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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Impact of the 2023–2025 “super election” cycle on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Gina Romero*

Summary

The present report by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Gina Romero, addresses concerns about the widespread repression and erosion of protection of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in the context of the 2023–2025 “super election” cycle. In the report, the Special Rapporteur calls for the increased protection of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, highlights their essential role in the effective exercise of the rights to participate in political and public life, including in electoral processes, and in the realization of the right to vote and be elected in genuine elections, and calls for a pushback against the global democratic backsliding.

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I. Introduction

1. The 2023–2025 global electoral cycle was decisive for democracy and civic space. Half of the world’s population elected local, national and international representatives in 2024. The cycle occurred amid an increased global shift towards authoritarianism, backsliding of democracy and attacks against human rights.¹ This “super election” cycle further deepened and expanded trends towards political repression and a shrinking of space for civic activism and participation in political and public life. Elections in many jurisdictions were marred by intimidation and serious violations of human rights in the context of widespread suppression of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, severely impacting the right to participate in public affairs, including the right to vote and to be elected.

2. In the present report, building on an earlier report under the mandate,² the Special Rapporteur emphasizes the standards for protection of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in the context of elections, reflects on the emerging and deepening challenges and threats to these rights and expands on the recommendations made by the previous mandate holder and other experts in their call for “strengthening democracy and reversing global erosion of human rights” in the context of the “super election” cycle.³

3. An overview of key activities carried out under the mandate since May 2024 is provided in the annex to the present report.

4. The present report provides illustrative examples to highlight global trends and issues concerning the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association during the 2023–2025 election cycle (covering the periods before, during and after elections), and their combined impact on the right to political participation. It is not an assessment of the integrity of the elections in the States mentioned and does not provide an exhaustive list of concerns.

5. In the preparation of the report, the Special Rapporteur benefited from 45 written submissions from civil society, national human rights institutions and regional bodies, concerning 51 States; 13 written submissions from States; five global and regional consultations with civil society and experts; and discussions with United Nations entities providing electoral assistance.⁴ It includes analysis of communications sent to States concerning election-related violations and of countries undergoing elections. It covers the 2023–2025 election cycle, with the Special Rapporteur noting that political repression and restrictions started long before the elections and often intensified after elections; and that, often, the newly elected authorities adopted measures further curtailing freedoms.

II. State obligations

6. The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are fundamental to any democracy and are prerequisites for guaranteeing free, fair, credible and participatory elections. These rights allow all persons to express their opinions and aspirations, ensuring inclusive political dialogue. Attacks or undue restrictions on the exercise of these rights undermine political participation and the legitimacy of elections.

7. The centrality of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association for the functioning of democracy and in ensuring free and fair elections has been widely recognized in international instruments, by regional bodies and by courts in their jurisprudence.⁵

¹ See [A/HRC/56/50](#).

² [A/68/299](#).

³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/electoral-year-2024-un-experts-call-strengthening-democracy-and-reversing>.

⁴ The Special Rapporteur is also grateful for the input and support provided by assistants, students and experts.

⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections (26 March 1994); African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights resolution 433 (LXV) of 10 November 2019 on

8. The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are implicit in the right to take part in the government of one's country.⁶ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government, expressed through free, genuine and periodic elections by universal and equal suffrage" (art. 21 (3)). Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects the right to participate in public affairs, to vote, to be elected and to have access to public service.

9. The Human Rights Committee recognizes the importance of the full enjoyment of and respect for the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association for ensuring the rights to public and political participation, including freedom to engage in political activity, to debate public affairs, and to hold peaceful meetings and demonstrations. The right to freedom of association, including the right to form and join organizations concerned with political affairs, is an essential adjunct to the rights protected by article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Committee further stresses that people should be free to vote for any candidate for election, and free to support or to oppose the Government, without undue influence or coercion, and that the free communication of ideas and information about public and political issues between citizens, candidates and elected representatives is essential.⁷

10. The General Assembly has emphasized the importance of respecting the freedoms of assembly, association and expression in the context of promoting free, fair and inclusive elections, and has underscored the need to protect these freedoms and to foster an enabling environment in which civil society can operate freely and safely, online and offline, for increased public participation in elections and election monitoring.⁸

11. Under international human rights law, States must ensure the enjoyment and protection of human rights, including by ensuring safe and enabling environments for the exercise of fundamental freedoms. These rights ensure pluralism and transparency throughout the electoral process.⁹ The Special Rapporteur reiterates her predecessor's observation that the legal framework, political environment, and institutional capacities before, during and after polling day affect how rights are enjoyed.¹⁰

12. The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association must be facilitated at all times, including during elections. Any restrictions should be narrowly construed and justified only on legitimate grounds as provided for in articles 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Any restrictions must be compliant with the requirements of legality, necessity in a democratic society, and proportionality. Restrictions should not be used to suppress dissent or undermine political participation. Given the importance of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in the context of elections, the threshold for imposing legitimate restrictions should be higher than usual: "the criteria of 'necessity in a democratic society' and 'proportionality' should be more difficult to meet".¹¹ Independent judicial remedies must be available for violations of these rights as an essential part of the guarantee of free and fair elections. States should avoid imposing a state of emergency in response to peaceful assemblies or using emergency measures to unduly restrict these rights.¹²

elections in Africa; and Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *López Lone et al. v. Honduras*, Judgment, 5 October 2015.

⁶ See [A/68/299](#).

⁷ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 25 (1996), paras. 19, 25 and 26.

⁸ See General Assembly resolution 76/176.

⁹ See [A/68/299](#).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, para. 25.

¹² See [A/HRC/50/42](#).

III. Importance of freedom of peaceful assembly and of association for genuine elections

A. Role of civil society

13. Civil society, including formal and informal grass-roots associations, plays a vital role during elections by contributing to ensuring their integrity, promoting and protecting human rights and democratic freedoms, and ensuring inclusive political participation.

14. As emphasized by the European Court of Human Rights, civil society “makes an important contribution to the discussion of public affairs”, and its activities are an “essential element of informed public debate”. Civil society is crucial for the ongoing democratic process, which needs to be continuously supported by free and pluralistic public debate.¹³

15. Civil society contributes to creating an enabling environment for free and fair elections by advocating for human rights-compliant legal frameworks and electoral reforms (including reviews of party systems, and guarantees for political parties and of the independence of electoral bodies), and the protection of associations. It pushes for laws and policies ensuring equal and diverse political representation, especially for women and minorities, and works to enhance marginalized communities’ participation. The efforts of civil society to educate voters, promote voting rights (encouraging voter turnout and guiding first-time voters) and ensure violence-free elections are essential.

16. Furthermore, civil society plays a watchdog role in elections and serves as a guarantor of inclusion by monitoring and promoting the participation of underrepresented groups, detecting irregularities and raising awareness about election integrity, thus increasing public confidence in electoral outcomes. During the presidential elections in Senegal in March 2024, a women’s platform for peaceful elections, known as “Ètu Jamm” (Peace Space), deployed women observers to conduct real-time monitoring at polling stations and to verify security guarantees and women’s participation.¹⁴ During the 2023 parliamentary elections in Poland, the efforts of civil society in training volunteer electoral observers, educating voters and organizing women- and youth-focused campaigns contributed to the increased participation of these groups and increased voter turnout.¹⁵

17. In restrictive environments, civil society is crucial for exposing electoral fraud and challenging official narratives. In the 2024 presidential elections in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, civil society helped to reveal alleged irregularities, including concerning the publication of election results, contributing to the pursuit for election transparency.¹⁶ Amid sustained repression of civil society and political opposition in Belarus,¹⁷ exiled civil society actors used alternative channels to monitor the 2025 presidential elections and reveal grave election integrity concerns.

18. Grass-roots associations defused election-related tensions by raising awareness of and promoting peacebuilding, dialogue and non-violent engagement at the community level, ensuring the right to political participation and hence preventing electoral violence. Civil society actors engaged in countering misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, which were especially heightened at the time of elections, thereby preventing violence and hate-based abuses.

19. Civil society actors also work to protect and widen participation by promoting the inclusion of women and marginalized groups as candidates and increasing their

¹³ European Court of Human Rights, *Ecodefence and Others v. Russia*, Application No. 9988/13 and 60 others, Judgment, 14 June 2022, paras. 124 and 139.

¹⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2024/06/senegal-election-boost-coup-prone-region>.

¹⁵ See <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/6657-poland-civil-society-played-a-crucial-role-in-ensuring-the-fairness-of-the-election>.

¹⁶ See communication VEN 7/2024. All communications mentioned in the present document are available from <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.

¹⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/belarus-outcome-presidential-elections-likely-result-continuing-human-rights>.

representation in political parties, through capacity-building, by monitoring and countering gender-based violence in elections, and by facilitating and encouraging community-based and national dialogues to prevent and respond to election-related gender- or ethnic-based violence and conflict.

20. Despite their critical role, civil society actors' legitimate actions are often suppressed or criminalized by Governments negatively labelling them as "political".

B. Role of peaceful assemblies

21. The right to peaceful assembly provides an avenue for candidates to mobilize support and engage communities and allows all persons to actively and meaningfully participate in elections by making their voices heard.

22. Protests have historically catalysed reforms, from securing universal suffrage to advancing social and political equality and holding Governments, parties and politicians accountable. The civil rights movement in the United States of America and women's suffrage movements are prime examples of how protests have advanced voting rights and ended voting discrimination.

23. During elections, by exercising their right to peaceful assembly, people have defended democratic freedoms and the integrity of elections, highlighted rights violations, and raised public awareness of social and political concerns. Protests have increased political participation, encouraged young people to vote and allowed those with limited representation, such as refugees and marginalized groups, to voice their concerns. They also prompted legal reforms to ensure voting accessibility, and brought social justice, human rights and other issues to the forefront of the political agenda.

24. Through protest, people have defended democracy and changed the status quo, leading to more inclusive and accountable institutions, and have pushed back against autocracy. Social movements have encouraged the emergence of more democratic political parties and leaders, more attuned to the grievances and aspirations of communities, and have led to increased representation for the people. The 2019 mass social mobilization in Chile triggered important reforms, including to address brutal police violence against protesters,¹⁸ and led to an agreement to change the Constitution and demands for a more participatory and inclusive process to ensure that the new Constitution was reflective of people's needs. Although attempts to change the Constitution have failed thus far, these protests shaped the public discourse and political agenda, including through the demands made for more inclusive governance and an expansion of social and Indigenous rights. In Thailand, the youth-led nationwide protests created a support base for pro-democratic parties before the May 2023 general elections.

25. Protests also created a space for representation by challenging authoritarian regimes. The revolution in the Syrian Arab Republic during the Arab Spring paved the way for the recent removal of the abusive regime, following years of brutal civil war. In Bangladesh, the youth-led social protests following the January 2024 parliamentary elections, marred by widespread, long-standing severe repression,¹⁹ led to the ousting of the authoritarian Government and opened the path for democratic transitioning.

26. Social movements and solidarity actions protected the integrity of elections and defended the will of the people. In Senegal, a popular youth-led protest movement pushed back against attempts to postpone the February 2024 presidential elections, ensuring that the elections were held and a peaceful transition of power. In Guatemala, an Indigenous-led social movement resisted persistent political and judicial harassment undermining the integrity of the presidential elections of June 2023 and seeking to ignore the will of voters,²⁰

¹⁸ See communication CHL 2/2025.

¹⁹ See communications BGD 5/2022 and BGD 1/2024.

²⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/12/guatemala-un-human-rights-chief-deplores-persistent-attempts-undermine>.

which ensured that the new Government was inaugurated, and created space for promoting the inclusion and public participation of Indigenous Peoples.

27. Grass-roots protests pushed back against rising political forces and populist agendas undermining human rights and inclusion in electoral contexts in France, Germany the United States and elsewhere.

IV. Restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

28. The “super election” cycle witnessed widespread and increased restrictions and repression of civic freedoms and political participation, often as part of a broader strategy to restrict civic space and stifle democratic debate.

A. Civil society

29. The misuse of restrictive laws, vilifying political rhetoric, smear campaigns and the spread of misinformation or disinformation targeting civil society intensified globally and affected electoral participation.

30. In September 2024, the Special Rapporteur and regional mechanisms warned of the global rise of laws on “foreign agents” or foreign influence and their weaponization to crack down on independent civil society, undermining meaningful public participation in elections.²¹ These laws require associations receiving foreign funds and other benefits to register as “foreign agents”, prohibiting them from engaging in broadly defined “political activity” and imposing intrusive inspections, overburdensome reporting requirements and penalties for non-compliance, including criminalization. This labelling creates stigmatization and isolation. The Special Rapporteur has repeatedly called for these laws to be repealed, as they violate the right to freedom of association, including to access and use resources, and have a chilling effect on public activism.

31. Many States introduced such laws prior to elections, under the pretext of protecting State sovereignty and curbing foreign influence, thereby creating a hostile environment for independent civil society work, particularly election-related activities. Existing broad anti-terrorism and anti-extremism laws were also leveraged to restrict civil society during electoral processes.

32. In Georgia, ahead of the October 2024 parliamentary elections and December 2024 presidential elections, the authorities adopted a “foreign agents” law, which sparked public protests that were met with excessive use of force. The law had a chilling effect on civil society engagement in the elections.²² In Zimbabwe, ahead of the August 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections, two repressive bills were adopted: the Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Bill,²³ and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Bill, commonly referred as the “Patriotic Bill”. As a result, many non-governmental organizations were deregistered prior to the elections. Hungary adopted the Defence of Sovereignty Law in December 2023, ahead of the June 2024 local and European Parliament elections, empowering authorities to investigate and publicize any activity that is foreign-funded and that may influence the outcome of elections or the will of voters or supports such activities, without judicial oversight. This provides another tool for civil society stigmatization and could interfere with fundamental freedoms and public participation in political life.²⁴ Ahead of the October 2025 presidential elections in Côte d’Ivoire, a restrictive law was adopted, allowing the authorities to dissolve associations

²¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/09/un-and-regional-experts-call-urgent-protection-civic-space-amid-global-uptick>.

²² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/georgia-un-experts-condemn-adoption-law-transparency-foreign-influence>.

²³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/02/un-experts-urge-president-zimbabwe-reject-bill-restricting-civic-space>.

²⁴ See communication HUN 1/2023.

deemed to pose, inter alia, threats to public order, national security or territorial integrity or a danger to social cohesion.²⁵ The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania has reportedly utilized the Non-Governmental Organizations Act to arbitrarily deregister and restrict civil society organizations ahead of the November 2024 local elections and the October 2025 presidential elections.²⁶

33. The broad term “political activity”, which is common in such laws and laws on transparency in the funding of political campaigns and lobbying, restricts legitimate civil society work, such as advocacy, election monitoring and the organization of public debates. To avoid restricting legitimate advocacy-related civil society work and civic participation in the decision-making process, lobbying regulations should be narrowly defined and establish adequate distinctions between business lobbying and civil society actions.

34. Laws that restrict civil society’s ability to engage in “political” activities violate the right to freedom of association. They are often enacted just before elections, bypassing public scrutiny and consultation, and are frequently used for political repression.

35. In addition, civil society activists faced harassment, prolonged arbitrary detention, torture, violence and killings in the run-up to elections, with the criminal justice system instrumentalized for political repression. In Tunisia, civil society actors and political opponents were reportedly arbitrarily detained ahead of the October 2024 presidential elections on vague conspiracy and terrorism-related charges.²⁷ States also weaponized citizenship-stripping and migration laws against political opponents.

36. Election observers, who are protected as human rights defenders due to their role in the protection of civil and political rights and fundamental freedoms,²⁸ faced increasing legal restrictions, denial of accreditation, restrictions on access to funding, stigmatization, criminalization, and repression, aimed at deterring or retaliating against those working to expose electoral fraud. In some cases,²⁹ international independent election observers were denied entry to a country to prevent them from monitoring elections. Legislation in some countries, such as Jordan and Uzbekistan, explicitly does not allow civil society and citizen election observation. In Tunisia, foreign funding has been used as a pretext to deny accreditation to election observation groups.

37. “Foreign agent” and “anti-extremism” laws were used to prevent civil society from monitoring elections, in many countries. In Belarus, independent civil society actors monitoring elections and the human rights situation have been criminalized as “extremist”, and any form of cooperation or interaction with organizations labelled as “extremist” could lead to prosecution for “facilitating extremist activities”.³⁰ In the Russian Federation, repressive legislation relating to “undesirable organizations” or “foreign agents” has been systematically used to persecute civil society actors, including election observers. The co-chair of the Russian election watchdog Golos was arrested in August 2023, shortly before the federal and local elections and ahead of the 2024 presidential election campaign, and prosecuted for cooperating with an “undesirable” organization, facing up to six years’ imprisonment.³¹

38. Civil society election monitors were also subjected to threats and violence to prevent them from reporting on election irregularities. In Mozambique, the opposition party’s lawyer and its spokesperson were murdered after preparing to challenge election results based on

²⁵ See communication CIV 1/2025.

²⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/tanzania-experts-call-urgent-action-amid-crackdown-civil-society-ahead>.

²⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2025/02/tunisia-end-all-forms-persecution-opponents-and-activists>.

²⁸ See <https://srdefenders.org/information/the-situation-of-election-observers-as-human-rights-defenders%E2%82%AC%82%80%20/>; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights resolution 1/24 of 30 April 2024 on election monitors as human rights defenders; and European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), “Report on election observers as human rights defenders”, 11 December 2024.

²⁹ See, for example, communication VEN 7/2024.

³⁰ See A/HRC/56/65.

³¹ See A/HRC/57/59.

parallel counts, and there has been no investigation into their killing.³² In Azerbaijan, a human rights activist leading the main independent election watchdog, the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre, a member of the European Platform for Democratic Elections, was detained in April 2024 on charges of conspiracy to unlawfully bring money into the country, after his organization published its preliminary findings on the 2024 presidential elections.³³ Police in Zimbabwe arrested some 40 election observers for “coordinating the alleged release of election results”.³⁴ Such practices, which are well recognized for bolstering trust in electoral outcomes, should not be criminalized. In Serbia, leading political figures targeted election observers with smear campaigns, following reporting on potential election fraud in the 2023 local elections.³⁵

39. Repression of civil society and election monitors undermines trust in elections and their outcomes. Civil society actors should be enabled to perform their legitimate work in the context of elections, including monitoring and reporting on election-related violations and abuses, free from intimidation, retaliation and undue restrictions.³⁶

40. After elections, civil society faced further restrictions, especially on access to resources, and smear campaigns undermining its legitimacy. The Government of Slovakia, following the September 2023 parliamentary elections, among a string of civic space restrictions,³⁷ proposed cuts to funding for associations influencing public affairs, as opposed to those engaged in “noble causes”.³⁸

B. Political parties

41. Everyone has the right to voluntarily and freely form or join a political party.³⁹ As the Human Rights Committee has noted, political parties and membership in parties play a significant role in the conduct of public affairs and the election process.⁴⁰ They serve as primary vehicles for citizens to participate in public affairs through elected representatives, ensuring pluralism and the proper functioning of democracy. Any measures against them have an impact both on the right to freedom of association and on democracy.⁴¹ Their proper functioning must be guaranteed, free from undue interference. Political parties are a specialized form of association, inherently different from civil society organizations; they are aimed at promoting candidates to run in free and democratic elections with the aim of governing.⁴² Political parties may be subject to different rules than other associations.⁴³

42. During the “super election” cycle, opposition party leaders, members and activists in many countries faced undue restrictions, abuse and political persecution.

43. Opposition parties and independent candidates faced burdensome registration requirements, unjustified bans and unlawful dissolution, including for advocating for reforms, advancing human rights law and democratic principles, and exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly. During the September 2024 parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, political parties faced “stringent” registration requirements, an increased number of grounds for dissolution, a requirement for annual re-registration, and extensive State

³² See communication MOZ 1/2025.

³³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/azerbaijan-expert-concerned-about-prosecution-human-rights-defenders-and>. The activist in question had previously been sentenced in connection with election monitoring activities to over five years’ imprisonment, in 2014. See communication AZE 2/2014.

³⁴ See www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/279784/Zimbabwe-General-elections-Final-report.pdf.

³⁵ See communication SRB 1/2024.

³⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/electoral-year-2024-un-experts-call-strengthening-democracy-and-reversing>.

³⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/experts-alarmed-deterioration-fundamental-freedoms-and-civic-space-slovak>.

³⁸ See <https://ecnl.org/news/slovakia-civil-society-under-threat>.

³⁹ See A/68/299.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 25 (1996), para. 26.

⁴¹ See A/68/299.

⁴² See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Human-Rights-and-Elections.pdf>.

⁴³ See A/68/299.

monitoring of party functioning, which “negatively impacted pluralism and further restricted freedom of association”.⁴⁴ In the March 2024 presidential elections in the Russian Federation, the excessive registration threshold for independent candidates led to disqualifications of key opposition candidates, over minor technicalities.⁴⁵

44. State authorities exerted excessive control over internal party procedures, candidate approvals and membership verifications, which unduly interferes with the functioning of political parties and is intimidating. In Oman, the Ministry of Interior reportedly has the power to decide the list of Shura Council (Consultative Assembly) candidates and disqualify them without appeal, while political parties remain prohibited. Political parties should control their own internal procedures; extensive State monitoring, including a requirement to provide lists of members, is an overly intrusive measure.⁴⁶

45. The standards related to associations apply to political parties, including the presumption in favour of party formation. If a system of registration exists, registration should not require prior approval, and requirements should not be so burdensome as to discourage people from engaging,⁴⁷ and must not restrict the political participation of and/or discriminate against parties representing minorities or marginalized groups.⁴⁸ Registration deadlines should be reasonably short to avoid unreasonable barriers to participation, and, in the absence of a negative decision, the party should be deemed to be registered. Political parties whose application for registration has been denied should be able to challenge the decision before independent and impartial courts.⁴⁹

46. “Foreign agent”, “extremism” and broad national security laws, among others, have also been used to target political parties, their members and their supporters. The “foreign agent” law in the Russian Federation bans those designated as such from standing for election. For example, after the election, one of the independent candidates was designated as a “foreign agent”, preventing her from participating in future elections.⁵⁰ In Hong Kong, China, the National Security Law, which provides for the removal from office of those convicted of vague crimes related to “endangering national security”, has been used previously to arrest, prosecute and arbitrarily disqualify candidates, and remove elected representatives. In addition, the reformed electoral law of Hong Kong, China, imposed vague “patriots-only” criteria for candidates, restricting political participation in the 2023 district council elections, and prevented candidates seen as disloyal to the Government from standing for election.⁵¹ In Thailand, the Move Forward Party, which won the largest share of seats in the 2023 general election, was dissolved on the grounds that its efforts to amend the lèse-majesté law were aimed at overthrowing the monarchy,⁵² and its executives received 10-year election bans. In Senegal, the opposition party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l’éthique et la fraternité (African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity) was dissolved for rallying its supporters during mass protests against the arbitrary arrest of opposition leaders and the election’s postponement.⁵³ In Guatemala, the Office of the Public Prosecutor subjected the Movimiento Semilla (Semilla Movement) to a series of repressive

⁴⁴ See <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/f/586290.pdf>.

⁴⁵ See A/HRC/57/59.

⁴⁶ See Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and Venice Commission, *Guidelines on Political Party Regulation*, 2nd ed. (Strasbourg, 2020).

⁴⁷ See A/68/299 and A/HRC/20/27.

⁴⁸ See <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/b/77812.pdf>; and Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Yatama v. Nicaragua*, Judgment, 23 June 2005.

⁴⁹ See A/HRC/20/27.

⁵⁰ See A/HRC/57/59.

⁵¹ See, for example, communications CHN 17/2020 and CHN 16/2023; www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/11/hong-kong-grave-concerns-over-sentencing-under-national-security-law; and <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/11/11/explainer-hong-kongs-first-patriots-only-district-council-race/>. See also the concerns expressed by the Human Rights Committee about restricted candidate eligibility criteria and the vague criteria for and process of disqualification of candidates and elected officials (CCPR/C/CHN-HKG/CO/4).

⁵² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/thailand-un-experts-seriously-concerned-about-dissolution-main-political>.

⁵³ See communication SEN 1/2024.

legal actions after it passed the first round of the presidential elections: it was provisionally suspended based on the Organized Crime Act; it was banned from participating in political events and from appointing candidates to positions; the Supreme Electoral Court was raided to seize documents regarding the movement and the elections; and the movement's office was raided and five of its members detained.⁵⁴

47. Given the important role that political parties play in democracy, they enjoy a higher level of protection. Prohibition of political parties, whether through registration bans or dissolution, may be applied only exceptionally, in cases of serious violations of the law, after all less restrictive alternatives have been exhausted. A political party should not be dissolved for expressing unpopular or offensive views, for proposing legislative reforms and advocating on issues of public interest or for exercising its right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Dissolution provisions should be narrowly framed, with clear criteria and a requirement for evidence-based, individualized assessments. Under international human rights law, a political party may be lawfully prohibited only if it advocates violence or national, racial or religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, or when it carries out activities or acts aimed at the violation of the rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights law (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, arts. 5 and 20).

48. Political parties should not be dissolved or prohibited for isolated unlawful acts by their members, where such acts are inconsistent with their statutes. Candidates should have access to prompt and effective legal remedies to protect the right to stand for election and the right to freedom of association. Blanket bans on candidates for merely associating with a dissolved or banned political party contradict international standards. In the Republic of Moldova, two days before the 2023 local elections, the Central Election Commission ordered the deregistration of all 8,605 candidates nominated by one of the dissolved political parties, on the basis of threats to national security and campaign finance violations.⁵⁵

49. According to international human rights standards, candidates who have been prosecuted for and convicted of a crime, following legal proceedings adhering to international human rights law, including the right to a fair trial, may be legitimately deprived of their right to stand for election, but blanket bans are neither justified nor proportionate measures. As the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have emphasized, restrictions based on illegitimate activities attributed to a political party should not be indiscriminate and require an individualized assessment of a member's active involvement in such activities.⁵⁶ Deprivation of the right to stand for election of persons not yet convicted could be legitimate in exceptional cases, such as for international crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

1. Political financing

50. Opposition parties and independent candidates encountered financial obstacles such as high registration fees, funding restrictions and intrusive inspections, including through the misuse of the State anti-corruption or anti-money-laundering institutions. Meanwhile, incumbent ruling parties often misuse State resources, undermining fair competition.

51. The ability of political parties to access and use financial resources is protected under the right to freedom of association, enabling their adequate and discrimination-free competition, and the exercise of their right to be elected. Rules governing the access to funding and resources of political parties must be non-discriminatory and transparent, and their implementation should not be arbitrary or jeopardize party independence and the ability to genuinely compete in elections.⁵⁷

52. Concerns are increasing over funding from powerful businesses, illicit actors, organized crime and foreign Governments. Reasonable limitations on campaign expenditures

⁵⁴ See communication GTM 8/2023.

⁵⁵ See <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/2/557406.pdf>.

⁵⁶ See <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/b/555996.pdf>.

⁵⁷ A/HRC/20/27, para. 71.

may be justified to prevent undermining the free choice of voters or the distortion of the democratic process due to disproportionate expenditure.⁵⁸ Foreign donations may be carefully regulated or prohibited to avoid undue influence by foreign interests,⁵⁹ but distinctions should be made on the basis of the types of funding sources. Funding by international organizations should be allowed to avoid the infringement of the right to association for political parties active internationally.⁶⁰

2. Arbitrary detention, prosecution and attacks

53. Opposition parties' leaders and members faced State-sanctioned repression, including arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture and ill-treatment, and extrajudicial killings, before and after elections. Judicial systems and oversight bodies were weaponized against opposition candidates.

54. In India, opposition leaders reportedly faced politically motivated raids and pretrial detention before the general elections of April to June 2024, including the arrest of an opposition leader a few weeks ahead of the elections on money-laundering accusations. Imran Khan, an opposition leader in Pakistan, was subjected to arbitrary arrest, prior to the February 2024 general elections, with the authorities using arrest, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and torture to clamp down on his party (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf).⁶¹ Zimbabwe saw an unprecedented surge in enforced disappearances, abductions, and torture and ill-treatment against political activists and opposition party members.⁶² In Senegal, the president of the dissolved main opposition political party *Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité* was arrested for allegedly inciting insurrection, criminal association, undermining State security, and plotting against State authority, and opposition leaders and supporters were subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, and torture.⁶³ In Türkiye, a politician thought to be a strong contender for the 2028 election faced an allegedly politically motivated prison sentence on corruption charges, which sparked peaceful protests and subsequent arrests of peaceful protesters, journalists and activists.⁶⁴

55. In some countries, the authorities launched a systematic and widespread repression of political opponents and activists before the elections, eliminating any space for exercising the right to freedom of association and political participation in elections. In Bangladesh,⁶⁵ Belarus,⁶⁶ the Russian Federation⁶⁷ and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of),⁶⁸ political repression has been widespread, with thousands detained and tortured, and many killed. The death of detained prominent opposition figure Alexei Navalny in the Russian Federation ahead of the presidential elections sent a threatening message to opposition candidates.⁶⁹

56. Candidates have also been targeted by non-State actors, such as organized criminal groups attempting to infiltrate the electoral process. In Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico, this has

⁵⁸ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 25 (1996), para. 19.

⁵⁹ A/HRC/20/27, para. 71.

⁶⁰ Venice Commission, Opinion No. 1169/2023 of 18 March 2024.

⁶¹ See A/HRC/WGAD/2024/22; and communication PAK 9/2023.

⁶² See communication ZWE 2/2023.

⁶³ See communication SEN 1/2024.

⁶⁴ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/turkiye-concern-widespread-detentions.

⁶⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/bangladesh/ohchr-fftb-hr-violations-bd.pdf>.

⁶⁶ See A/HRC/58/68; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/belarus-human-rights-violations-remain-rampant-some-amounting-crimes-against>.

⁶⁷ See A/HRC/57/59.

⁶⁸ See the conference room paper, dated 15 October 2024, containing the detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, available on the web page of the mission at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ffmv/index>; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/venezuela-harsh-repression-and-crimes-against-humanity-ongoing-fact-finding>.

⁶⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/no-justice-alexei-navalny-and-more-lives-risk-russia-warns-un-special>.

resulted in threats against and killings of politicians and candidates who challenge corruption and denounce organized crime.⁷⁰

57. These acts of repression against dissidents and the lack of due process and protection instil an atmosphere of fear, severely inhibiting public freedoms and political pluralism.

C. Freedom of assembly

58. The cycle saw widespread protests and mobilizations of social movements globally, both before and after elections. Many protests were driven by dissatisfaction with the election process, alleged fraud and manipulation, international interference, repression of democratic freedoms, and exclusion of opposition parties. They also addressed corruption, inequality, climate justice, and racial justice, and calls were made for ending ongoing wars and genocide and for a just peace. The underlying causes of these protests, however, were often linked to the shrinking of democratic spaces and the lack of governmental accountability.

59. Rather than addressing these legitimate concerns, the incumbent authorities and/or newly elected Governments responded by curtailing peaceful assemblies through administrative restrictions, arbitrary arrests of protesters and opposition leaders, and heavy repression.

60. Protests raising certain critical issues (such as protests in support of Palestinians' human rights and climate justice protests) or opposing authorities' policies were met with undue restrictions and excessive use of force by law enforcement, thereby preventing selected groups' right to participation through the silencing of their voices. In Germany, exacerbated by heightened anti-immigration election campaigning, in the context of the February 2025 parliamentary elections, a solidarity movement in support of Palestinians' rights faced increased police violence, home raids of activists and the criminalization and forced deportation of protesters, leading to an erosion of peaceful assembly rights. In addition, there was a systematic defunding of organizations advocating for the rights of Palestinians.⁷¹

61. Before and after elections, some States adopted laws extending law enforcement powers targeting peaceful protesters. Ahead of the elections in Georgia, the authorities expedited amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations, restricting the right of assembly. Following the November 2023 presidential elections, Argentina issued the "anti-picketing" protocol, allowing for the arbitrary restriction of peaceful assemblies.⁷²

62. Opposition parties' assemblies were intentionally disrupted, including through restrictions or general bans on a "public safety" pretext. In Tunisia, peaceful assemblies were allegedly prevented by blocking access to gathering locations, setting up security checkpoints and deploying law enforcement.⁷³ In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the opposition presidential candidate's campaigns faced systematic obstructions, including retaliatory temporary closures of certain private service providers, and harassment, arrests and detentions of individuals who provided assistance.⁷⁴

63. States used existing restrictive frameworks to prevent campaign rallies and assemblies and issued blanket bans on peaceful protests prior to and after elections, while law enforcement used excessive force to disperse allegedly unauthorized protests. In Azerbaijan, ahead of the 2024 parliamentary elections, the Ministry of Internal Affairs reportedly warned of "severe measures" against participants in any potential peaceful protests. In the Russian Federation, emergency legislation related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic was reportedly invoked to ban opposition rallies without justification.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Submission received by the Special Rapporteur. Submissions are on file with the Secretariat.

⁷¹ Submission received by the Special Rapporteur.

⁷² See communication ARG 3/2024.

⁷³ Submission received by the Special Rapporteur.

⁷⁴ See communication VEN 7/2024.

⁷⁵ Submission received by the Special Rapporteur.

64. Greater tolerance of peaceful assembly is required during elections.⁷⁶ Under international human rights law, the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly does not require authorization; if necessary, prior notification may be required to facilitate the assembly and protect the rights of others. However, blanket restrictions on peaceful assemblies are inherently disproportionate and should never be invoked.⁷⁷ Authorities must facilitate peaceful assemblies and protect participants regardless of the existence of any system of notification, even if the assembly is declared unlawful or is dispersed.⁷⁸ Laws should permit, rather than criminalize, spontaneous peaceful assemblies. Authorities must treat all peaceful assemblies equally, regardless of the political views expressed or the organizers' identity.

65. In some countries, public sector employees were allegedly forced to attend election campaign events, raising concerns about the ability to vote without fear of retribution. No one should be forced to participate in an assembly.⁷⁹

66. Reports indicate the use of agents provocateurs – belonging to the State apparatus or acting on behalf of authorities – aiming to provoke violence within the assembly or broader electoral violence. The Special Rapporteur and her predecessors have repeatedly condemned this practice, as it severely undermines and endangers peaceful assemblies. States have a positive duty to protect peaceful protesters from violent actors, including within the assembly, and the potential or actual existence or actions of such infiltrators should not be used as a pretext to ban peaceful protests or place responsibility on organizers to prevent infiltrators.

67. Targeted arrests of opposition leaders and political activists have been carried out as a means to suppress peaceful assemblies. In Mozambique, the day before elections, a political activist of the opposition was reportedly arrested for inciting collective disobedience and attacking the President's honour.⁸⁰ Authorities also carried out mass arrests to suppress peaceful protests, subjecting protesters to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence. The campaign of mass arrests carried out by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela following protests demanding election transparency was aimed at generating terror among the population, and children arrested after the protests were charged with terrorism.⁸¹

68. Excessive and deadly force, including live ammunition, has been used against peaceful protesters demanding transparency and voicing concerns of electoral fraud. In Bangladesh, peaceful protests were met with excessive and lethal force in the lead-up to elections and in the post-election mass protests.⁸² In Senegal, mass protests led to the arrest, injury or death of opposition leaders and supporters, journalists and human rights defenders, with law enforcement allegedly using excessive force against political gatherings.⁸³ In Georgia, before and after elections, law enforcement used rubber bullets, water cannons, and pepper spray and other chemical irritants to suppress protests, allegedly injuring hundreds, while many were arbitrarily detained, tortured or subjected to ill-treatment. Protesters faced physical violence, intimidation and retaliation by law enforcement officers and individuals without uniforms or identification.⁸⁴ In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, post-election mass protests were met with repression by security forces and armed civilian groups aligned with the Government, as a result of which 25 were killed and hundreds injured or detained.⁸⁵ In Mozambique, law enforcement officers used excessive force, including tear gas and live

⁷⁶ See [A/68/299](#).

⁷⁷ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 37 (2020).

⁷⁸ See [A/HRC/55/60](#).

⁷⁹ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 37 (2020), para. 66.

⁸⁰ See communication MOZ 2/2024.

⁸¹ See [A/HRC/57/57](#).

⁸² See communications BGD 1/2024 and BGD 6/2024.

⁸³ See communications SEN 2/2022 and SEN 1/2024.

⁸⁴ See <https://georgia.un.org/en/288324-georgia-must-investigate-use-force-police-during-demonstrations-experts>.

⁸⁵ See [A/HRC/57/57](#).

ammunition, during post-election protests, allegedly killing dozens and injuring or arresting hundreds.⁸⁶

69. Also concerning is the reported use of armed civilians aligned with Governments or political parties to suppress peaceful protests. This practice undermines accountability and spreads fear.

70. The use of force, often as the first choice, and the wide, indiscriminate use of crowd control weapons, by authorities in many countries, suggest an intentional crackdown on dissent and political participation. Closing the space for people to raise their concerns and repression of peaceful protests and political rallies resulted in electoral violence in some countries.

71. Considering the high tensions during elections and the importance of ensuring a safe and enabling space for political dialogue, law enforcement officials, including commanders, must exercise greater restraint, use de-escalation tactics, and remain neutral.⁸⁷

72. Some States deployed the military to crack down on protests in the context of elections, such as in Mozambique.⁸⁸ The military should not be involved in policing protests, as it carries the risk of serious violations.⁸⁹

D. Intersectionality and inclusion

73. Following the “super election” cycle, women’s representation in political leadership and in parliaments remained limited worldwide. In 2024, women’s parliamentary representation increased by only 0.3 per cent, marking the slowest rate of progress since 2017.⁹⁰ Women candidates continue to face significant election participation barriers, including a lack of financial resources, structural gender discrimination and gender-based violence, social stigma, hate speech, intimidation, and digital violence, and increased pushback against gender inclusion.

74. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) urged States to implement and enforce gender quotas and strategic appointments, and to implement legal and policy reforms addressing societal biases and eradicating violence against women in politics.⁹¹ Legislative gender quotas contributed to progress with regard to women’s representation. However, fulfilment remains a challenge. Brazil reportedly granted amnesties to political parties failing to comply with mandatory quotas for candidates based on gender, sexuality and race, undermining efforts to overcome gender and racial underrepresentation.

75. As women remain underrepresented in political parties, women candidates, especially those belonging to minorities, face barriers in access to campaign funding. Political parties have failed to create internal policies for the protection and security of women candidates and parliamentarians and to ensure women’s representation, including in leading party positions.

76. While some countries have introduced electoral policies and practices inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons, LGBTI rights are under attack globally. Hateful anti-LGBTI rhetoric was widespread during election campaigns, and the rights of LGBTI individuals to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and public and political participation, are increasingly restricted. Many States have criminalized LGBTI associations and expressions and banned activities promoting LGBTI human rights,

⁸⁶ See communication MOZ 2/2024; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/11/mozambique-post-election-violence-and-repression-must-stop-say-un-experts>.

⁸⁷ See A/HRC/55/60.

⁸⁸ See communication MOZ 2/2024.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 37 (2020), para. 80.

⁹⁰ See <https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2025-03/ipu-report-parliamentary-gender-gap-narrowed-over-past-30-years-progress-stalled-in-2024>.

⁹¹ See <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2024/12/only-five-women-elected-in-direct-presidential-elections-in-2024>.

creating a hostile environment for their public participation, which led some candidates to withdraw. In Georgia, the Law on the Protection of Family Values and Minors allegedly prevented LGBTI individuals from gathering and voicing their needs during elections.

77. In addition, women and LGBTI individuals exercising their fundamental freedoms face digital political violence, often on social media platforms lacking robust anti-discrimination moderation policies, exacerbated by disinformation.

78. Some positive examples are: the introduction of legal and financial incentives for parties to include women in their internal structures and candidate lists; the adoption by Brazil of a law against political violence; and collaboration with civil society to address political violence against LGBTIQI candidates. A national policy and effective protection mechanisms are required to effectively prevent political gender-based violence. In Nepal, two transgender women ran in the 2024 local elections, which was hailed as a step forward for representation

V. Freedom of peaceful assembly

79. During the cycle, some elections took place in environments of complete suppression of civic space due to sustained and severe crackdowns on public freedoms. This created a repressive environment gravely undermining the right to freely choose, effectively depriving people of their right to vote and political participation.

80. For instance, due to the systematic and widespread nature of the repression against political opponents and protesters, and the gravity of crimes committed as part of State policy, experts found evidence that the repression amounted to crimes against humanity in Bangladesh,⁹² Belarus⁹³ and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of),⁹⁴ including, in the latter two cases, persecution on political grounds against civilians perceived as being critical of, or opposed to, the Government.

81. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation concluded that arrests of opposition leaders and restrictions on civil rights had “severely compromised” the 2024 presidential election.⁹⁵ The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus stated that: “When one cannot form and operate political parties or participate in civil society organizations or assemble peacefully to receive or impart information, political pluralism and political competition cannot be ensured, which is the essence of free elections.”⁹⁶ In the March 2023 parliamentary elections in Cuba, people voted with no real choice, given the legal prohibition of multiparty competition, the long-standing criminalization of independent civil society and peaceful assemblies, the suppression of independent electoral observation through arbitrary detentions, and restrictions.⁹⁷

82. Military regimes, occupation, and armed conflict, which severely hinder the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, cannot be considered conducive to free and fair elections. Holding elections in highly controlled and coercive environments, without political participation and freedoms, leads to legitimizing undemocratic Governments, further threatening freedoms. Advocating for a boycott of a non-compulsory vote should not be criminalized, as it is protected under the right to freedom of expression.⁹⁸

83. Refugees and exiled civil society should be able to freely exercise their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association for effectively participating in their

⁹² See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/bangladesh/ohchr-fftb-hr-violations-bd.pdf>.

⁹³ A/HRC/58/68, para. 81.

⁹⁴ See the conference room paper, dated 15 October 2024, containing the detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

⁹⁵ See A/HRC/57/59.

⁹⁶ See https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/ijudiciary/statements/briefing-situation-in-belarus-23-jan-2025_0.pdf.

⁹⁷ Submissions received by the Special Rapporteur; and communication CUB 2/2024.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 34 (2011), para. 28.

country's democratic processes, protected from transnational repression, intimidation, criminalization, cancellation of protected status and threats of deportation.

84. Emergency or exceptional measures restricting fundamental freedoms are generally inconsistent with genuine elections. The 2024 presidential and legislative elections in El Salvador, held under a prolonged state of emergency to combat alleged gang violence, saw excessive security powers misused to suppress 2023 pre-election protests opposing the President's anti-constitutional bid for re-election; the increased security and military presence, including at polling centres, and alleged arbitrary arrests and intimidation of activists, created a chilling effect for participation and the provision of protection services; and there were delays in court appeals against decisions disallowing peaceful assemblies.

VI. Prevention, de-escalation and accountability

85. Restrictions on the exercise of freedoms, and serious human rights violations against people exercising their freedoms, led to escalating electoral violence, exacerbated by divisive political rhetoric that heightened polarization.

86. Ensuring an enabling legislative, policy and institutional framework guaranteeing the exercise of fundamental freedoms without discrimination based on political views or other grounds is a key prerequisite for genuine and violence-free elections. Electoral processes and legislation should enable participation for all groups and be devised in a timely manner to allow for inclusive consultations.

87. To ensure safe and meaningful participation, where the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are facilitated, authorities should exercise maximum possible restraint and exhaust all possible measures for de-escalation. Genuine, open and inclusive dialogue with protesters, civil society and other stakeholders should be prioritized.

88. The facilitation of the election-related work of independent monitors and civil society is essential for transparency and legitimacy in the election process and its outcomes and is key for preventing and de-escalating potential violence.

89. Internet and communication shutdowns, which are increasingly imposed to quell protests during elections on security pretexts, restrict political participation, have an impact on transparency and can escalate violence, preventing political leaders from maintaining calm in their constituencies.

90. The widespread violations of fundamental freedoms in many countries highlight the necessity of establishing preventive strategies to facilitate the exercise of the rights to freedom of assembly and of association, in consultation with diverse civil society actors and opposition parties, addressing past and current human rights concerns, and systemic discrimination.

91. As hate speech and disinformation have affected many elections, often igniting political violence, a prevention strategy compliant with freedom of expression standards is crucial to curb them, including online.⁹⁹ Civil society is an important partner, as it can address misinformation directly with communities and provide effective counter messages.

92. To de-escalate and resolve violence, national inclusive dialogues should be prioritized, addressing opposition and community concerns. Where authorities failed to engage, the situation escalated, leading to prolonged insecurity and undermining the election's legitimacy.

93. The widespread use of force by law enforcement highlights the urgent need for training and institutional reforms, including the implementation of the Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests and its incorporation into election security manuals.

94. Unresolved electoral repression and related grievances often trigger serious post-election violence and long-term legitimacy crises, as was recently seen in Bangladesh,

⁹⁹ See <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/kenya-helping-national-partners-counter-hate-head>.

creating cycles of repression. A policy of zero tolerance towards repression should be adopted at the highest level of authority and among political party leaders, including by ensuring systematic, impartial and rapid investigations to bring all responsible to justice. Full, impartial justice and reparations are essential to restore public trust in democratic processes and peaceful reconciliation.¹⁰⁰

95. For full accountability, those responsible and with command responsibility must be brought to justice. In Georgia, the alleged large-scale violent repression of and gravity of the harm reportedly inflicted on protesters, which may constitute torture, point to command responsibility. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, a United Nations investigation found that “the repression of the protests was instigated by the highest civilian and military echelons of the State ... through public statements of a threatening nature”.¹⁰¹ Impunity and evading accountability for the repression of election-related protests would seriously undermine political participation and democratic transitions. In Senegal, the parliament enacted an amnesty law for crimes committed during the election-related protests, shielding law enforcement from responsibility for serious abuses.¹⁰²

VII. Use of digital technologies

96. Many States during the 2024 elections used biometric voter registration technology, including fingerprinting, iris scans and facial recognition, to verify voters’ identity. Although biometric voter registration systems have been commended, including by election observers, for enhancing electoral transparency and minimizing fraud, thus bolstering public trust in elections, concern has been raised that they may have facilitated voter suppression targeting opposition constituencies and data-protection violations, as, reportedly, in Mozambique and Nigeria. Civil society and political actors raised concerns about the potential use of biometric voter registration for political repression through targeted disenfranchisement and about biometric data possibly being weaponized to direct political retribution against political opposition voters and activists. Like other biometric technologies, biometric voter registration is often deployed without transparency, an appropriate regulatory framework and independent oversight. This creates uncertainty as to how biometric voter registration systems are being used and how data are being protected, which can deepen public distrust and disenfranchise voters.

97. The use of electronic voting systems, by its very nature, further limited election monitoring work, especially where civic space has been heavily repressed.

98. Various surveillance technology and digital repression tactics have been used to target activists and political opponents. Facial recognition technology – an advanced biometric system that uses artificial intelligence to identify individuals – and remote biometric technologies in publicly accessible spaces enable mass surveillance and discriminatory targeted surveillance. In some countries, where facial recognition has been integrated into public surveillance camera infrastructure, it has allegedly been used to prevent democratic participation by facilitating the swift identification, real-time location and arrest of assembly participants, sometimes pre-emptively. In Mauritius, a nationwide network of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras powered by artificial intelligence (the Safe City Project), reportedly linked to facial recognition software, raised concerns of politically motivated surveillance targeting opposition actors in the 2024 general elections, including after the elections.

99. The use of spyware and communications interception technologies are a critical threat to civic activism and democratic participation.¹⁰³ While introduced for national security or law enforcement purposes, these tools have been increasingly misused to conduct

¹⁰⁰ See [A/HRC/53/38](#).

¹⁰¹ See [the conference room paper, dated 15 October 2024, containing the detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela](#).

¹⁰² See https://law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Senegal-Report_EN_1.14.25.pdf.

¹⁰³ See https://freeassemblyandassociation.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Joint-Declaration-on-FoAA-and-Digital-Technologies_15.09.2023.pdf.

surveillance on opposition figures, journalists, civil society activists and protesters. The Special Rapporteur and her predecessors have consistently warned against the use of spyware for the surveillance and targeting of political and civic activists, most recently highlighting that, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the State-owned mobile applications “VenApp” and “CC200” facilitated the surveillance and persecution of citizens, allowing for the anonymous reporting of those perceived to be opposing or protesting against the Government as “fascists”.¹⁰⁴ In Serbia, in the lead-up to, and the aftermath of, the December 2023 parliamentary elections, the authorities, allegedly, systematically utilized surveillance technologies: Cellebrite UFED, a law enforcement mobile forensic tool, for extracting data from the mobile devices of independent investigative journalists and activists; and the domestically produced Android NoviSpy spyware system, to access activists’ personal data, including encrypted conversations on mobile applications, emails and social media activity. NoviSpy has allegedly been used to covertly infect activists’ devices during detention or police interviews.¹⁰⁵ The Pegasus spyware, allowing authorities to remotely control microphones and cameras, was also used against activists and political opponents by several States.

100. These technologies, often used without strict legal control and oversight, threaten the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the right to participate in elections: before the election, by discouraging participation in political assemblies and civil society campaign activities; during the election, by influencing voter turnout; and after the election, by enabling reprisals against dissenting voices.

101. The uncertainty surrounding the use of digital technology in the context of elections (how technology is used, how data are protected, and the consequences for those targeted) fosters a climate of fear and creates a profound chilling effect for democratic participation. Chilling effects are particularly insidious in an election context, gravely impacting marginalized groups and those challenging the status quo and advocating for political change. Chilling effects may undermine individuals’ ability to freely develop their identity as publicly engaged people, and the functioning of democratic society by interfering with the ability to express, associate and mobilize. As these technologies are becoming increasingly sophisticated, often able to operate remotely and undetected, they are less visible to their targets, the public and regulatory scrutiny, and they aggravate chilling effects and deter future participation.

102. In this context, the principles outlined in the Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests and its component on human rights-compliant uses of digital technologies are fully relevant, regarding the prevention of chilling effects, oversight and accountability for the use of technology.¹⁰⁶

VIII. Conclusion

103. Following the “super election” cycle, human rights, including the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, face unprecedented and increasing threats.

104. Newly elected Governments, aiming to consolidate their power, sought to further weaken civic activism and eradicate and silence criticism, by restricting access to funding, stigmatizing and criminalizing civil society actors working on democracy and human rights. This trend was exacerbated globally following the defunding by the Government of the United States of the United States Agency for International Development and the vilifying campaign by the Government of the United States against the Agency, aid institutions and agencies in general, their workers, and aid recipients. The Special Rapporteur and over 30 other experts stated that halting the

¹⁰⁴ See communication VEN 7/2024.

¹⁰⁵ See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur70/8814/2024/en/>.

¹⁰⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Toolkit-law-enforcement-Component-on-Digital-Technologies.pdf>.

Agency's provision of foreign humanitarian assistance gravely impacted freedom of assembly, leading many civil society organizations, media outlets and faith-based organizations, among others, to close down.¹⁰⁷

105. The rhetoric of the Government of the United States, labelling aid agencies, workers and recipients as "corrupt", "criminal" and part of a "scam", and baselessly alleging that programmes undermined foreign elections, fuelled a wave of harmful stigmatization, criminalization and persecution against civil society, social movements and activists around the world. It encouraged States' revival of "foreign agent" laws¹⁰⁸ and the levelling of threats by authorities and politicians against organizations that received foreign funds. In Serbia, several civil society organizations working on human rights, the rule of law and democratic elections were targeted with vilification and intimidating prosecutorial investigation, excessive armed police raids and over-intrusive inspections due to United States Agency for International Development funding.¹⁰⁹ This vilification campaign against civil society has a long-term damaging impact on democratic participation.

106. The "super election" cycle shows that the realization of democracy goes beyond polling day. Ensuring the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association throughout the election period is essential for guaranteeing genuine elections, representing people's free will, and sustaining democracy. Respecting the independence of civil society and the media, and facilitating peaceful assemblies, are vital to guarantee that people's will is respected. People's voices must be heard to ensure that elected authorities remain attentive to, accountable for and responsive to public needs. Honouring the outcome of an election and the will of the people also requires fostering an enabling environment in which everyone can freely voice concerns and opinions after elections. At the current, critical time of rolling back on fundamental freedoms and rights, which has been exacerbated following the "super election" cycle, and in the midst of new electoral cycles and a compounded crisis globally, the protection and facilitation of these rights is more essential than ever.

107. As emphasized by the Special Rapporteur's predecessor, an electoral process, in which widespread barriers are systematically placed on the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, cannot be said to be either free or fair and, as such, the outcome should not be considered to be the result of "genuine" elections, as required under international law.¹¹⁰

IX. Recommendations

108. States should:

- (a) Ensure, throughout the election cycle, in law and in practice, that the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association play a decisive role as avenues for genuine and inclusive dialogue, pluralism, tolerance and inclusion, where minority or dissenting views or beliefs are respected and considered, allowing protesters, civil society actors and political opponents (including in exile) to express their views without fear of reprisal;
- (b) Advance inclusion and equality in political participation, including by:
 - (i) Ensuring a non-discriminatory legal framework and procedures;
 - (ii) Supporting and building the capacity of women, LGBTI persons, and historically marginalized groups to expand their political representation, including by implementing gender quotas and strategic appointments,

¹⁰⁷ See communication USA 5/2025.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/bosnia-and-herzegovina-bill-registering-ngos-will-increase-government>.

¹⁰⁹ See <https://beograd.vjt.rs/aktuelnosti/saopstenje-915/> (in Serbian).

¹¹⁰ A/68/299, para. 7.

guaranteeing adequate financial support and ensuring protection from gender and/or race-based political violence or discrimination;

- (c) Prevent violence and facilitate peaceful assemblies, including by:
 - (i) Prioritizing restraint and negotiations, and avoiding the use of force;
 - (ii) Ensuring prompt, independent and impartial investigations and victim-centred accountability for violations of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and that those with command functions are held accountable;
 - (iii) Refraining from imposing a state of emergency during elections and in response to protests and, in the exceptional circumstances in which a state of emergency is imposed, ensuring that the emergency powers are not used to restrict and repress fundamental freedoms and participation;
 - (iv) Refraining from deploying the military or militarized forces in response to political protests and, in the very exceptional circumstances in which their deployment is strictly necessary and justified, ensuring that they are under civilian law enforcement command and oversight and bound by the laws and rules applicable to law enforcement;
- (d) Ensure human rights-compliant use of technology, including by:
 - (i) Ensuring that digital technologies are used in compliance with human rights standards, including the digital component of the Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests;¹¹¹
 - (ii) Considering chilling effects on political participation when evaluating the necessity and proportionality of the use of digital technologies;
 - (iii) Refraining from preventing or disrupting the exercise of public freedoms and participation through mobile phone signal or Internet slowdowns or shutdowns;
 - (iv) Prohibiting the use of surveillance technologies, particularly mass surveillance of biometric identifiers, for the indiscriminate and/or untargeted and illegitimate surveillance of individuals exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association;
 - (v) Implementing effective oversight across the full life cycle of a technological deployment, and providing access to remedy to direct and indirect victims;
 - (vi) Ensuring transparent procurement policies and procedures for all digital technologies used by law enforcement or for election facilitation purposes;
 - (vii) Putting in place robust and accountable export control regimes for surveillance technologies that pose serious risks to human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (e) Ensure, prior to elections, that:
 - (i) Laws and processes are adopted to guarantee the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, political pluralism, inclusive elections and independent election observations, following inclusive consultations with relevant stakeholders;
 - (ii) Laws regulating associations, assemblies and political parties are compliant with international human rights laws and standards;
 - (iii) A clearly defined legal framework is in place to ensure transparency and accountability of political party funding and campaign finance, and independent

¹¹¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Toolkit-law-enforcement-Component-on-Digital-Technologies.pdf>.

monitoring and oversight mechanisms are established, ensuring that any interference, including financial regulations, and sanctions, are proportionate and do not undermine the right to freedom of association and political participation;

(iv) Steps are taken to repeal and refrain from adopting vague laws restricting civil society's political participation, such as "foreign agent" laws, and laws related to security, transparency and financing do not unduly restrict the freedom to access resources;

(v) A robust action plan is adopted to facilitate and protect the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, including of vulnerable candidates and groups, following broad consultations with relevant stakeholders, and the plan incorporates lessons learned from previous elections and current evidence-based risks;

(vi) Impediments to the registration or work of political parties or candidates, independent civil society associations and election observers, including their freedom to seek, access and use resources, are removed;

(vii) The independence of civil society, including its ability to conduct advocacy and election-related activities unobstructed and free from stigmatization or restrictions related to vaguely formulated definitions of "political activity", is promoted, respected and protected;

(viii) Clear protocols are established to prevent intimidation and provide protection for associations and individuals monitoring and reporting on elections;

(ix) Safe forums are created for public dialogue, and civil society and other stakeholders can freely interact with candidates;

(x) The Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests is implemented in election protection strategies, and training is provided for law enforcement in facilitating peaceful protests and opposition campaign rallies;

(xi) Well-resourced independent oversight mechanisms are established to investigate violations of fundamental freedoms by law enforcement, as are victim-supportive systems for safe reporting and effective remedy;

(xii) Persons and groups exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly or of association are protected from criminalization, threats, use of violence, persecution and reprisals, including for expressing dissent;

(f) Ensure, after elections, that:

(i) Multi-stakeholder consultations, including with victims, are conducted to assess the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms during elections, and lessons learned are incorporated into training, policies and electoral strategies, ensuring accountability, access to justice and reparations, when needed;

(ii) Authorities exercise greater tolerance and remain open to receiving and considering criticism (from the public, the media, civil society and other associations, and protesters), to meet the public's needs and the State's human rights obligations.

109. Political parties, leaders and candidates should:

(a) Refrain from using hate speech, show restraint, and resolve disagreements through democratic means while respecting the will of the voters;

(b) Adopt a code of conduct to protect and respect freedom of peaceful assembly and of association throughout the elections and, if elected, when in power;

(c) Ensure that women have parity in the governing bodies of political parties, and ensure that women have realistic prospects of being elected.

110. The United Nations and regional bodies involved in electoral assistance and election monitoring should also monitor the exercise of fundamental freedoms throughout the election cycle to assess the environment for a free election.

111. The international community should:

(a) Strengthen engagement with grass-roots civil society and social movements, and support, including financially, civil society associations, including those in exile, to carry out their advocacy and monitoring for ensuring genuine elections and respect for the will of voters;

(b) Refrain from endorsing or legitimizing elections that do not meet the international standards for genuine, free and fair elections and are characterized by widespread and systematic violations of democratic freedoms and repression;

(c) Ensure that, where States provide peacekeeping and law enforcement training in conflict-affected and transition electoral contexts, they implement the Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests through their operations and institution- and capacity-building;

(d) Address the trends related to the trade in digital technologies and crowd control equipment that may be used for suppressing fundamental rights. The adoption of a torture-free trade agreement is a good starting point.

Annex

Key activities conducted from May 2024 to March 2025¹¹²

1. 2024 was a crucial year for the defence of the freedoms of association and peaceful assembly. Throughout the year, we faced significant challenges, but we also witnessed important advances, thanks to the tireless action of civil society, social movements, community leaders, and international actors.
2. The Special Rapporteur expresses her thanks to Sonya Merkova, Felipe Caicedo and Luz Avendaño, external advisors, for their support; interns from Universidad Sergio Arboleda, Columbia University Law School Human Rights Institute Advocates Program; students from the Master of Advanced Studies International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, at the Geneva Academy; and to all the other individuals, associations, governments, international bodies, and her colleagues special procedures mandate holders, among others, that have engaged with the mandate. And a warm recognition to all the victims of the violations of the right to freedom of assembly and of association worldwide, in solidarity.
3. The Special Rapporteur also expresses her appreciation to Switzerland for the provision of a Junior Professional Officer to support the mandate, and reiterates that greater contributions are required from member States to fulfil the objectives of her mandate.

Reports

4. The Special Rapporteur presented the last three reports of her predecessor, Clement Voulé, to the Human Rights Council: i) thematic report “Preserving gains and preventing the global assault on civic space and rising authoritarianism” (A/HRC/56/50), ii) country visit reports: Peru (A/HRC/56/50/Add.1) and Algeria (A/HRC/56/50/Add.2). Besides, the Special Rapporteur presented her first report to the United Nations General Assembly “Protecting the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association from stigmatization” (A/79/263).

Communications

5. Between 1 May 2024, when the current mandate holder took up her duty, and 31 March 2025, the Special Rapporteur sent a total of 160 communications, either individually or jointly with other special procedures mandate holders. These communications were addressed to 64 Member States and 27 other relevant actors. Among them, 131 were Joint Letters of Allegation (JAL), 20 were Joint Other Letters (JOL), and 9 were Joint Urgent Appeals (JUA).
6. The Special Rapporteur led 16 of these communications, which were sent to Peru, Rwanda, Paraguay, Zambia, Venezuela, Togo, the European Union, Mali, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Italy, Chile, Türkiye, the United States of America, Georgia and Côte d’Ivoire. Some of these communications were related to legislative amendments, new law proposals, and executive orders that undermined the human rights to peaceful assembly and association by either restricting funding, threatening human rights defenders with legal prosecution or creating vague definitions of terrorist organizations. The wider analysis on the communications sent reflects a growing and concerning trend of governments across the world seeking to use the legal framework to restrict the fundamental freedoms of association and assembly. Out of the 16 communications only three countries sent replies.
7. All the communications sent concerned an estimated 37,930,606 unidentified victims. The threats and alleged violations identified ranged from arbitrary arrests during peaceful demonstrations to allegations of mistreatment in unlawful detention settings, as well as

¹¹² The annex is also available in other languages (unofficial translations) at:
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-freedom-of-assembly-and-association/activities>.

threats to nuclear and electrical infrastructure, which could place millions of lives in danger, among many others.

8. In terms of regional distribution, 31 communications were directed to the Americas, to the Asia-Pacific region, and to Europe and Central Asia (19,4% each), 22 to Africa (13,8%), 18 to the Middle East and North Africa (11,3%), and 27 to non-state actors operating across multiple jurisdictions (16,9%).

9. When considering the number of individuals affected, Europe and Central Asia emerged as the region with the highest number of individuals at risk, accounting for 37,900,081 people. The Asia-Pacific region ranks second in terms of individuals affected, with China constituting the largest share of cases.

10. In the Middle East and North Africa, 435 identified individuals were cited in communications. In Africa, communications sought to safeguard the rights of 134 individuals, with the most concerning situation observed in Kenya. In Kenya, reports indicate enforced disappearances and the arbitrary detention of protestors, human rights defenders, activists, lawyers, and medical professionals in the context of demonstrations held in June, July, and August 2024.

11. In the Americas, 58 individuals were identified as being directly affected in the transmitted communications. The highest number of alleged victims was reported in Colombia and Nicaragua. In relation to the communications sent to Colombia, some concerns were raised regarding the lack of investigations into protest-related deaths from 2021, while in Nicaragua, the politically motivated denial of re-entry to Nicaraguan nationals has been raised as one of the main concerns in the communications sent.

12. It is important to underscore that the figures of identified individuals mentioned in communications do not reflect the actual and wider impact of certain cases. For instance, JOL USA 5/2025, which pertains to the suspension of all federal grants and loans by the government of the United States of America, has had far-reaching repercussions, affecting millions of individuals and associations worldwide.

13. Of the total communications sent, 85 responses were received, corresponding to 73 communications, as some communications elicited multiple responses. This translates into an overall response rate of 45,62%.

14. At the regional level, Africa recorded the lowest response rate, with only 4 communications receiving a reply. The Asia-Pacific, Europe and Central Asia regions demonstrated the highest number of responses received (20 responses from each of these regions). In the Americas, 14 responses were received from five States. In the Middle East and North Africa, 9 responses were received.

Events and other activities

15. From 1 May 2024 to 31 March 2025, the Special Rapporteur visited countries to participate in conferences and meetings, during which she strengthened relations with local organizations, governments, and national and regional OHCHR offices, promoting concrete actions to protect the rights of association and peaceful assembly. She also participated in international events to promote understanding and solutions to the challenges of freedom of assembly and association.

16. Her visits to Germany (May 2024), Thailand (October 2024), Brazil, South Africa (November 2024) and France (January 2025) were focused on participating in global events. Her visits to Bosnia Herzegovina (May 2024), Türkiye (June 2024), Argentina and Angola (August 2024), Guatemala (October 2024), Perú (October 2024 and March 2025) and United States of America (March 2025) were focused on participating in regional events. In most of these visits, the special rapporteur met local actors and government representatives, and she took advantage to collect inputs for her next reports. Her visit to Chile (October 2024) organized by local actors focused on activities where domestic issues falling within her mandate were discussed.

Technical assistance

17. Providing support and technical assistance to:

i) the Government of Costa Rica for the preparation of civil society consultation for the Universal Periodic Review;¹¹³ ii) the United Nations' office in México for the production of the "Standardized specialized protocol for the investigation of crimes against human rights defenders"; iii) the Libyan civil society, to advance the drafting of a unified Draft Law that promotes the right to freedom of association in line with international standards.

Collaboration with regional mechanisms

18. The Special Rapporteur: i) participated in OSCE/ODIHR's panel of experts (April 2025); ASEAN Forum on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly (July 2024); 79th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (May 2024), ii) engaged in a peer review of OSCE/ODIHR's Interim opinion on the amendments to the several regulations in Georgia (adopted on February 2025); and iii) Issued a Joint Declaration on the protection of the right to freedom of association in light of the "Foreign Agents"/"Foreign Influence" laws, in articulation with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression of the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the Commissioner Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders of the IACHR, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and focal point on reprisals in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the Representative of Indonesia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (September 2024).¹¹⁴

Implementation of the Model Protocol

19. The Special Rapporteur engaged in various activities to support and promote implementation of the Model Protocol for law enforcement for facilitating peaceful protest, including: i) the Special Rapporteur, with her predecessor Mr. Voulé, launched the Model Protocol in Portuguese, with the Federal Public Defender's Office (Brazil, November 2024); and ii) she co-hosted a side event at the Rightscon to promote the digital component of the Model Protocol (Taiwan Province of China, February 2025).

Student protests

20. The Special Rapporteur held numerous meetings with members of the pro-Palestine solidarity movement worldwide, issued recommendations to universities to protect the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association of pro-Palestine student movements,¹¹⁵ and engaged with over 10 universities and academic communities worldwide.

¹¹³ [A/HRC/WG.6/47/CRI/1](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/association/statements/2024-09-13-statement-sr-foaa.pdf).

¹¹⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/association/statements/2024-09-13-statement-sr-foaa.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/association/statements/20241004-stm-sr-association.pdf>.