

7 May 2020

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

As member organisations of the [Human Rights and Democracy Network](#) (HRDN) [European Parliament Working Group](#), we are writing to express our concern over **the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic on human rights, democracy and the rule of law**. We would also like to communicate our recommendations to ensure the European Parliament remains engaged on these issues during the lockdown.

While government action has been essential to respond to the pandemic, civil society around the world has expressed concerns over the nature, scope and duration of the adopted measures and their effects on human rights and democracy. As the crisis evolves and governments prepare to end imposed lockdowns, further concerns arise over the possible adoption of long-term measures likely to extend and deepen limitations of human rights. Decreased international attention over situations of widespread human rights violations unrelated to covid-19 has also been a cause for worry.

In light of these developments, we welcome the call included in the [European Parliament's resolution](#) of 17 April 2020 for continued application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and compliance with democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights during the crisis. We were also happy to see that the AFET Committee and the DROI Sub-committee were able to convene a remote meeting on 20 April 2020 and hold a discussion with High Representative Borrell on the EU's foreign policy during and after the crisis.

In order for the European Parliament to continue upholding its commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, we urge you to consider the following recommendations:

- **Resume the adoption of human rights urgency resolutions during plenary sessions**, including the adoption of urgency resolutions that were put on hold due to the crisis but remain relevant (e.g. on the Citizenship Amendment Act in India, or the cases of Osman Kavala or Gui Minhai). Urgency resolutions are essential tools to increase international attention over a particular situation, as well as to call on other EU institutions to take action to address it.
- **Resume the practice of holding foreign policy debates during plenary sessions**. The pandemic has consequences on international relations and it is important the European Parliament remains vocal on the international stage. Also, when discussing foreign policy issues and the implications of the covid-19 pandemic on a particular country, the situation of civil society and human rights defenders (HRDs) needs to be a key point of the agenda.
- Where necessary, **find alternative ways to conduct regular Committee activities**, such as hearings and missions. If such activities cannot be postponed to a later date, consider organising **online hearings** as well as **remote meetings** with relevant stakeholders, including HRDs, especially as they remain, now more than ever, at the front line of human rights work.

- Continue **meaningful engagement with civil society partners**, including to seek advice and expertise on ways to manage the crisis. It is particularly important for MEPs to remain in contact with affected communities inside and outside the EU.
- Within every committee, **designate a human rights focal point** in an effort to mainstream human rights effectively in the European Parliament's structures and processes to ensure that human rights and democracy are at the core of all actions and policies. This recommendation was made in [2019](#), and remains particularly relevant now given the need to effectively monitor **the impact of covid-19 measures** in each policy area **on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law**. It is particularly important that MEPs demand that economic recovery measures are adopted as part of a holistic strategy that puts human rights and democracy at its core.
- Continue the crucial work of **ensuring a financial allocation equal or superior to that of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights for the human rights component of the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument** in negotiations with the Council, as the covid-19 crisis is severely impacting the closing space for civil society and human rights defenders worldwide, and they face greater needs than ever before in carrying out their work and holding governments accountable.
- **Ensure that human rights, gender equality, women's rights including SRHR, and support to civil society organisations that defend these values remain priorities of the EU and Member States' responses to the crisis, both within and outside the EU, including in the annual Work Programme for 2021 and the revised MFF proposal.** The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme, the Health strand of the European Social Fund Plus, and the NDICI are particularly important instruments in this regard.

Members of the HRDN European Parliament Working Group would be **happy to support any efforts undertaken** by the European Parliament as an institution or by individual MEPs in order to implement these recommendations. For further information on covid-19 and its consequences, you are welcome to visit HRDN's website. It includes a [compilation of resources](#) from our members and partners and international organisations to help guide crisis responses, monitor, inform and assess the impact of covid-19 on human rights and democracy.

We remain available for any further information.

Yours sincerely,

[*Members of the HRDN European Parliament Working Group*](#)

The Human Rights and Democracy Network is an informal grouping of NGOs operating at EU level in the broader areas of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention. Participation in the network is open to non-governmental organizations which engage at EU level in the promotion of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention in and outside the EU.