



HAUT-COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME • OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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Dear friends,

I would like to thank you for your letter of 5 September 2018, and for your warm welcome on behalf of so many non-governmental organizations and civil society actors working at different levels. The letter truly is a reflection of our shared objective – advancing human rights everywhere.

Since I assumed the post of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, I have reiterated my conviction that human rights are for all and that the most decisive struggles for human dignity take place on the ground, far removed from the attention of the international community and media. And I stressed repeatedly that I see it as my duty to listen to those who are at the heart of these struggles and take their concerns seriously. I also acknowledged the risks that people face when they stand up to those in power and promised to support them. I pointed out that you, human rights defenders, accomplish so much without the recognition you deserve. I am fully aware of the very high price that many activists pay for their efforts, and I commit to do my best to make their struggle worth the effort. Every day, in my work with States to advance human rights, I will endeavour to be the voice of the voiceless.

I also had the chance to outline some of my thoughts: Having the space and channels to obtain information, to express one's views, to unite with others, to participate in decision-making in areas that influences one's life is not only a right, but a *precondition* for advancing on all fronts. Without civic space it is unlikely that we will progress in relation any of the contemporary challenges – be it addressing climate change, preventing conflict, reducing inequalities, or maximizing the benefits from new technologies. But this very space, so inalienable and fundamental, is closing in many places.

At OHCHR, we have recognized the need to step up our efforts on these issues, and, resources permitting, will strive to develop a better framework for tracking civic space trends; protect civic space and human rights defenders in a more coordinated and effective way, including from reprisals; help build public support for civic space, and pay particular attention to how new technologies impact on civic space and design responses accordingly.

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Representatives of the Civil Society organisations



I, and my Office, cannot, will not win these battles alone. In our quest to protect and expand civic space and to protect human rights defenders, we will work with you all hand in hand, more than ever as our partners, allies and insightful critics.

I greatly look forward to working with you to advance human rights.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michelle Bachelet".

Michelle Bachelet
High Commissioner for Human Rights