



ACFID Resolution No. 2/2017

Resolution on the Space for Civil Society

Approved at ACFID Council AGM 01 November 2017

Preamble:

- A. Affirming our view that civil society is a fundamental component of a democratic society and creates beneficial outcomes by:
 - providing critically important services and support;
 - raising awareness and understanding of issues within the community;
 - voicing alternatives and proposing new directions for policy; and
 - holding both State and market-forces accountable to community interests and international commitments, laws, and norms;
- B. Noting that around the world the space for citizens to operate freely in civil society is shrinking with only 3% of people now living in societies that are deemed to be fully open by CIVICUS (see [2017 State of Civil Society report](#));
- C. Realising that a resurgence of nationalism, coupled with rising xenophobia and isolationism, is acting to constrain civil society in many places;
- D. Recognising the risks to personal safety that many civil society actors are facing to continue to defend human rights;
- E. Expressing concern that a number of disturbing developments in Australia may constrain the role of charities in undertaking advocacy in the future, specifically:
 - possible restrictions to tax deductibility for charities, such as caps on expenditure on advocacy and activity checks (see [ACFID's July 2017 submission on DGR reform](#));
 - a possible ban on international philanthropy to charities for their advocacy, as part of a proposed Bill to ban overseas donations to political parties (see [sector position paper on Charities and International Philanthropy](#));
- F. Noting that charities are fully accountable under the Charities Act 2013 (Cth) not to be partisan, and are subject to robust existing regulations in this regard by the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission as well as the Commonwealth Electoral Act (see [ACNC's guidance on advocacy by charities](#));
- G. Recognising that the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and other international commitments will only be realised through new collaborations driven by genuinely shared commitment to the well-being of people and the planet;

- H. Welcoming the fact that civil society organisations from around the world will gather in the Pacific in Fiji in December 2017 for [International Civil Society Week](#);
- I. Welcoming the election of Australia to the United Nations Human Rights Council and the leadership role it can play;

We resolve:

1. To actively work to support those who are facing constraints on, or closure of, their civic space in countries where we operate;
2. To actively promote respect for human rights including fundamental democratic freedoms of association, assembly and expression in countries where we operate;
3. To uphold the highest standards of transparency, accountability and integrity through commitment to the ACFID Code of Conduct; and
4. To work to our charitable purposes and affirm that advocacy is integral to our purpose.

We call on the Australian Government to:

1. Use its position on the United Nations Human Rights Council to be a champion for the role of civil society and stand as a bulwark against further erosions of civic space in countries around the world; and
2. Not impose:
 - a. caps on expenditure for advocacy under Deductable Gift Recipient status schemes for charities;
 - b. unnecessary new reporting obligations on charitable advocacy activities; and
 - c. a ban on international philanthropy to charities for work undertaken as part of their charitable purpose.

Moved: Dermot O’Gorman, CEO, WWF Australia

Seconded: Helen Szoke, CE, Oxfam Australia