**Civil Society in Exile**

Civic Space Cohort of the Summit for Democracy

Civil society, including human rights defenders and independent journalists, remain at risk for their activities in too many countries. The number of attacks against them is increasing, including through smear campaigns, physical attacks, arbitrary detentions, torture, enforced disappearances or even extrajudicial killings. These threats force many activists and HRDs in different parts of the world to leave their home countries and lead them into exile.

While in exile, civil society activists and HRDs are forced to adapt to the new circumstances. On the one hand, the situation provides them with an opportunity to continue their work ensuring that human rights violations are exposed, and impunity is fought. It may even allow them to acquire new skills and experiences that would be highly valuable if they are ever able to return to their home countries. On the other hand, being in exile often generates additional barriers, which restrains the ability of activists and HRDs to continue their work, in addition to existing challenges that threaten their work and security.

Examples of areas in which civil society activists and HRDs in exile face significant challenges:

* Legal entry into the country (visa facilitation, asylum procedures, etc.)
* Regularisation of their immigration status (residence permits, work permits, etc.)
* Access to services provided by the government (health insurance, financial benefits, etc.)
* Access to other services (banking, insurance, etc.)
* Ability to work effectively in the country of origin (censorship, administrative hurdles, etc.)
* Ability to continue their civil society and human rights activities in the country of exile (registration of new civil society organizations, access to office space, links to civil society in the country of exile, etc.)
* Financial support from donors
* Personal security – including of their families (physical security, online security, etc.)
* Misuse of legitimate tools (exchange of banking information, international legal cooperation, Interpol Red Notices, etc.)

The aim of this workstream of the cohort on “Civic Space” is to exchange views and best practices on the topics outlined above and to agree on a short list (2-3) of joint commitments on how to strengthen the support to civil society activists and HRDs in exile. After approval by the cohort as a whole, these joint commitments would be presented at the second Summit for Democracy that is scheduled to take place on 29 March 2022.