely seemed possible on the mainland, but authoritarian President Xi

Jinping has launched a further crackdown ahead of the November 2022 Communist Party National Congress that will confirm his third term in power. Now non-political online activity and many elements of popular culture are under attack, as Xi seeks to eliminate any competitors for the unswerving loyalty he and the party demands. Such trends in China are globally worrying, given its extensive international influence, which encourages imitation.

### THE PERSISTENCE OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM

The toxic tide of right-wing populism isn't over yet either. The far right got its **highest-ever vote** in France's April 2022 presidential election, where

its power to win even when it loses was on display, as candidates from the political centre **adopted** hard-line anti-migrant rhetoric. The January 2022 election in Portugal, a country that long considered itself immune to right-wing extremist appeals, also witnessed the normalisation of the presence of the far right in electoral politics.

Hungary's authoritarian hardman and global **anti-rights figurehead** Viktor Orbán triumphed in April 2022 despite a united opposition running against him and a campaign focusing on his close links to Putin.

In the Philippines, hopes of restoring rights were dashed in the May 2022 elections. Incumbent authoritarian Rodrigo Duterte, whose 'war on drugs' has claimed tens of thousands of lives, hands over

to the son and namesake of Ferdinand Marcos, a bloody and corrupt dictator overthrown by a peaceful popular uprising in 1986, backed as vice president by Duterte's daughter. While competition was far from fair and vote-buying played a role, the autocratic alliance's resounding victory was also enabled by an aggressive, long-term disinformation operation which rewrote history: a significant segment of voters now sees the years of brutal dictatorship as a time of prosperity and security they would happily see return.

**I fear in a few months or years we will be living under a dictatorship. Marcos may even be able to stay in power for as long as he wants. After trying to reach power for so long, he has finally won, and he won't let go of power easily. It's very scary because the human rights violations that happened during his father's**

**dictatorship are not even settled yet. More human rights violations are likely to happen."**

[MARINEL UBALDO, Living Laudato Si' Philippines](#)

The power of far-right appeals to mobilise around disinformation was seen in Canada's capital Ottawa in February 2022, where a blockade led by truckers brought normal life to a standstill. The protest came in response to proposed COVID-19 vaccination requirement for truckers crossing the border but quickly accommodated an array of far-right conspiracy theories and extreme anti-government sentiment. It provided just one example out of many of how disinformation is being deliberately weaponised to mislead people, warp their understanding of reality and foster division, with domestic extremists, globally connected anti-

rights groups and rogue states like China and Russia all competing in the disinformation industry.

The Canada protests also offered further evidence of the opportunism of far-right politics, which has seized on vaccination as an issue, and the international currents of support, with **resources** flowing from the US far right. Dangerously, Canada's established centre-right party, reacting to yet another defeat in the September 2021 election, **echoed** and legitimised the far-right rhetoric.

Anti-rights appeals were deployed and normalised in the very different context of South Korea's March 2022 presidential election, which increasingly resembled a race to the bottom on women's rights. Flying in the face of a reality of **exclusion**, winner Yoon Suk-yeol **pitched** his election campaign at disaffected young men, conferring legitimacy on once-fringe myths that some small advances towards gender equality are responsible for young men's struggles in the labour market.

But efforts to mobilise broad-based opposition fronts to kick out right-wing populist leaders won some successes, seen in the Czech Republic in 2021 and in Slovenia in April 2022. In the Czech Republic, two opposition coalitions put their differences to one side to defeat populist Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and then **joined together** to form a moderate unity government. In Slovenia, a new party offered a fresh alternative to defeat a similar leader, Janez Janša, known for his **attacks** on civil society. Both cases indicated that, since such leaders thrive on division, approaches that bring people together and offer new and appealing alternatives can win.

“The main narrative used by members of the democratic coalition was that we needed change, that we had had enough of an oligarch as prime minister, and we wanted to see no more billions flowing illegally into politicians’ businesses.”

[MARIE JAHODOVÁ, Million Moments for Democracy, Czech Republic](#)

## POLITICAL CHANGE AND VOLATILITY

Change came too in Bulgaria and Moldova, where establishment leaders associated with grand-scale corruption were ousted; in Bulgaria, as in Slovenia,

a new party that voters saw as offering a fresh alternative triumphed. In both Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, political change was presaged by mass protests articulating public fury at corruption and the degradation of the rule of law.

Change is on the cards in Chile, where protest led to a **constitution-making process** led by an unprecedentedly diverse elected body. In December 2021 former student protester Gabriel Boric was elected the country’s youngest-ever president. Boric stood on a commitment to build a fairer economy and advance egalitarian, environmental and feminist values, offering voters a very stark

choice between his vision and the neoliberal and exclusionary platform of his opponent.

Peru’s voters similarly faced a choice between two highly contrasting visions in the June 2021 presidential runoff election. Leftist outsider Pedro Castillo beat right-wing political insider Keiko Fujimori by the tiny margin of 44,000 votes. Fujimori then deployed the Trump playbook of falsely claiming electoral fraud. This was also attempted by Zambia’s defeated President Edgar Lungu, in a context where voters overwhelmingly chose change despite the incumbent’s multiple **attempts** to skew the result.

Voters in Honduras also opted for change, making left-wing Xiomara Castro their first female president, a verdict in part on the extraordinary corruption that has seen her predecessor, Juan Orlando Hernández, **extradited** to the USA on drug-trafficking and firearms charges. Halfway across the world, Samoa also elected its first female leader, Prime Minister Naomi Mata’afa, marking the first electoral defeat of a party that had ruled since 1982, and a potentially significant challenge to patriarchal norms that often see women excluded from politics in Pacific Island nations.

In Australia’s May 2022 election, several independents succeeded in defeating established politicians,

a key factor in the ruling party’s surprise defeat. As well as being committed to climate action – see below – many of the new independents are women, offering an alternative to the country’s prevailing macho politics and the toxic nature of mainstream political discourse.

Even Lebanon’s hopelessly deadlocked governance – where the distribution of power between sectarian groups has long fostered extraordinary corruption and perpetuated governments with no interest in tackling political and economic problems – came under challenge in the May 2022 election. A cadre of young leaders who emerged from the protest movement active **since 2019** were elected,

defeating establishment candidates. The new, young members of parliament are working across sectarian barriers and embedding demands for women’s and LGBTQI+ rights in their calls for political and economic change.

**Despite taking place in an extremely complicated, uncertain and turbulent political and economic context, the process resulted in the election of many new independent candidates coming from civil society and calling for change. These new voices have political agendas that are very different from those of traditional ruling parties: they call for a new, more accountable governance system and for women’s rights, among other issues. These agendas include road maps**

for overcoming the ongoing deep economic crisis. And most importantly, they focus on how to stop the political race to the bottom that's been happening in Lebanon.”

[LINA ABOU HABIB, Asfari Institute for Civil Society and and Citizenship, Lebanon](#)

In many of these cases, voters have, when given the chance, dumped established parties and embraced newcomers. The volatility of voter preferences is resulting in highly fragmented legislative bodies and presidential candidates making it into runoff races on low shares of the vote.

In 2021, around 70 per cent of Ecuador's National Assembly members standing for re-election **lost**

their seats, and the fragmentation of parties on the left enabled right-wing business leader Guillermo Lasso to win the presidential run-off vote. But corruption scandals and neoliberal economic policies meant his popularity was short-lived, with **protests** suggesting more volatility to come.

In Costa Rica's presidential election in February 2022, far many more people didn't vote in the first round than backed any of the candidates. In an incredibly crowded field, eventual winner Rodrigo Chaves secured the support of just 16.8 per cent of voters. His policies differed little from those of his runoff opponent, but his **positioning** as a newcomer prepared to take on establishment

corruption struck a chord with voters seemingly casting around for anything fresh.

Winners in many recent elections should be aware that their victory may have less to do with their appeal than with rejection of incumbents. As they become the incumbents, they should be mindful that voters will judge them the same way. They must work in the interests not only of their voters but of society as a whole and deliver on the anti-corruption and accountability promises made on the campaign trail. No one has a mandate to monopolise power, and election winners have a duty to respect and uphold democratic institutions and processes and enable civic space so that civil society can play its proper part.



## CHALLENGING EXCLUSION: PROGRESS AND PUSHBACK

Excluded groups who are frequently the targets of political attacks –including women, LGBTQI+ people, Indigenous people and migrants and refugees – are fighting back. In the face of white supremacist, xenophobic, misogynistic and homophobic movements, and the political opportunists that associate with these to promote regressive and exclusionary agendas, they are scoring hard-fought victories.

**All gains, and resistance to regression, are coming from years of dogged civil society campaigning. Civil society has become the space where diversity is respected and intersectionality practised, not least because a new generation is taking up the struggle, forging new forms of civil society and instinctively embedding the elimination**

**of discrimination in its fight for democratic freedoms and economic, environmental and social justice.**

### **WOMEN'S MOVEMENT RECLAIMS PUBLIC SPACE**

Wherever pandemic restrictions were eased, women's movements came out in force on International Women's Day in March 2022 to keep demands for gender equality and justice on the public agenda. Women's marches demanded sexual and reproductive rights, social and economic rights, and increased women's political representation to help drive progress on all fronts. They called for action on gender-based violence, which



intensified under the pandemic, exposing deep-rooted patterns of subordination and oppression which, if not challenged, will remain even when the pandemic has passed.

“All types of violence against women and girls intensified during the pandemic. Unfortunately, times of crisis have rarely proven to be a catalyst for gender equality. What is key for achieving equality and social justice is an active civil society.”

[HANNAH STEINER and SOPHIE HANSAL, Network of Austrian Counselling Centres for Women and Girls](#)

A reminder of both gender-based violence and institutionalised misogyny came in the UK, where the murder of young woman Sarah Everard by a serving police officer in March 2021 led to a national outpouring of anger at violence against women and

police failures to protect women. At a vigil to express grief, women were violently manhandled by police officers. As further revelations came of systematic misogyny and racism in the police force, pressure forced the head of London’s police to resign.

“Misogyny is not just a policing problem; it is a societal problem. Misogynists are the product of a society that sees women and girls as less. For women to be respected and treated as equals, police reform is necessary, but it is not sufficient. What we need is to change the culture that sends girls to take self-defence classes instead of teaching boys to respect women.”

[ANNA BIRLEY, Reclaim These Streets, UK](#)

That change is possible was shown across the world in Indonesia, where a decade-long advocacy effort came to fruition in April 2022, when

parliament passed a Sexual Violence Bill. The new law criminalises forced marriage and sexual abuse and enhances protections for victims of physical and sexual violence. Civil society is now working to ensure the new law is effectively implemented.

“It took us 10 years to get here. A victory like this provides confirmation of the great influence our work has on society. Sexual violence is an offence that affects those who constitute the majority in our society. Getting this law passed is one step further in claiming the rights of women and children, including their right to live in a safe and secure environment.”

[NURIL QOMARIYAH, Perempuan Bergerak, Indonesia](#)

Like the women’s movement, LGBTQI+ Pride events burst back onto the streets wherever pandemic restrictions allowed. In places where



the movement is long-established, including the UK and USA, Pride marches are developing a radical new edge, as activists push back against the corporate co-optation of recent years. Moved by the power of the Black Lives Matter movement, campaigners are connecting their struggles for rights with demands for racial and social justice, building new alliances and allowing the multiply excluded to take the lead.

### VISIBILITY BRINGING BACKLASH AND RESISTANCE

Visibility brings backlash. Toxic divide-and-rule politics are stoking and instrumentalising enmity towards LGBTQI+ people to mobilise conservative

support bases. In Hungary, Orbán vilified LGBTQI+ people as part of his re-election strategy. But in Hungary, Poland and elsewhere, LGBTQI+ people are courageously refusing to go back into the closet and instead working to normalise their presence in public life. Elsewhere, including in Ghana and other African countries where same-sex relations continue to be criminalised as a colonial legacy, politicians are increasingly mobilising homophobia as punishment for advocacy for basic rights.

In India, Muslim women have become the target for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist party in their quest to consolidate power. In the run-up to key elections, Indian Muslim women found themselves in the crosshairs of a backlash against both the rights of religious

minorities and of women, in a confected dispute over the wearing of the hijab in schools. Enmity was turbocharged by disinformation. Young Muslim women were put in the impossible position of choosing between their right to practise their religion and their right to education.

**The hijab ban is very much part of Muslim marginalisation. Muslims are being driven to a corner and targeted by a right-wing government that demonises them to boost their support and remain in power. It is also a complete violation of women's rights to express their own identities. It should be my choice alone whether to wear the hijab or not."**

*[SYEDA HAMEED, Muslim Women's Forum, India](#)*

Nowhere are women's rights under attack as much as they are in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover of August 2021. The new Taliban regime, craving international recognition, talked of being less repressive than before, but their deeds have betrayed their words. Women have lost access to education, work and leisure. Most recently **mandatory veiling** has been introduced. Unsurprisingly, gender-based violence is growing.

But a post-Taliban generation that has experienced relative freedom is not ready to let go without a fight. Despite the heavy risk of violence and detention, restrictions have fuelled resistance rather than subservience, in the form of protests but also underground activities, putting women and girls at the forefront of Afghanistan's human rights struggle.

“We want to change people's minds and show them that children's rights, women's rights and the right to education are all fundamental rights. In 2016 we started with 12 secret schools. We now have 33 secret schools in the poorest provinces of Afghanistan. Right now, 5,000 girls are studying every day in our secret schools.”

[MATIULLAH WESA, PenPath, Afghanistan](#)

The Taliban may be the worst, but they're far from the only fundamentalists bent on making society subservient to religious rules. In the country the Taliban consider their deadliest enemy, the USA, fundamentalism is in full flow. Trumpism remains an ascendant ideology, regardless of who is in power. The US Supreme Court is set to overturn *Roe v Wade*, the 1973 ruling protecting abortion rights, which will immediately bring into effect state-level laws banning abortion across roughly half the country. Efforts to push for a nationwide ban will likely follow.

At state level it's a race to the bottom, with states competing for the title of most 'pro-life'. Oklahoma is so far winning this dismal contest, **banning abortion** from the moment of 'fertilisation', a policy based on wilful disinformation about conception and pregnancy. It isn't going to stop there: emboldened far-right groups will then likely **go after** birth control, marriage equality and even racial desegregation, on the basis of the Supreme Court's leaked rebuttal of the constitutional interpretation on which these essential freedoms rest.

Women's rights advocates are not resigned to watching this happen: they are **mobilising** nationwide to make their presence felt on the streets, while organising in solidarity to ensure continuing access to abortion in some form.

“Extremist politicians have been hellbent on stigmatising and banning abortion for decades. But we will continue to fight unapologetically for unrestricted abortion access. Abortion is essential healthcare, and it should be readily accessible to anyone who needs or wants one. We're leading this movement and changing the culture with an unapologetic abortion-forward mindset, through community-building, education and political advocacy.”

[CAROLINE DUBLE, Avow, USA](#)

The culture war is also being waged in education. Books are being removed from libraries; teenage students are fighting back by forming 'banned book clubs' and suing for their right to read. There are creeping state-by-state bans against teachers mentioning sexuality or gender in class or teaching 'critical race theory' – a decades-old academic concept that examines the intersections of race, society and institutions, turned into a strawman in the same way 'gender' has been. Florida's **Parental Rights in Education bill** is probably the strongest embodiment of the aspirations of a neoconservative anti-gender movement heavily funded by US foundations.

The same US money is highly active in funding extremism globally, enabling well-resourced anti-rights groups to develop influence. Such

forces recently made their move in Guatemala, where Congress introduced a law promising increased prison sentences for abortion, a same-sex marriage ban and curbs on the teaching of sexual diversity. In response to protests, the president backtracked and Congress withdrew the bill, but it showed how anti-rights groups are pushing on, testing the waters and working towards a long-term project. Civil society cannot let its guard down.

“Anti-rights groups in Guatemala are part of a highly organised and well-funded transnational movement that aims to undermine the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people, as well as the broader participation of civil society in public debate and decision-making.”

[VISIBLES](#), Guatemala

## ADVANCES IN ABORTION RIGHTS

Although the global context is challenging, a highly committed and organised civil society has gained ground in several countries, particularly in Latin America, where a generational change has turned feminism into a mass movement, under the banner of the green wave.

Good news came first in Ecuador, where the Constitutional Court ruled in a case brought by women’s rights groups by decriminalising abortion in cases of rape in April 2021. This represented the first relaxation of the country’s incredibly harsh abortion laws. Although the women’s movement viewed it as too little, too late, it immediately got ready for a legislative battle to turn the ruling into reality. Recognition of the fact that this small victory

could open the door to bigger gains was reflected in the fundamentalist backlash that followed.

“For those of us who have devoted our lives to this and will continue to do so, this change has a great symbolic impact, even though it is a small step. Obviously, the legalisation of abortion in cases of rape is something huge for raped girls and women. And although no progress has been made in recognising the right of all women to decide about their own bodies in any circumstance, symbolically it is a huge step forward because it demystifies abortion.”

[VIRGINIA GÓMEZ DE LA TORRE](#), [Fundación Desafío](#), Ecuador

Hope came from the regional human rights system in El Salvador, with a November 2021 ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in a case brought by Salvadoran women’s rights organisations.

It determined that blanket abortion bans and the criminalisation of women who experience obstetric emergencies constitute gross human rights violations. In a decision with far-reaching implications, since it is binding for 20 countries that have accepted its jurisdiction, the Court instructed the government to redress the harm and modify its laws and policies.

“ Strategic litigation in the Inter-American system has allowed us to address the problems of persecution, torture and judicial and police abuse faced by women in El Salvador. Justice in El Salvador is patriarchal justice.”

[SARA GARCÍA GROSS, Citizens' Group for the Decriminalisation of Abortion in El Salvador](#)

Legal action also paid off in Colombia, in the form of a February 2022 ruling by the Constitutional

Court that decriminalised abortion on demand up to 24 weeks. This long-awaited decision was the result of a decades-long struggle by the feminist movement – but it too unleashed an instant anti-rights backlash, including initiatives to reinstate restrictive laws.

In stark contrast to the USA, Mexico has joined the green wave, big time: its Supreme Court made several crucial decisions that could pave the way for nationwide legalisation of abortion. In a key ruling in a case concerning Sinaloa state, it declared it unconstitutional for state laws to redefine the legal concept of personhood by protecting ‘human life from conception’. Soon afterward, it also declared invalid the principle of conscientious objection for medical practitioners. These steps reaffirmed hopes that the Americas as a whole are moving in a progressive

direction: while it commands the headlines, the USA is increasingly the outlier rather than the norm.

“ In our country strong stigma still prevails around abortion, based on the idea of motherhood as women’s inevitable fate. This idea continues to permeate all state institutions and laws, and forms the basis for not only the social but also the legal criminalisation of abortion. It also sends the strong message that the state plays a role in reproductive decisions that should belong to the private sphere.”

[VERÓNICA ESPARZA and REBECA LOREA, Information Group on Reproductive Choice, Mexico](#)

Across the ocean in tiny San Marino, progress came through the ballot box, as people overwhelmingly voted in a September 2021 referendum to overturn a complete abortion ban. The result, belying the country’s socially conservative image, resulted from

a positive, broad-based campaign for change that contrasted with the negative campaigning of church groups opposed to reform. The result gave heart to campaigners in other highly Catholic countries, including Poland, where abortion has recently been **banned**, and Malta, where it has always been illegal.

“ We were up against the opposition of the Catholic Church and the ruling party, the Christian Democrats. The fact that 77 per cent of citizens, many of whom are Catholics and support the ruling party, voted ‘yes’, shows that people’s views have evolved faster than those of their political and religious representatives.”

[SARA CASADEI, Noi Ci Siamo San Marino](#)

## PUSHING FORWARD FOR LGBTQI+ RIGHTS

The same forces trying to stem the tide of liberalisation of abortion rights are also making LGBTQI+ people, particularly **trans people**, their targets, causing immense suffering. Nonetheless, progress is still being made in realising LGBTQI+ rights.

In Central America and the Caribbean, long inhospitable territory for LGBTQI+ people, progress has been won, as on abortion rights, in the regional human rights system, following cases brought by civil society. In February 2021, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights published its report on a case brought by two LGBTQI+ people against the state of Jamaica. The state was found responsible for the violation of their fundamental rights and urged to repeal its homophobic laws.

This unprecedented decision – the first in which the regional body stated that laws that criminalise LGBTQI+ people violate international law – brought hope of progressive change to the Commonwealth Caribbean, where nine countries still have colonial laws prohibiting same-sex relations.

“ For civil society, the report reinforced ongoing calls for amendments to the 1864 Offences Against the Person Act and became part of existing engagement with policymakers to have it changed. After 20 years of advocacy, now there is sustained public conversation around LGBTQI+ rights, increasing public tolerance and a growing willingness among parliamentarians, policymakers and key decision-makers to engage with the local LGBTQI+ community.”

[KAREN LLOYD, J-FLAG, Jamaica](#)

In Honduras, a ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights held the state accountable for the murder of Vicky Hernández, a trans woman, bringing hope that the widespread abuses trans people experience daily and the almost total impunity that has prevailed may come to an end.

“ The ruling marks a before and after, as it establishes guarantees of non-repetition that must be turned into public policy in favour of LGBTQI+ people.”

[INDYRA MENDOZA, Cattrachas Lesbian Network, Honduras](#)

In rapidly changing Chile, currently going through an unprecedentedly inclusive process to write its new constitution – see above – December 2021 saw the approval of the Equal Marriage Law. It took

years of campaigning to get to this point. Activists went through all domestic courts up to the Supreme Court and then denounced the state at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights before reaching a 'friendly settlement agreement' with the state. It was this agreement that eventually led to the adoption of the civil society-authored bill as law.

Chile is going through a complex, epoch-changing process that came about as a result of the 2019 social outburst. Although the movement for gender equality was already very strong, the context of social mobilisation helped create an environment conducive to the consolidation of the LGBTQI+ movement as a presence recognisable on the streets in citizen protests demanding more equality."

[MARCO BECERRA, AcciónGay, Chile](#)

In Switzerland, a similar law was passed by parliament in December 2020, also after years of campaigning. Anti-rights groups, however, refused to accept it and called a referendum in an attempt to mobilise public backlash. But a broad-reaching 'yes' campaign ensured this backfired: in September 2021, 64 per cent of voters gave same-sex marriage their ringing endorsement, guaranteeing the right by popular will.

The recognition of marriage to all couples will eliminate the inequalities in legal treatment that still exist regarding facilitated naturalisation, joint adoption, joint property, access to medically assisted reproduction and legal recognition of parent-child relationships.

[RETO WYSS, Pink Cross, Switzerland](#)

## RACIAL INJUSTICE STAYS ON THE AGENDA

The many voices insisting that Black Lives Matter have not fallen silent. Some important steps forward have been taken in dealing with colonial legacies that embed emblems of racism in everyday life, but the movement has brought violent backlash. The pandemic unleashed an intensified wave of racist aggression against Asian minorities in western countries, connected with pandemic disinformation. In response people of Asian heritage have allied themselves with the global movement, demanding that Asian Lives Matter too.

Many of us took inspiration from the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 and we have since seen more and more people engaging in conversation about anti-racism and the need to be actively anti-racist, and engaging in struggles for broader social justice. We have seen so many people pouring into the streets and taking action to become actively anti-racist in their own lives.”

[MARITA ETCUBAÑEZ, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, USA](#)

Canada’s Indigenous people are also challenging long histories of discrimination. In 2021 undeniable evidence came to light of mass graves of Indigenous children, forced into a racist residential school system as late as 1997, in which many died as a result of institutionalised abuse and neglect. Canada’s Indigenous people turned their grief into protest, breaking open a fresh conversation about

the country’s foundational genocide. But beyond official ceremonies of regret, they are demanding material action to end the exclusion in which Indigenous Canadians continue to live.

The challenges are steep. Racial hate crimes are **increasing** across global north countries as far-right forces mobilise hatred. Once a fringe set of white supremacist lies, the so-called ‘**great replacement theory**’ has entered the political mainstream. It is both a manifesto item of US mass shooters and a claim increasingly dragged into the mainstream by right-wing politicians, and as such a powerful piece of disinformation that civil society needs to find ways of rebutting.

### A BROKEN SYSTEM FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Even amidst a pandemic that limited travel for many, the number of people forced to leave their homes reached **a new record** in 2021: according to UN Refugee Agency data, more than 84 million people were displaced, eclipsing the previously record-breaking years of 2020 and 2019. And this was before at least **6.6 million Ukrainians** fled the war. This is a world of migrants and refugees like never before, yet national and global policies refuse to accept this reality.

Conflict remains a major driver of displacement in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Sudan, among others. In Afghanistan, the worsening

security situation forced people from their homes as the Taliban advanced. Unprecedented levels of displacement are being recorded in Central America, Haiti, Mexico and Venezuela, with people leaving their homes, and often their countries, due to violence, lack of jobs, the ravages of the pandemic and the effects of climate change. The Mediterranean continues to be the only possible route – but also a mass grave – for many people trying to reach safe haven in Europe, often fleeing inhumane treatment in Libya.

Restrictions do not stop migration, and instead deepen the violations of migrants’ rights, as they make them susceptible to the challenges of the labour market and the housing rental market and limit their access to basic rights such as health and education.”

[DELIO CUBIDES, Chilean Catholic Migration Institute](#)



Despite civil society's efforts, states rarely show anything other than hostility towards migrants. Countries that received Syrian asylum-seekers, such as Denmark, decided – against all evidence – they could now be returned home. If sent home, they can expect to face repression. In Turkey, the country with the world's largest refugee population, strong-arm President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is repeatedly stoking xenophobia that harms migrants and refugees, instrumentalising them to rally political support ahead of elections and extract concessions from the European Union.

With all other routes blocked by politicians fixated on stopping migrants, many are attempting a dangerous sea crossing to get to the UK. In early 2022, in a move evidently made to placate its right-wing base and distract from numerous scandals, the UK government announced a plan to remove asylum seekers to Rwanda. **Syrians** will be the first to go. Rwanda's authoritarian President Paul Kagame will expect to receive no further UK criticism of his human rights record as a result.

The UK was not the first state to do this: Australia has for years been interring asylum seekers in Pacific Island detention centres. This is what happens when politicians make asylum seekers scapegoats for bigger political problems and deny the humanity of those crossing borders.

But the catastrophe in Ukraine showed that migrants need not to be treated this way. Ukrainians fleeing war deserved all possible help,

but their treatment highlighted the deep-seated racism behind the hostility usually afforded to migrants and refugees. Media reporting of the Ukrainian exodus was strikingly different from the coverage of the arrival of non-European refugees. Meanwhile African and Asian students and **Roma people** escaping Ukraine were treated noticeably worse. The right-wing leaders of Hungary and

Poland, who for years benefited from stoking enmity towards Middle Eastern migrants and refugees, now sought political advantage in welcoming white refugees.

Still, that compassion has its limits: in Poland the state is increasingly taking over voluntary efforts, typically suspicious of civil society, and refugees who became

pregnant as the result of rape are being **denied help** due to the country's draconian abortion law. Obstacles don't stop migrants and refugees: they just make their lives worse and expose them to danger and criminality. Solutions will only result from concerted regional and global approaches that acknowledge migration as a fact of life and a human rights issue rather than a security problem.



## ENVIRONMENT: ACTION AND DENIAL

A warming world is an inherently unfair world. Excluded groups, because they are most denied power and resources, are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Those who have done the least to cause climate change will suffer its worst consequences. Civil society is pushing for climate action and a just transition out of the same motivations that it demands democratic freedoms and economic, social, gender and racial justice. Civil society is challenging an extractivist economic model that puts profits before people and calling governments and businesses to account for perpetuating the climate crisis.

### GOVERNMENTS AND BUSINESSES CHOOSE NOT TO ACT

The warning couldn't be starker. The IPCC's **latest report**, published in April 2022, makes clear time is almost up. Greenhouse gas emissions, which have so far only increased, must start falling by 2025 for us to have any chance of limiting the world's temperature rise to a maximum of 1.5°C above pre-industrial times. Above this threshold, the impacts of climate change will be much worse.

This is not some fringe view: the report was signed off by all UN member states and endorsed by hundreds of scientists. UN Secretary-General António Guterres was blunt in backing its findings. He **called out** the 'litany of broken climate promises' and 'empty pledges' by governments

and companies, accusing them of 'lying' with 'catastrophic' results.

And yet the devastating conclusions and need for urgent action barely made the front pages before giving way to whatever came next in the news cycle. With the world's attention elsewhere, including on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the fossil fuel industry keeps **ploughing ahead**, making bets that government commitments won't lead to any action that ends their lethal business. In the week after the IPCC report alone, **seven** new oil and gas projects were approved. 2022 has seen numerous fossil fuel companies posting record profits.

In many countries hit hard by the pandemic, governments are pushing ahead with huge energy and infrastructure projects in the hope of

reviving their economies. Subsidies supporting environmentally damaging industries have climbed to **two per cent** of global GDP. Russia's war on Ukraine, which should incentivise states reliant on Russian energy to reduce dependency by embracing renewable energies, may instead be prompting a return to coal or the adoption of unsustainable alternatives such as fracking.

**Just recently, the current administration lifted a moratorium on mining, based on claims that it will help the economy recover, after it was hard hit by the poor pandemic response. This will usher in around 100 mining agreements in different parts of the country. This was opposed by many communities due to the negative impacts of existing mining operations."**

[LIA MAI TORRES, Center for Environmental Concerns, Philippines](#)

But for civil society, despair is not an option. It is keeping up the pressure by all means possible, from lobbying, legal action and engagement with corporate shareholders, to participation in global forums and mass street protest, disruption and non-violent civil disobedience. The enormity of the challenge demands simultaneous action on all fronts.

## GLOBAL ADVOCACY: ANOTHER DISAPPOINTING COP

At the intergovernmental level, the climate change year is measured out in COP – conference of the parties – summits. Each year – except in 2020, due to the

pandemic – states come together, with a heavy private sector presence, to make climate commitments and check progress in meeting them. Since the 2015 Paris Agreement, in which almost all states agreed a plan to limit global warming, COPs review performance in implementing it. Civil society works hard to engage but is often frustrated by lack of access.

The value of these summits must clearly be questioned: there have now been 26 and yet the danger of climate catastrophe has increased. COP26, held in Glasgow, UK in November 2021, offered no breakthrough, providing plenty of show but little substance. In the wings of the conference states and companies launched an array of non-binding side deals that made headlines but often fell down in the details. The worst-offending states opted out of many agreements, and some were little better than greenwash.

In the final official agreement, the last-minute watering down of commitments to end coal use showed the continuing influence of the fossil fuel industry, represented by **over 500 delegates**. Plans for emissions cuts did not get close to keeping the global temperature rise under 1.5°C. Climate financing commitments for global south countries remained inadequate.

The outcomes reflected the fact that civil society voices were consistently muted, with people denied access to key sessions or told to use inadequate online platforms. In these circumstances it was made almost impossible to advocate for more ambition and press for accountability.

**Once again, at COP26 states have exhibited their complete inefficiency in acting in compliance with their own decisions. Much more money is being invested in destroying the planet than in saving it. As long as these forums do not discuss sanctions on states that do not comply with agreements, or that do not even sign declarations, there will be no concrete results."**

[RUTH ALIPAZ CUQUI, National Coordination for the of the Defence of Indigenous Peasant Territories and Protected Areas, Bolivia](#)

COP26's commitment to develop stronger national plans by COP27 brought some hope, but there's a major problem: better plans and actions will only come if civil society is able to push for more ambition. But COP27 is being held in Egypt, a country with closed civic space,

where civil society access challenges can only increase. After Egypt it will be the turn of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which also has closed civic space. Civic space is essential to climate action, because it enables civil society to push for a just transition, urge stronger commitments and monitor the performance of states and the private sector. Closed civic space enables governments and companies to hide from pressure and scrutiny. When the UN holds key climate summits in conditions of closed civic space, it makes adequate climate action less likely.

The inadequate outcomes of COP26, and the likelihood of more disappointment at COP27, are an open invitation for civil society to exert greater street pressure on institutional processes.

## PUSHING FOR STRONGER ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

At the global level, civil society is also pushing for higher standards on environmental protection.

A milestone was reached in July 2021, with the release of the first official draft of a new Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It sets a series of targets on land and sea conservation. Importantly, it commits to eliminating financial incentives that harm biodiversity and increasing international financing for conservation in global south countries.

This framework was two years in the making, with civil society playing a role, coming together in the CBD Alliance, a network working to increase public awareness and connect those engaging at the global level with those involved in biodiversity-related work on the ground.

**“The CBD is a legally binding agreement and, if fully implemented, has great potential. It is an opportunity to adopt a rights-based approach that puts the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, women and peasants, and the rights of nature, at the centre of the debate, connecting the CBD to the international human rights architecture.”**

[GADIR LAVADENZ, CBD Alliance](#)

The framework is pending finalisation at the next UN Biodiversity Conference, repeatedly postponed due to the pandemic. Civil society will keep engaging to try to keep up momentum and remain alert to likely attempts to water the agreement down.

Other international processes with potential for civil society influence are at play. The UN Ocean Treaty is currently **being negotiated**; it could offer significantly more protection for the majority of the world’s surface. However, the fourth round of negotiations, held in March 2022, ended in disagreements. According to civil society accounts, some states deliberately prolonged discussions as a way of avoiding decisions that might challenge their ways of operating and hold them accountable. As with the Global Biodiversity Framework, civil society warns that the longer the discussions are

drawn out, the more diluted the agreement is likely to become.

A more nascent opportunity comes in the proposal to develop the **first-ever global treaty on plastic pollution**, aimed at phasing out new plastic production by 2040. The idea, advanced by some states at the UN Environment Assembly in February 2021, is supported by many scientists and civil society groups. Progress on all these fronts will partly depend on civil society pressure to push governments to show political will.

At the regional level, the first meeting of the COP of the **Escazú Agreement** – the environmental rights treaty for Latin America and the Caribbean – took place in Chile in April 2022. Discussions largely focused on the standards states must follow in establishing independent oversight mechanisms.

The agreement, the first to include provisions on environmental human rights defenders, was negotiated with extensive civil society involvement, and entered into force following its 11<sup>th</sup> ratification in February 2021. National-level ratifications were the result of **sustained civil society advocacy and campaigning**, and civil society’s role was recognised, with the summit much more open to participation than such processes usually are. Civil society will keep pushing for many more states to ratify the treaty and will scrutinise states’ human rights compliance.

Politically the first COP was very important because it renewed political commitment to the Escazú Agreement. There was a lot of commitment, and the rules adopted are very positive for civil society's active participation. Already in this COP there was large civil society participation, including by women's groups, youth groups and Indigenous peoples. Civil society had a direct voice in the negotiations to bring its proposals."

NATALIA GÓMEZ, [EarthRights International](#)

Civil society continued to work to domesticate international standards into national-level law. Progress came in Italy, where a law passed in February 2022 built environmental protection into the country's constitution. Climate activists celebrated the new possibilities this opened up.

The new text of Article 9 establishes the principle of environmental protection 'in the interest of future generations', a reference to the concept of sustainable development, according to which natural resources cannot be exploited in an unlimited way – without taking into account that they are finite and how this will affect those who will come after us."

[EDOARDO ZANCHINI](#), [Legambiente Onlus](#), Italy

## TAKING TO THE COURTS

An increasingly important part of the response sees activists taking to the courts to hold governments and business to account: **over a thousand** climate lawsuits have been brought

since 2015, with 191 new actions filed between May 2020 and May 2021. Research suggests over half of all lawsuits have been successful.

Climate activists won several landmark cases in 2021, as courts ruled against governments and companies and instructed them to act on climate change.

In the Netherlands, a court ruled that oil giant Shell must cut its emissions by 45 per cent by 2030, setting a precedent by ordering a private corporation to comply with the Paris Agreement – and not just in its own emissions, but also by trying to cut them throughout its value chain. The case was brought by environmental groups led by Friends of the Earth.

In Germany, nine young climate activists won their case in April 2021, with the court ruling that Germany's law to cut emissions to net zero by 2050 needed to be strengthened. The court ruled that young people's rights were being breached because failure to make adequate cuts now would put an unreasonable burden on them in future.

Buoyed by the ruling and following a wave of public anger about devastating floods, Germany's youthful climate movement mobilised during the October 2021 election campaign to demand more ambition from all parties. The new coalition government, which includes a buoyant Green party, went further than the court's ruling, **committing** to phase out coal by 2030 and generate 80 per cent of its power from renewables by the same date.

“The climate movement, particularly Fridays for Future, has become much stronger. Young people are mobilised and they will keep up the pressure because they rightly fear for their future.”

SASCHA MÜLLER-KRAENNER, [Deutsche Umwelthilfe, Germany](#)

A similar dynamic between lawsuits and political action came in Australia, where young activists won a court judgment in July 2021, ruling that the government has a duty of care towards young Australians to avoid causing injury or death as a result of carbon dioxide emissions. Although the ruling is subject to appeal, climate change went on to become a major issue in the country's May 2022 election – see above – in which candidates committed to reversing the government's policy

of climate inaction fared well and the climate-denying ruling party experienced one of its worst-ever defeats.

Many current lawsuits are being brought in the USA; young activists in Montana will soon have their day in court, in a case that **argues**, as in Germany, that their state has put fossil fuel industry interests ahead of their futures.

States particularly vulnerable to climate change are following suit. In 2021, Vanuatu **announced** it would seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the right of present and future generations to be protected from climate change. Its initiative has **won the support** of over 1,500 civil society groups from more than 130 countries.

## SHAREHOLDERS TAKING ACTION

Fossil fuel companies are also being urged to transition to cleaner energies both by concerned investors and climate activists who, even by buying a few shares, can place a resolution before shareholders.

In May 2021 an activist hedge fund **won two seats** on the board of Exxon, arguing that the oil giant was failing to adjust its business strategy to climate change. That same month, against board advice, a majority of Chevron's shareholders **voted** to cut the emissions generated by the company's products. In April 2022, shareholders

of mining giant Rio Tinto **voted against** approving the company's financial statements due to lack of clarity about climate change risks.

It is becoming almost a matter of routine for companies, particularly the many large corporations headquartered in the USA, to face climate resolutions. They don't even have to be fossil fuel companies: in January 2022, 70 per cent of shareholders in Costco **voted** to call on the company to set a strategy to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions in its value chain by 2050.

Campaigners calling for pension funds to divest and support renewables are seeing success. In October 2021, one of the world's biggest pension funds, ABP in the Netherlands, said it would **sell** all its fossil fuel holdings, worth around US\$17 billion. This came after legal action and **protests** including an occupation of its offices.

The month before, under similar pressure from climate activists, Canada's second-largest pension fund, CDPQ, **announced** it would divest all its oil investments by the end of 2022.

Climate activists are increasingly campaigning to seek seats on fossil fuel company boards; even when unsuccessful, they use their campaigns to draw attention to the climate harm these companies cause.

## RESISTING FROM THE GROUND UP

On the ground, climate harm is being challenged by environmental, land rights and Indigenous human rights defenders. Often this comes at great risk, particularly in Latin America, the region with the world's **highest concentration** of killings of environmental activists. Attacks are often connected to extractive industries, particularly mining companies.

But given the importance of what is at stake, people fight for change despite the risks. In their struggle to defend land and territory, grassroots civil society continues to push back against civic space restrictions. In Honduras, one of the deadliest countries in the world for environmental activism, sustained campaigning resulted in the vindication of the struggles of the Guapinol water defenders, who spent over two and a half years in prison for anti-mining activism before being freed in February 2022.

**We have worked to defend and support our comrades criminalised by the state and private companies, but we have never been able to address what's at the root of the conflict: the handing over of natural resources. Preventing the criminalisation of defenders is a big step, but we must address the issue of concessions. Approved projects are waiting to be implemented."**

[EDY TÁBORA](#), Justicia para los Pueblos, Honduras

In Bougainville, an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea, sustained campaigning and a complaint filed with the Australian government brought results in July 2021, when Rio Tinto agreed to fund an independent assessment into the environmental and human rights impacts of a huge copper and gold mine it abandoned in 1989.

**The communities we are working with called for Rio Tinto to fund the impact assessment as a first critical step towards addressing the massive and ongoing environmental and human rights problems being caused by the mine. They hope and expect that once the impact assessment is complete, Rio Tinto will contribute to a substantial, independently managed fund to help address the harms caused by the mine and assist long-term rehabilitation efforts."**

[KEREN ADAMS](#), Human Rights Law Centre, Australia

Rio Tinto also experienced a reverse in Serbia, where in January 2022 the government **withdrew** licences to mine lithium and boron in the Jadar valley. Serbia's government had previously been committed to extraction: in 2015 it passed a law declaring the mining of key minerals to be in the country's strategic interest. But mass protests, including **road blockades**, along with legal action forced it to change course.

**In the face of many displeased people mobilised in an election year, the government reacted. It revoked the decree greenlighting Rio Tinto's project and backtracked on the spatial plan for the special-purpose area designed for the project's implementation, which had been illegally introduced. It really was the fact that people mobilised in an election year that did the trick."**

[MIROSLAV MIJATOVIĆ](#), Podrinje Anti-Corruption Team, Serbia

It isn't just in Serbia where the growing business of lithium mining – booming due to rising demand for electric vehicle batteries but impossible to extract without great harm at mining sites – is being met with resistance. In Bolivia, communities are protesting at mines against foreign-led potential extraction, while in Chile, Indigenous communities are **calling for** the suspension of operating permits until an environmental compliance plan is agreed. Campaigners have submitted an **amparo appeal** – a writ to seek protection of constitutional rights – which the Supreme Court has agreed to hear.



countries. Powerful state and corporate interests are trying to silence local voices warning about its potentially disastrous consequences, but the #StopEACOP campaign is mobilising to put pressure on investors, attempting to stop financing for the project's development.

 **Our government cares only about profit, not people. We have urged them to be mindful about the approval they give to investors, but the response we always get in return is threats.”**

[NYOMBI MORRIS, Earth Volunteers, Uganda](#)

In the USA, the Keystone XL Pipeline saga had a **happy ending**. Following decade-long resistance by Indigenous groups and environmental activists, in January 2021 President Joe Biden cancelled the USA's permit for the pipeline designed to carry oil from Canada's Alberta tar sands. The project's developers officially **abandoned** it the following June. Attention soon turned towards other pipeline projects, including the Canadian government-owned Trans Mountain pipeline and other US pipelines that still have permits.

Resistance continues in East Africa, where the governments of Tanzania and Uganda have embarked on a major extractive project entailing two new oil fields and a pipeline across the two

What these various campaigns are making clear is that commitments to cut emissions are only part of what's needed. Current economic models are unsustainable and need to change. Economic incentives support extraction rather than climate action, and simply switching from one form of car to another won't stop extractive harm. Efforts must go into developing and scaling less harmful energy options, but also energy conservation that helps society live within planetary boundaries. Strategies to both cut emissions and live with climate impacts need to be adequately funded and global south populations shouldn't be expected to carry an even heavier burden than they already are.

## RESPONDING TO DISASTER

A catastrophic oil spill on Peru's coast in January 2022 brought home another devastating impact of the fossil fuel industry. A massive leak from a pipeline serving a refinery owned by Spanish oil giant Repsol left thousands of small-scale fishers without a livelihood, turned tourist spots into ghost towns and killed marine life.

In the face of an oil company with a **track record** of irresponsibility and greenwash and a state that promotes an extractivist model with little implementation of environmental laws, civil society is demanding accountability and improved safety standards.

“The company’s reaction was very slow. There is little transparency in the investigation. Lack of accountability is a longstanding concern for the communities in these areas, but their demands have been systematically ignored. For us it is very clear: Repsol must publicly assume clearly defined responsibilities.”

[JUAN CARLOS SUEIRO, Oceana](#)

The story repeated itself most recently in **Gabon**, with a leak in April 2022 at an oil terminal run by the French-British oil company Perenco. The company, already accused of numerous environmental regulation violations, insisted the leak was under control. But environmental activists reported a significant spill and called on the company to take responsibility.

Meanwhile, extreme weather events linked to climate change just keep coming. In recent months record heatwaves have killed hundreds in **Canada**, **India** and the **USA**, among others. Extreme drought has threatened the Amazon forest in **Brazil**, and helped fuel further conflict in **Somalia**. Forest fires have raged in Lebanon, **Russia** and Turkey, plus many more. Ever **more frequent** floods have stricken European countries – including Austria, **Belgium** and **Germany** – and most recently South Africa, causing loss of life and the destruction of crucial **infrastructure**.

Those who have the least – who live in poverty and vulnerability having done little to contribute to climate change – are paying the highest price. In response, civil society has scrambled to help people left traumatised, homeless or in ill health by events such as wildfires, floods and extreme heat.

Civil society is combining the provision of crucial support with advocacy, urging governments to take stronger action against climate change. The need is to tackle the root causes of extreme weather rather than just respond to its ravaging effects.



## GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: FAILINGS FURTHER EXPOSED

The global governance system is tested by emergencies – and it keeps being found wanting. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has further revealed the profound inadequacies of the global architecture meant to guarantee rights and keep people safe, as the COVID-19 pandemic did before it. The case for better global cooperation, enabled by UN reform, has never been stronger.

### UN SECURITY COUNCIL: NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE

The UN Security Council (UNSC) could do little to respond to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, even though it constituted a clear and obvious

violation of the UN Charter, which prohibits states using force against the ‘territorial integrity or political independence’ of another state.

Russia, as one of the UNSC’s five permanent members, simply flexed its veto power. Its contempt for the UN was explicit: it **launched** its invasion in the middle of a special session of the UNSC, intentionally undermining the body. It used UNSC sessions to **spread disinformation**, including a nonsensical claim that Ukraine has biological and chemical weapons, and brought a bad-faith **resolution** on humanitarian action even as it blocked humanitarian access. Russia has co-opted the peak global body intended to promote peace to wage a propaganda war as a complement to its ground war.

“The architecture of the international governance system is not working properly because it has a fundamental design defect. Russia is a permanent member of the UNSC. The mandate for this body is to maintain international peace and security, but we have seen the total opposite of that take place in Ukraine. And there is also a lack of understanding of their responsibilities by those who are in positions where they could help. When the war started, international organisations evacuated their staff from Kyiv and other places under attack. International organisations are clearly not up to their historic responsibilities.”

[OLEKSANDRA MATVIICHUK](#), [Center for Civil Liberties, Ukraine](#)

Civil society has highlighted this problem for years. Veto power has hamstrung the UNSC time and again, leaving it sitting on the sidelines of major conflicts, with action vetoed by states with a stake in those conflicts. It functions now as a political theatre, a space for posturing and stunts.

Instead, with UNSC processes blocked, a rare special session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) was convened. On 2 March it passed a **resolution** condemning Russia's aggression in the strongest terms and calling for Russia's immediate and unconditional withdrawal. It passed a second **resolution** on 24 March, demanding the fighting stop and humanitarian corridors be respected. While the Assembly's resolutions offered an opportunity for many states to express outrage,

unlike those of the UNSC, they were non-binding.

In both UNGA votes, there were disturbing absentees from the list of states that condemned Putin's assault on international law and human rights. Voting choices shed light on relationships of complicity, patronage and fear. While only Russia's staunchest allies such as Cuba and North Korea and vassal states such as Belarus and Syria were bold enough to support it, many others abstained. They chose to maintain a position of seeming neutrality, even though Russia has broken the fundamental international rules on which the UN rests and is evidently committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. In doing so, states placed blatant self-interest above their duty to uphold the UN Charter.

### THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL: A HAVEN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS?

It's a mixed picture at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the world's peak human rights body. In a landmark move at the UNGA in April, over two thirds of UN member states voted to **suspend** Russia's UNHRC membership, sparing the world the grisly sight of Russia attempting to further use the space to deny or justify its gross human rights violations. But again the vote fell far short of unanimity: 58 states abstained and 24 voted against.

All the states that voted in Russia's favour have poor-to-appalling human rights records; they have appreciably worse civic space than states

that backed the resolution. Poor civic space buffers political leaders from public pressure and scrutiny of their decisions. Repression at home translates into the enabling of repression in the international arena.

Russia should never have been allowed to serve on the UNHRC in the first place. Civil society has long pointed to an anomaly at the heart of the UN human rights system: UNHRC members are supposed to 'uphold the highest standards in the protection and promotion of human rights', but at least 34 of its current 47 members, including Russia, clearly fail to do so, as attested by their **CIVICUS Monitor** ratings, which indicate serious civic space restrictions. Even with Russia's suspension, the Council is dominated by human rights offenders. It's hard to avoid the conclusion that states seek UNHRC seats to undermine rather than contribute to setting international human rights standards and scrutinising compliance.

Non-competitive elections help enable this: each regional group of states has a set number of seats, and it's common for prior negotiations to ensure that no more candidates stand than seats available. This is why civil society calls for competitive elections as a minimum condition to enable greater scrutiny of the human rights records of states standing for the Council.

In a positive move, following civil society pressure in March 2022 the UNHRC took the welcome step of overwhelmingly voting to **establish** a commission of inquiry into war crimes and other human rights

abuses in Ukraine. Now the commission must be properly resourced and enabled to do its work to hold those responsible to account, including by working with Ukrainian civil society that is collecting evidence of violations.

## REPRESSIVE STATES AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODIES: SPOTLIGHT ON INTERPOL

Beyond the UN's major bodies there's a wider pattern of states ignoring international rules – and not just to start conflicts, but also to exert **transnational repression** against **exiled dissidents** – and seeking to influence international institutions through selective funding, the capture of top positions and undue pressure on other states over voting decisions.

One institution where these trends have come together recently is an international organisation that civil society rarely engages with: international police cooperation body Interpol. In recent years, it's become clear that its red notice system – alerts shared through its communications networks requesting the extradition of foreign citizens for serious crimes – is being **abused** by repressive states to secure the return of dissidents who have fled repression.

Belarus, China, Russia and Turkey are the states that most use this cross-border repression tactic. When Interpol held its general assembly in Turkey in November 2021, the country's interior minister

**made clear** that his government planned to use the event to persuade delegates and officials to step up their efforts to arrest and extradite exiled Turkish dissidents. Now Syria has **rejoined** the system following suspension, a similar pursuit of the many exiles who stood up to its murderous regime would be little surprise.

At that same meeting in Turkey, Interpol chose a new president. After intensive lobbying, General Ahmed Naser Al-Raisi of the UAE triumphed in a secret vote. Al-Raisi claimed the role despite currently facing several **lawsuits** that credibly allege torture in his role as the UAE's police chief.

He won the vote despite a civil society campaign against: with an opaque selection process and no

direct civil society access, state representatives were isolated from pressure. In the face of growing fears that it is being instrumentalised by states to silence dissent, Interpol should take the vital step of opening itself up to civil society scrutiny.

## LIMITED ACCESS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society does its best to engage with any spaces available in international institutions and processes, but the pattern is inconsistent at best. In the UN, states often delay civil society reports and accreditation on flimsy grounds. Each institution offers a varying level of space for civil society. What spaces are available tend to privilege elite civil society groups. And in all cases civil society complains of being behind not only states but also the private sector when it comes to access.

This is no trivial matter. When civil society is excluded, UN institutions risk being disconnected from the people closest to the major issues the UN is supposed to be tackling.

This was the case at the COP26 climate summit in November 2021 – see above – where civil society was denied access to key sessions and pushed to the back of the queue behind the private sector, including fossil fuel companies, leading to reduced ability to apply pressure for ambitious agreements and hold states accountable on their implementation.

When the annual official opening of the UNGA was held in October 2021, government delegations

and the media were allowed to attend, but not civil society. It was a similar story at the annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting, the peak global women's rights gathering. The March 2022 CSW was held in a 'hybrid format', with state representatives present at UN headquarters but most civil society representatives taking part virtually. Even those from civil society who could attend in person were not allowed into the session where the meeting's outcomes were negotiated. While participants tried to make the best of their online participation, the fact that most were not physically present deprived them of a key means of influencing outcomes through personal connections with delegates.

The 2022 CSW had a chance to improve its processes, since its ways of working were up for discussion. But conservative pushback prevented any changes being made to allow civil society participation in the negotiation of outcome documents. Civil society organisations (CSOs) were not even given observer status. For the foreseeable future, civil society at CSW will continue to try to do its best from the margins.

**At CSW CSOs continued to be excluded from the negotiation room. Civil society in the global south faces many structural restrictions on participation, including time constraints and language barriers. We really wanted to see CSW66 facilitate women's meaningful and democratic participation, particularly because this year saw the negotiation of a Methods of Work resolution. However, this was yet another failure. To us, it was a further indication of how disconnected from women's realities global-level policymaking is."**

[WANUN PERMPIBUL, Climate Watch Thailand](#) and [MISUN WOO, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development](#)

## PREPARING FOR THE NEXT PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic saw another failure of international cooperation. Over six million people have died. Many lives could have been saved with a faster and better coordinated international response to a virus that had no respect for borders. But instead powerful states followed policies of national self-interest and global south states were given little support as international

institutions were largely pushed to the sidelines.

With further pandemics inevitable, civil society is urging that the lessons be learned quickly, with an evident need for new global mechanisms to encourage states to cooperate and be held accountable.

Following civil society advocacy, a global treaty on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response is being drafted. For the treaty to set high standards, civil society participation is necessary from the outset, including in the development of the treaty, and in monitoring its implementation, pushing for enforcement and demanding accountability.

“In terms of participation in the treaty process itself, the World Health Organization has a category for civil society, as ‘official observers’. But civil society should have much more influence in the discussion. One major problem I have seen is centralised pandemic management. We need to engage communities, and this includes civil society. When handling a pandemic, engagement of people and organisations at the local level must be built in.”

BARBARA STOCKING, Panel for a Global Public Health Convention

## AN URGENT NEED FOR UN REFORM

The need has never been more obvious for a rules-based international order in which states are held accountable for human rights violations. The existing system is inadequate. The UN has become bureaucratic and slow-moving, too often reacting to crises rather than intervening to help prevent them, accused by people living in conditions of appalling conflict in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, **Ethiopia**, **Myanmar** and **Ukraine** of abandoning them when the need is greatest.

Civil society’s calls for UN reform help provide a way forward. Civil society has long been working with supportive states to develop proposals to make the UNSC workable, including by developing norms on veto moderation and encouraging states to **abdicate** veto power. These finally appear to be making some headway, with UNGA adopting a **resolution** in April that means states that use their veto power will have to explain their decision at

UNGA, with the aim at least of raising the political costs of using vetoes.

But beyond ideas about how specific parts of the UN could be made to function better, there is a need to consider what fundamental changes may help the UN to deliver on the ideals of its founding **Charter**, created in the wake of the devastation of the Second World War: to protect people from the scourge of war, uphold the rights and dignity of all and bring about a world in which everyone lives in peace and security, on the basis of multilateral cooperation and an international set of laws.

Although the UN Charter begins with the words, ‘We the Peoples of the United Nations’, the UN still remains built around states. Civil society is

making clear that the issues the UN deals with are too important to be left to states alone. The limited ways the UN has been able to respond to Putin’s aggression make an unanswerable case for change. Most states have condemned Putin’s actions but have then been forced to watch as he ignores the rules and attempts to manipulate UN processes. They must now embrace civil society’s reform agenda as part of the solution.

There was a missed opportunity in 2021 when the UN Secretary-General published **Our Common Agenda**, the outcome of a consultation exercise on how the UN can respond to current and future challenges. Although its analysis of global problems was sound, when it came to its recommendations the report lacked the ambition civil society is calling for.

Civil society is urging that UN institutions and processes are democratised and opened up to bring a greater diversity of voices to the table, particularly the voices of those directly affected by the pressing problems of the day.

Reforms civil society is pushing for include the appointment of a cross-UN **civil society envoy or people’s champion** to stand up for civil society in the UN system; a UN **world citizens’ initiative**, based on the European Union’s model in which a petition that gathers widespread public support can be put to the UNSC or UNGA; and a **UN parliamentary assembly** to bring a greater variety of voices into UN processes and offer a source of accountability over states.

However, despite extensive civil society engagement with the consultation processes that fed into Our Common Agenda, these ideas have so far been broadly ignored. Even the minimal demand for a UN civil society envoy was merely acknowledged as an item for future consideration.

**During the stakeholder consultations, CSOs from all regions called for a high-level UN civil society champion to help increase and diversify participation and advise on access – be it to UN headquarters or to climate COPs. This was the one concrete proposal that attracted widespread support and while the report commits to exploring it further, there is some bewilderment as to why Guterres did not move forward with an appointment that is in his gift.”**

[NATALIE SAMARASINGHE, United Nations Association UK](#)

These proposals would all constitute fairly modest steps forward in helping civil society play a greater role in the UN and assert stronger democratic scrutiny over its decisions. They are logical next steps on a journey that can help the UN become more responsive and effective. The alternative is for the UN to drift into irrelevance, standing on the sidelines of an ever-changing and volatile world.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The analysis contained in this report would not have been possible without the input and insights received from civil society activists, leaders and experts around the world. We're grateful to the following interviewees for helping to inform this report:

Lina Abou Habib, 'Lebanon: This election has brought to the forefront new voices speaking about rights', 23.May.2022

Bilkis Abouosba, 'Yemen: Women are completely absent from decision-making bodies; politically we don't exist', 9.Mar.2022

Eucharía Abua, 'CSW66: UN member states should make efforts to honour their commitments at home', 4.Apr.2022

Keren Adams, 'Papua New Guinea: The mining company must address its human rights and environmental legacy', 17.Sep.2021

Imran Ahmed, 'Disinformation: A moral case based on rigorous technical research can bring about change', 18.Oct.2021

Maria Al Abdeh, 'Syria: The pandemic added another layer to women's diminished access to healthcare', 4.Mar.2022

Alyaa Al Ansari, 'Iraq: We've submitted many bills, but parliament refuses to adopt a law against GBV', 7.Mar.2022

Ruth Alipaz Cuqui, 'COP26: Much more money is being invested in destroying the planet than in saving it', 19.Nov.2021; 'Bolivia: To exercise our rights, Indigenous peoples don't need anyone's permission', 10.Feb.2022

Ana Lucía Álvarez, 'Nicaragua: María Esperanza's case is part of a growing process of criminalisation of social protest', 19.Feb.2022

Alicia Amarilla, 'Paraguay: As long as land remains in private hands, conflict will continue', 5.Jan.2022

Ghida Anani, 'Lebanon: Abuses against women are the direct product of the gender imbalances of a patriarchal society', 10.Mar.2022

Cecilia Ananías Soto, 'Chile: Domestic and care work still falls overwhelmingly on women', 8.Mar.2022

Anonymous Colombian activist, 'Colombia: Young people experience a feeling of wanting to change everything', 25.Aug.2021

Anonymous Nicaraguan activist, 'Nicaragua: For the government, these fraudulent elections were a total failure', 18.Nov.2021

Rachid Aouine, 'Algeria: The authorities are arresting human rights defenders to suffocate civil society', 16.Mar.2022

Maddalena Avon, 'Migration: The spread of COVID-19 is no excuse to confront vulnerable people with more violence', 30.Sep.2021

Samuel Awom, 'Indonesia: Peaceful pro-independence activists may be labelled as terrorists', 28.May.2021

Iliana Balabanova, 'Bulgaria: Women's rights organisations are working together towards the goal of a feminist Europe', 2.Mar.2022

Luis Barrueto, 'Guatemala: Anti-rights groups seek to maintain the privileges of some at the expense of the rights of others', 21.Mar.2022

Marco Antonio Becerra, 'Chile: There is social consensus that the arbitrary exclusion of diverse families is unacceptable', 18.Feb.2022

Danny Bediako, 'Ghana: The 'anti-gay' bill will have far-reaching consequences if we do not fight it now', 27.Oct.2021

Sudha Bharadwaj, 'India: The government is dealing with dissent in very concerning ways', 16.Feb.2022

Anna Birley, **'UK: For women to be respected, police reform is necessary but not sufficient'**, 23.Feb.2022

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Bold Voices, **'UK: Education can equip the next generation to disrupt the culture of gender-based violence'**, 3.Mar.2022

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Nixon Boumba, **'Haiti: The international community has never addressed the root causes of the crisis'**, 26.Jan.2022

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Yaropolk Brynykh, **'Ukraine: If we share information, leaders won't be able to turn blind eye to human rights violations'**, 25.Mar.2022

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Sara Casadei, **'San Marino: There was an overwhelming demand for women to gain the right to choose'**, 18.Jan.2022

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McDonald Chipenza, **'Zambia: Electoral practices seen so far do not indicate good lessons for the region'**, 12.Aug.2021

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Benedicta Chisom, **'Nigeria: The federal government and ASUU at some point made it feel like our education doesn't matter'**, 16.May.2022

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Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners Foundation and Defend Freedom Campaign, **'Colombia: Those who demonstrate put their integrity and their lives at risk'**, 23.Aug.2021

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Delio Cubides, **'Chile: Migration restrictions do not tackle the causes of migration'**, 15.Nov.2021

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Agni Das and Aiman Khan, **'India: An effective civil society is essential for advancing human rights'**, 9.May.2022

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Magdalena Demczak, **'Poland: If lots of tiny actions are performed by many people, we can achieve big things'**, 17.Mar.2022

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Jessica Dercontée, **'COP26: Marginalised communities should be at the centre of climate action'**, 7.Oct.2021

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Caroline Duple, **'USA: Extremist politicians have been hellbent on stigmatising and banning abortion for decades'**, 6.Oct.2021

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Teresa Edwards, **'Indigenous Peoples: Canadians stand in solidarity with us and want to see change'**, 7.Oct.2021

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Abdel-Rahman El Mahdi, **'Sudan: The government and the international community must engage more with civil society'**, 11.Jan.2022

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Omar Elmawi, **'East Africa: The pipeline project would open up critical ecosystems to commercial oil exploitation'**, 21.Apr.2022

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Eduardo Escobar, **'El Salvador: The president's aim is to concentrate power'**, 22.Sep. 2021

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Verónica Esparza and Rebeca Lorea, **'Mexico: Alliances, public debate & diversification of voices are indispensable in the struggle to expand rights'**, 27.Sep.2021

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Marita Etcubañez, **'USA: We cannot trust that increased anti-Asian hate will disappear once the pandemic is over'**, 19.Oct.2021

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Aziza Fakher, **'Tunisia: We are just students fighting for the future in times in which our opinions are disregarded'**, 31.Mar.2022

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Ruki Fernando, **'Sri Lanka: The ongoing protests have put the government on the defensive'**, 20-Apr.2022

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Einat Fogel-Levin, **'Palestine: The counter-terrorism law is used to restrict political work in Palestine and shrink civic space in Israel'**, 5.Jan.2022

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Bhavani Fonseca, **'Sri Lanka: By peacefully protesting, we hope to protect our democracy'**, 19.Apr.2022

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Sara García Gross, **'El Salvador: Patriarchal justice persecutes, tortures and abuses women'**, 25.Feb.2022

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Amine Ghali, **'Tunisia: Civil society is not yet under direct threat, but we believe that our turn is coming'**, 20.Jan.2022

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Allison Gill, **'Uzbekistan: Advocacy for labour and human rights is a marathon, not a sprint'**, 29.Apr.2022

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Virginia Gómez de la Torre, **'Ecuador: Women's rights have experienced an emergency situation since well before the pandemic'**, 23.Aug.2021

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Alejandro González-Davidson, **'Cambodia: This is a textbook case of organised crime with links to the state'**, 11.Nov.2021

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Judith Götz, **'Austria: If anything changed for women under the pandemic, it was for the worse'**, 3.Mar.2022

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Sam Grant, **'UK: The government is set on hiding from accountability and scrutiny'**, 26.Aug.2021

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Daniel Gutierrez Govino, **'COP26: We need to regenerate ourselves and what we have destroyed'**, 3.Nov.2021

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Zarin Hainsworth, **'UK: Violence against women continues at pandemic levels in the UK as elsewhere'**, 12.Apr.2022

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Syeda Hameed, **'India: The hijab ban is just another tool used by right-wing politicians to remain in power'**, 5.May.2022

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Sophie Hansal and Hannah Steiner, **'Austria: Unfortunately, times of crisis have rarely proven to be a catalyst for gender equality'**, 6.Mar.2022

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Ellie Happel, **'Haiti: There is opportunity for a meaningful shift from foreign interference to true leadership of Haitian people'**, 21.Dec.2021

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Theophile Hategekimana, **'COP26: We hope that at COP26 words will translate into commitments that will change behaviours'**, 23.Sep.2021

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Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, **'Poland: Abortion rights will inevitably be at the forefront of this year's International Women's Day'**, 4.Mar.2022

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Hejaaz Hizbullah, **'Sri Lanka: They arrest us to stop us, silence us and instil fear in others'**, 30.May.2022

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Htoon Htoon Oo, **'Malaysia: The government should have assisted refugees under the pandemic'**, 23.Jun.2021

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Mubiru Huzaifah, **'COP26: A key priority is to address vulnerability at the community level'**, 29.Sep.2021

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Terry Ince, **'CSW66: Women need more access to real political decision-making power'**, 11.Apr.2022

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Mariela Infante, **'Chile: The drafting of the new constitution is a historic opportunity for women'**, 15.Mar.2022

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Marwan Issa, **'Lebanon: The political youth movement was a major pillar of the opposition to the ruling class'**, 25.May.2022

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Marie Jahodová, **'Czech Republic: We believe that the new government will defend democratic principles'**, 13.Jan.2022

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Mwape Kapepula and Pamela Mateyo, **'Zambia: Our aim is to break societal biases against girls'**, 7.Mar.2022

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Joseph Kariuki, 'Kenya: Holding police officers accountable for killings in a court of law will be the main deterrent', 31.Jan.2022

Arzak Khan, 'Afghanistan: The international response has been extremely weak and shameful', 25.Oct.2021

Maria Kuznetsova, 'Russia: These protests are key to the preservation of Russian civil society', 22.Mar.2022

Iván Lanegra, 'Peru: It is necessary to restore trust in elections', 18.Oct.2021

Antonio Lara, 'Mexico: Human rights defenders constantly put their freedom and their lives at risk', 9.Mar.2022

Gadir Lavadenz, 'Biodiversity: Governments will not show political will unless people on the ground put enough pressure', 26.Oct.2021

Baraka Lenga, 'Tanzania: The government is trying to silence those who are against the pipeline', 22.Apr.2022

Nay Lin Tun, 'Myanmar: The military turned medical workers from heroes to criminals overnight', 6.May.2021

Karen Lloyd, 'Jamaica: After 20 years of advocacy, now there is sustained public conversation around LGBTQI+ rights', 27.Aug.2021

Elisa 'Tita' Lubi, 'Philippines: The charges against me are part of the government's efforts at silencing its critics', 3.May.2021

Jeeva M, 'India: We have achieved a historic labour rights win for female Dalit workers', 12.May.2022

Natalia Malysheva, 'Russia: The shutdown of media sources threatens to create information vacuum for Russians', 24.Mar.2022

Oleksandra Matviichuk, 'Ukraine: International organisations are clearly not up to their historic responsibilities', 29.Mar.2022

Manny Maung, 'Myanmar: Nearly everyone detained tells us they were beaten', 6.Aug.2021

Helen McEachern, 'CSW66: Advocacy for policy change takes time and a long-term commitment', 13.Apr.2022

Indyra Mendoza, 'Honduras: The ruling of the Inter-American Court marks a before and after for LGBTQI+ people', 19.Aug.2021

Miroslav Mijatović, 'Serbia: We are not just fighting locally; we are sending a message to the world', 14.Feb.2022

Nyombi Morris, 'Uganda: Our government cares only about profit, not people', 25.Apr.2022

Horia Mosadiq, 'Afghanistan: Our fight for accountability has become a thousand times harder under the Taliban', 30.Apr.2022

Sascha Müller-Kraenner, 'COP26: Awareness that we need to protect the climate to protect ourselves is still missing', 25.Oct.2021

Joy Hayley Munthali and Dorothy Kazombo Mwale, 'CSW66: Grassroots environmental defenders are highly underrepresented in decision-making', 7.Apr.2022

Margaret Mutsamvi, 'Zimbabwe: Young women should be at the centre of discussion of the issues affecting them', 2.Mar.2022

Farrah Naz, 'Pakistan: As a result of patriarchal norms, women experience discrimination at all levels', 6.Mar.2022

Nyang'ori Ohenjo, 'COP26: We need a power shift

to communities, especially to women, in managing climate resources', 14.Oct.2021

Adeyeye Olorunfemi, 'Nigeria: The government is more willing to negotiate with terrorists than with striking teachers', 13.May.2022

Caroline Owashaba, 'COP26: In response to pressure from below, COP26 should develop interventions for just climate action', 20.Sep.2021

Boris Patentreger, 'COP26: Decision-makers have national objectives whereas the issues at stake are transnational', 1.Nov.2021

Wanun Perpipibul and Misun Woo, 'CSW66: Global-level policy-making is disconnected from women's realities', 8.Apr.2022

Sotiris Petropoulos, 'Greece: Together we can do more', 23.Mar.2022

Nymia Pimentel-Simbulan, 'Philippines: We will make sure that human rights are on the electoral agenda', 24.Feb.2022

Alberto Precht, 'Chile: For the first time the extremes are inside the parliament and there are unacceptable undemocratic voices', 17.Dec.2021

Nuril Qomariyah, 'Indonesia: The Sexual Violence Bill is one step further in claiming the rights of women and children', 19.May.2022

Nelya Rakhimova, 'Russia: Any tactic that protesters use will likely be banned and declared a crime', 18.Mar.2022

Antonella Regular and Joaquín Salinas, 'COP26: Young people are making proposals rather than just demanding change by holding up a sign', 20.Oct.2021

Edwin Rekosh, 'Innovation: Conventional human rights structures and practices may no longer be optimal or sufficient', 15.Sep.2021

Feliciano Reyna, 'Venezuela: We need a multilateral, flexible and creative approach from the international community', 20.Dec.2021

Sasha Romantsova, 'Ukraine: The presence of international organisations is key to ensure safe humanitarian corridors', 28.Mar.2022

Natalie Samarasinghe, 'United Nations: Civil society has always been an integral part of the UN ecosystem', 19.Nov.2021

Denis Shedow, 'Russia: We hope that social media companies will avoid becoming a censorship tool', 19.Jan.2022

Charlotte Slente, 'Denmark: There is a focus on protecting borders rather than people's rights', 22.Dec.2021

Krzysztof Śmiszek, 'Poland: Right-wing backlash is just one side of the coin, the other being the active mobilisation of rights-oriented civil society', 25.Nov.2021

Zakia Soman, 'India: Muslim girls are being forced to choose between education and the hijab', 11.May.2022

Lorena Sosa, 'COP26: The global north must remain accountable and committed to tackle climate change', 2.Nov.2021

Barbara Stocking, 'Pandemic treaty: States hold a shared responsibility to keep the world safe and must be held accountable', 18.May.2022

Kristina Stockwood, 'UAE: Many leaders remain silent in the face of systematic human rights abuses', 22.Mar.2022

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Juan Carlos Sueiro, 'Peru: Environmental regulations were relaxed, when they should have been strengthened', 11.Feb.2022

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Edy Tábor, 'Honduras: We must address the roots of the conflict: the handing over of natural resources', 10.May.2022

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Mitzi Jonelle Tan, 'COP26: My hope lies in the people coming together to demand justice', 13.Oct.2021

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Estefanía Terán, 'Ecuador: Civil society must highlight the added value of its participation', 29.Oct.2021

Lia Mai Torres, 'COP26: False solutions are brandished to divert our attention from those responsible', 22.Oct.2021

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Maria Sarungi Tsehaj, 'Tanzania: What is needed is a new constitution reflecting the will of the people', 9.Sep.2021

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Farid Tukhbatullin, 'Turkmenistan: There is nothing resembling real civil society – and no conditions for it to emerge', 10.Mar.2022

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Marinel Ubaldo, 'Philippines: We fear the democracy those before us fought so hard for will be erased', 20.May.2022

Charles Wanguhu, 'COP26: We hope for stricter obligations under the principle of common but differentiated responsibility', 15.Oct.2021

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Matiullah Wesa, 'Afghanistan: Education is our basic right, it's an Islamic right, it's a human right', 5.Apr.2022

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We Will Stop Femicide Platform, 'Turkey: We continue to organise and demonstrate so that no voice is left unheard', 8.Mar.2022

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Kyaw Win, 'Myanmar: If we fail to take appropriate action, the junta will commit more crimes', 1.Mar.2022

Reto Wyss, 'Switzerland: It was about time for everybody to have the same rights, with no discrimination', 17.Nov.2021

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Edoardo Zanchini, 'Italy: The constitution now contemplates the interests of future generations', 14.Apr.2022

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Yevgeniy Zhovtis, 'Kazakhstan: No economic or social reform will bring real change unless there is also serious political reform', 3.Feb.2022

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Jessica Zuber, 'Switzerland: The victory of marriage equality will boost our efforts towards the next steps', 16.Nov.2021



All quotations used in this report are edited extracts of interviews with civil society activists, leaders and experts. For full interviews, visit the **CIVICUS Lens interview hub**.



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