

UNGA75 | Assistant Secretary General encourages discussions on improving civil society participation in the General Assembly

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In her first interaction with the Third Committee of the General Assembly, Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in New York, emphasised the importance of civil society participation as well as preventing reprisals and attacks against human rights defenders who engage with the UN.



On 2 November, Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris participated in an interactive dialogue with the Third Committee of the General Assembly.

In light of what the EU called a 'disconcerting trend' of increasing reprisals, attacks and killings of human rights defenders, it welcomed the Secretary General's Report on Reprisals ([A/HRC/45/36](#)) as well as the UN's commitment to a system wide strategy to protect civil society space. The EU also condemned the practice by some States in the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs of blocking accreditation for NGOs without justification. Furthermore, the EU asked the ASG how civil society participation in key UN meetings could be improved, including the Third Committee.

In her responses, the ASG reaffirmed the UN's commitment to enhance civil society participation at all levels including in New York at the Third Committee, and encouraged discussions on this. She emphasised that furthering the inclusion of civil society participation is a specific priority in the Secretary General's "[Call to action for Human Rights](#)" and that the UN has followed this with endorsement at a UN-wide level with a particular focus on the 3 'Ps' - Protection, Promotion and Participation of civil society. She indicated that there was a plan to implement this focus with specific guidance in the future.

In response to a question by Latvia on challenges that her office faces, the ASG emphasised the challenges surrounding the looming budgetary discussions. While reiterating that human rights is one of the three key pillars, the ASG lamented that only 3.7% of the overall budget is devoted to human rights. She urged support for human rights in the budget so that the crucial functions could continue to be performed.

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