



International Humanist and Ethical Union

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Working Session VI: Freedom of peaceful assembly and association

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The Copenhagen Document is clear: “Everyone will have the right of peaceful assembly and demonstration. Any restrictions [...] will be consistent with international standards.”¹ Yet across the OSCE region there are clear violations. Just a few examples:

In Kazakhstan, authorities routinely deny permits for peaceful protests against government policies and disrupt even single-person unauthorized protests, arbitrarily detaining organizers and participants.²

In Hungary, a law on public assembly, introduced last year, gives police more discretion to ban or disband demonstrations.³

Turkey has seen an increase in arbitrary bans on public assemblies. Last year, police detained students from leading universities for peaceful protests. A number of students were held in pretrial detention and many more prosecuted for crimes such as “spreading terrorist propaganda” and “insulting the president.”⁴

The Copenhagen Document (1990) is clear: “The right of association will be guaranteed.”⁵ Yet, again, there are clear violations by participating states.

In Turkmenistan, it is illegal for unregistered NGOs to operate, and strict regulations create severe challenges for groups to register. Civil society activists are threatened with reprisal.

In Russia, authorities smear independent NGOs, with a number of foreign NGOs banned for being “undesirable.” Earlier this year, Anastasia Shevchenko, coordinator for the pro-democracy NGO Open Russia, was put under house arrest for violating the “undesirable organizations” law.⁶

NGOs working on issues related to asylum and migration, women’s rights, or LGBT rights in Poland report ongoing difficulties accessing previously available public funding and some reported being smeared in pro-government media.⁷

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association is not only guaranteed under international law and via OSCE commitments but it is a fundamental good for society. It promotes the public discourse, diversity and progress so sorely needed in the region. And it is an essential tool in achieving change and representation in society. We urge all participating states to protect it accordingly.

¹ 1990 Copenhagen Document, §9.2

² <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/kazakhstan#cea955>

³ <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2018/10/02/hungarys-new-law-restricting-freedom-of-assembly/>

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkey#803bf5>

⁵ 1990 Copenhagen Document, §9.3

⁶ <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/01/25/first-victim-russias-undesirable-organizations-law-declared-prisoner-conscience-a64291>

⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/poland>