

Private and Confidential

Proposed Special Envoy on Civic Space

Why focus on civic space¹?

Ireland's human rights priorities include the protection and promotion of civil society space and human rights defenders. Ireland has developed a strong profile internationally in this area and therefore can speak with credibility on these issues.

Broadening the scope to civic space (rather than civil society space) would ensure the role could focus on the human rights which create an enabling environment for civil society including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Equally, the rubric of civic space would present an opportunity for the mandate to engage on issues of gender equality and LGBTBI rights in a constructive, inclusive way as foreseen in "The Global Island, Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World".

It is widely accepted that civic space is under significant pressure globally due to, inter alia, an increase in repressive laws and policies, security and public health measures being used as a pretext to restrict freedoms and justify attacks and harassment against human rights defenders, journalists and civil society actors.

Areas of thematic focus

Civil society space

Human Rights Defenders

Right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly

Gender equality

Rights of LGBTQ+?? persons

Potential activities

1. Represent Ireland at relevant high level events in multilateral fora including:

- Human Rights Council
- UN General Assembly 3rd Committee

¹ Civic space is the bedrock of open, democratic societies. It is the set of conditions which enable individuals and civil society organisations to organise, participate and communicate without hindrance or discrimination and therefore play a role in the political, economic and social life of society. This can only happen when a state upholds its duty to protect its citizens and respects and facilitates their human rights to associate, assemble peacefully and freely express views and opinions.

Commented [HEH1]: Any other suggestions?

Commented [KSH2R1]: I think this is a good suggestion - it's a neat way of capturing a basket of rights

Commented [CGHLE3]: Ditto – it would be useful to clarify where the definition in the footnote comes from

Commented [CGHLE4]: Do we need an explanation as to the distinction between civil society vs civic space?

Commented [CGHLE5]: Sonja's guidance was to start with why (why a SE / why civic space?) and then define the parameters. As such the GI references to HRD's; civil society; LGBTBI are probably a useful benchmark with the second part of the answer in the next paragraph relating to the deteriorating environment for CS space

Commented [HEH6]: Not sure if we want to include?

Commented [KSH7R6]: I would definitely include gender equality given the neverending efforts to squeeze women (& others) out of civic space, the roll back on e.g. the Istanbul Convention and the increasingly violent gendered nature of attacks on women in the public sphere on social media.

Commented [CGHLE8]: I would leave it in for further discussion – within EU and elsewhere there is an overlap in those attacking GE and LGBTQ+ : on the other hand GE is so broad that we would want to set further parameters in terms of expression; association; assembly; maybe SRHR

Commented [HEH9]: I have kept this intentionally vague e.g. did not reference LGBTBI national strategy, work in Coalitions etc. See what you think.

Commented [KSH10R9]: Makes sense - if we are asked for an accompanying analysis of policy documents, we can do so at that stage

- Commission on the Status of Women
 - OSCE Human Dimension
 - Council of Europe
2. Speak at human rights events organised by Ireland's Embassies (this could be combined with engagement at country level on thematic issues).
 3. Provide leadership to Ireland's work on civil society space and human rights defenders.
 4. Collaborate with UN/regional/bilateral partners such as:
 - The EU's Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore and FRA Director Michael O'Flaherty
 - Existing networks of bilateral Human Rights Envoys and Ambassadors
 - The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office
 - Relevant UN Special Procedure mandate holders e.g. on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, Human Rights Defenders, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Counter Terrorism (given chilling effect of CT measures on civic space?)
 5. Engage with civil society and NHRIs at home and abroad.

5. Do we need either an introduction or a final paragraph clarifying that this is an initial draft for discussion and further drafts will take account of budget; other resources; reporting arrangements and coordination with Ministers (and other Departments) and geographic desks etc.

Commented [HEH11]: I have used this as a way to incorporate the request of "country visits" as I don't think this would be a helpful focus.

Commented [KSH12R11]: Good idea

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