



TO : High Representative Mogherini
CC: Mr. Lambrinidis, EU Special Representative for Human Rights.

Brussels, June 20 2016

Dear High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini,

Re: Shrinking space for civil society in Israel

We write to you as a family of European civil society, cooperation, and human rights organisations who work closely with Israeli and Palestinian civil society organisations. Together, we represent a large number of constituencies across countries that work to promote respect for human rights and sustainable and just peace.

On the occasion of the visit of Israeli President, Mr. Reuven Rivlin to Brussels, we would like to express our deep concern over recent campaigns against civil society organisations in Israel which limit space for free speech, delegitimise human rights defenders and hinder the search for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

We would like to bring to your attention that 22 Israeli human rights organisation asked Mr. Rivlin to intervene in favour of Israeli democracy, and to act to protect free space for civil society organisations to work. Kindly see an English translation of the letter, dated 15 June 2016, attached.

Against this backdrop, we urge you to raise your concerns before Israeli President Rivlin, in particular on the legislation of the so-called NGO Bill and the shrinking space for civil society. We hope that you call on him to assume a leading role in protecting and cultivating an environment in which a vibrant and independent civil society can continue to promote human rights, justice, and peace.

Yours sincerely,

Floris Faber,
Director, ACT Alliance EU

Bernd Nilles,
Secretary General, CIDSE

Michel Tubiana
President, EuroMed Rights

Karim Lahidji,
President, FIDH

Gerald Staberock
Secretary General, OMCT

Natalia Alonso,
Deputy Director of Advocacy & Campaigns,
Oxfam International

Mary Lawlor,
Executive Director, Front
Line Defenders

To: Mr. Reuven Rivlin, President of the State of Israel

Dear Mr. President,

Re: Stopping Anti-Democratic Legislation and Initiatives

We, the directors of organizations for human rights and social change, are turning to you to request that you act to stop the wave of anti-democratic legislation in Israel and intervene in order to put an end to the systematic harm inflicted upon the work of social justice activists who defend human rights.

In recent years, there has been a dangerous and troubling erosion of Israeli democracy on all fronts. We, organizations working for social change and civil and human rights, have been under a fervent onslaught that not only harms us, but also Israel as a democracy.

This onslaught manifests itself in anti-democratic legislation aimed at silencing critical voices, limiting freedom of expression, diminishing the rights of minorities, and weakening the status of the Supreme Court. Legislative initiatives like the NGO Bill, that, first and foremost, harms human rights, peace, and left-wing organizations and the Suspension Bill that is designed to intimidate and alienate public officials who represent the Arab minority among others, are fervently advanced in the Knesset. No one disputes the fact that they are explicitly anti-democratic.

These initiatives are taking place in a hostile atmosphere of incitement and political persecution against human rights and social change organizations. Senior politicians allow themselves to label members of Breaking the Silence “spies,” “traitors” and “foreign agents”; Right-wing organizations use public funds to pay impostors to infiltrate organizations as “moles” with the aim of defaming them; and there is even a concerted effort to shut down Breaking the Silence through legal measures. In parallel, we are witnessing selective law enforcement sends young Israeli Arabs to jail for comments they posted on social media outlets, in blatant violation of freedom of expression; while administrative detention continues to be used as a legitimate tool against Palestinians and Israelis alike.

This reality, in which it is legitimate to label and slander individuals and groups – including the Israeli President, the IDF Chief of Staff, the Defence Minister, MKs, artists, academics, intellectuals, and others, as dissidents against the State – solely for their moral, social, and political positions, is unacceptable and must be stopped.

It is clear to all that the common ground shared by these initiatives is the desire to narrow the impact of organizations that do not align with the government, both in Israel and abroad. This is due, among other things, to the fact that they advocate for human rights in the OPT, oppose the occupation, and work to ensure rights for asylum seekers. The success of such persecution will come at a heavy price: the weakening of Israel and grave harm to its democratic nature.

The work of human rights and civil society organizations in Israel is essential to its democracy, especially when it comes to organizations that directly oppose government policy. Without legal and political protection that creates space for safe and free action in Israel, we will be barred from fulfilling our civil duty to identify injustices and work to correct them.

Thus, we, organizations for human rights and social change in Israel, call – on you, the President of the State of Israel, who holds democracy dear, and knows personally the pain of incitement and hateful attacks, to make every possible effort to stop the anti-democratic wave engulfing us; to stop the persecution of civil society organizations and prevent further violations of the freedom of association, the freedom of expression, and other Israeli democratic values.

Only a country that provides legal and political recognition of human and civil rights, and freedom of expression, which embodies the simple and just principles of equal rights and human dignity, is deserving of being called a democracy.

Sincerely,

Sharon Abraham Weiss – **Association for Civil Rights in Israel**, Hagai El-Ad – **B’Tselem**, Yudith Oppenheimer – **Ir Amim**, Arik Ascherman – **Rabbis for Human Rights**, Avi Buskila – **Peace Now**, Alma Biblash – **Human Rights Defenders Fund**, Ran Goldstein – **Physicians for Human Rights**, Yonatan Gher – **Amnesty International - Israel**, Rawnak Natour and Ron Gerlitz – **Sikkuy**, Tania Hary – **Gisha - Legal Center for Freedom of Movement**, Ala Khatib – **Kav LaOved**, Lior Yavne – **Akevot - Institute for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Research**, Raya Yaron – **MachsomWatch**, Nirit Moskovich – **The Social Guard**, Reut Michaeli – **Hotline for Refugees and Migrants**, Yuli Novak – **Breaking the Silence**, Reem Amer and Maayan Dak – **Coalition of Women for Peace**, Neta Patrick – **Yesh Din**, Michael Pinchuk – **Assaf**, Dalia Kerstein – **Hamoked Center for the Defence of the Individual**, Hedva Radovanitz – **Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights**, Rachel Stroumsa – **The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel**.