



The Assembly and Association Briefing

Newsletter of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Vol. 2, No. 8 (Issue 17) - Published December 4, 2015

p3

Kiai files intervention before European Court in Azerbaijan protest cases

p6

Chile urged to scrap proposed 'identity check' bill

p7

Special Rapporteur says civil society needs 'new tactics' to reverse shrinking space

COPA NÃO!
EU QUERO
EDUCAÇÃO!

Scene from a 2013 protest in São Paulo, Brazil. The Special Rapporteur warned in November that proposed anti-terrorism legislation may unduly restrict fundamental rights in the country. For the story, see page 2 (photo: [Gianluca Ramalho Misiti](#)/Flickr)

UN experts warn that Brazil anti-terrorism law may threaten fundamental freedoms

GENEVA — Proposed anti-terrorism legislation currently being considered by Brazil's Congress is too broadly drafted and may unduly restrict fundamental freedoms, Maina Kiai and other UN experts [warned](#) on Nov. 4, 2015.

"We fear that the definition of the crime established by the draft law may result in ambiguities and confusion as to what the State considers a terrorist offence, potentially undermining the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms," the independent experts said.

Law N° 101/2015 seeks to define crimes of terrorism in Brazil and provides for other investigative and procedural provisions. On Oct. 28, 2015, the Brazilian Senate passed the legislation by 34 votes to 18. The amended text now returns to the lower house.

"We regret that the current draft excluded a previous article establishing an important safeguard that would protect participation in political demonstrations and social movements from falling under the legislation's scope," the experts said.

The Special Rapporteurs shared their concerns with the Brazilian authorities, who in turn provided further clarifications on the draft law.

"States have a duty to protect civil society and the rights that are critical to its existence and development, such as the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and

to freedom of expression," they added.

"Unclear or overly broad definitions of terrorism carry the potential for deliberate misuse of the term," warned the experts. For that reason, "legislation aimed at countering terrorism must be sufficiently precise to comply with the principle of legality, so as to prevent it from being used to target civil society, silence human rights defenders, bloggers and journalists, and criminalise peaceful activities in defence of minority, religious, labour and political rights," they noted.

The experts stressed that where security-focused legislation can have an impact on fundamental freedoms, States should always ensure that the principles of necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination are fully respected.

"Counter-terrorism measures that have a negative impact on the ability of NGOs to operate effectively and independently are bound to be ultimately counterproductive in reducing the threat posed by terrorism," the experts noted.

The experts concluded that "public consultation in the lawmaking process is indeed an indispensable element in developing policies and in the preparation of legislation."

The full version of this story is available via our website in [English](#) and [Portuguese](#).



Protesters at an anti-corruption march in São Paulo, Brazil, on March 15, 2015 (photo: [Radio Interativa/Flickr](#))

"Unclear or overly broad definitions of terrorism carry the potential for deliberate misuse. Legislation aimed at countering terrorism must be sufficiently precise to comply with the principle of legality, so as to prevent it from being used to target civil society, silence human rights defenders, bloggers and journalists, and criminalise peaceful activities in defence of minority, religious, labour and political rights."

Nov. 4 joint statement by UN experts cautioning Brazil on proposed anti-terrorism legislation

Kiai urges European Court to establish “clear and strong standards” on assembly rights

NAIROBI/GHENT/STRASBOURG — Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai joined with [Ghent University's Human Rights Centre](#) to file a third party intervention on Nov. 12 in four cases before the European Court of Human Rights.

The cases, *Mahammad Majidli v. Azerbaijan* (no. 3) and three other applications, concern the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Azerbaijan. At issue is the Court's interpretation of Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which enshrines the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

The submission from the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, and the Human Rights Centre, calls upon the Court to clarify its jurisprudence on the right to freedom of assembly and to establish “clear and strong protective standards.”

“States are increasingly limiting the right to freedom of assembly using justifications such as ‘unauthorized assemblies’ or ‘unlawful assemblies’ with consequent measures such as administrative and criminal sanctions,” the authors write. “The cases before the Court provide an excellent opportunity for the Court to clarify the use of these notions and measures in light of the legal protection guaranteed by Article 11 of the Convention.”

The brief focuses on the need to clarify legal notions that are abused by states to “criminalise” participation in peaceful assemblies. It also looks at the role of plain clothed police officers in the management of assemblies and shares general observations on assembly rights in Azerbaijan, based on the Special Rapporteur's work and recent developments in the country.

A core legal argument of the intervention is centered on “authorization regimes” for assemblies, in which gatherings can be deemed illegal if they are not pre-approved by authorities. Such regimes are often used to criminalise participation in assemblies that are disfavored by authorities. The brief urges the Court to clearly recognize that assembly rights should not be subject to authorization by national authorities.

“Requiring authorization turns the right into a privilege to be dispensed by authorities,” the authors write. “Authorization regimes shift the burden to organizers or participants to challenge a refusal, instead of placing the burden on authorities to justify the restrictions they wish to impose.”

Similarly, the brief notes, limitations or changes to the location of assemblies “should not represent a hidden obstacle to the freedom of peaceful assembly as it is protected by the Convention.”

The third party intervention further encourages the Court to underscore that crimes which essentially criminalise participation in an assembly have no place in states which are party to the European Convention of Human Rights.

On Azerbaijan the parties noted that “the right to freedom of assembly is in a crisis . . . Of particular concern are amendments to the laws on freedom of peaceful assembly and administrative offences.”

“In practice, the Government of Azerbaijan has moved beyond merely discouraging or chilling the right to freedom of peaceful assembly: It has effectively annihilated it,” they added.

The brief is the third official court filing in the UN expert's project to advance assembly and association rights through the use of litigation.

The [full story](#) is available via our website; or [click here](#) to read the amicus brief. For more on the project, please see the Special Rapporteur's [litigation hub page](#).

Read

the brief to the European Court

Litigation

find out more about our project

Ghent U

learn more about our partner in the case

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France (photo: [James Russell](#)/Flickr)

Burundi: Experts urge Security Council to follow resolution with 'concrete' steps

GENEVA — Welcoming the adoption by the Security Council of a new resolution strongly condemning the ongoing killings and human rights violations in Burundi, a group of UN independent experts [expressed outrage](#) at the situation on Nov. 13 and warned that the country is headed “towards an unacceptable path of atrocities.”

The experts welcomed the “clear message and alert” sent by the Council’s unanimously adopted [resolution](#), which condemned the increased cases of human rights violations and abuses in Burundi, the seven UN Special Rapporteurs emphasized that actions must now be undertaken to follow up the text and provide “concrete responses fitting the magnitude of the risks at stake, for Burundi and the region.”

The experts went on to recount a raft of ills, saying the situation in Burundi continues to deteriorate with daily reports of serious human rights violations, including extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, attacks on independent media and harassment and killing of human rights defenders, unjustified limitations on freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression, adding to more than 200,000 persons displaced by violence.

“This is a crisis that is eminently political in nature and entails an increased risk of escalation of violence and further fracturing of the Burundian society,” the experts warned and urged the Security Council to adopt immediate measures if the security situation deteriorates further, and prevent additional loss of life.



They also urged the Burundian authorities to take immediate steps “to put an end to the rampant human rights violations and ensure there is no impunity for the perpetrators.”

The experts recalled that in the last two months, reports received suggested that people arrested by the security forces have been found dead, many with signs of torture, in several locations of the capital, Bujumbura, stressing that nothing under international law can justify these “unacceptable” violations.

In early November, Welli Nzitonda, the son of a prominent human rights defender was found dead after being arrested by the police earlier in the day.

“The brutal killing of Mr. Nzitonda shows that, in spite of constant demands, nothing has been done to protect human rights defenders in Burundi,” said the Special Rapporteurs. “If a well-known and reputed [rights] defender is attacked in such a way, we fear the worst for those defenders who are more isolated and less visible,” they stressed.

The Special Rapporteurs warned that the situation in Burundi dangerously worsened in the recent weeks and observed that security forces continue to disrespect the human rights of Burundians, amid a general climate of impunity.

For more on the story, [please see our website](#).



A photo exhibit of Bangladeshi garment workers organized by the Australia Bangladesh Solidarity Network. Legislation under consideration in Bangladesh could limit local civil society's access to foreign resources and cooperation (photo: [UTS Library/Flickr](#))

Bangladesh NGOs: Kiai warns against proposed funding bill

GENEVA — The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, on Nov. 6 [urged the Bangladeshi Parliament](#) not to adopt a bill which could severely restrict civil society organizations’ access to funding and hinder their activities.

The draft Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act was to be debated during the Parliament session starting Nov. 8, 2015.

“This Bill is deeply worrying. Civil society is a crucial component for the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law, and for contributing to the provision of humanitarian assistance,” Kiai said.

“Unduly restricting civil society organizations’ access to resources therefore not only has a detrimental impact on freedom of association, but also deeply undermines the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that these organizations seek to promote and protect,” he stressed.

The Special Rapporteur noted that the proposed law would, among other problematic issues, make it compulsory for NGOs seeking to receive or use foreign funds to register with the Government-controlled Non-Governmental Organizations Affairs Bureau, and obtain its approval for each project undertaken with these resources. The Bureau’s commissioners would

also review on a monthly basis the progress made by NGOs in the implementation of their projects.

The Bureau would also have the authority to approve each appointment of foreign specialists under foreign-funded projects, as well as all travel abroad paid for by foreign funding.

Failure to comply with these provisions could lead to the cancellation or suspension of an NGO’s registration, the interruption of the project, and a fine up to three times the amount of the foreign funding received.

“Such governmental intrusion is totally unacceptable. The ability to seek, secure and use resources is essential to the very existence and effective operations of any civil society organization,” said Kiai. “Registered and unregistered NGOs should be able to operate and function freely without prior authorization or other undue impediments.”

“I urge the Parliament not to adopt the Bill as its purpose clearly violates the right to freedom of association, and has a ricochet effect on the realization of other human rights, as well as on the delivery of aid in a country prone to natural disasters. I stand ready to provide assistance to the Government to help ensure that the Bill complies with international human rights law,” the Special Rapporteur added.

Freedom of association & assembly: By the numbers

OUT & PROUD DIAMOND GROUP
#LGBTILIVESMATTER

CHANGING
PERCEPTION
TOWARDS
LGBTI
PEOPLE

Number of "red notices" - the closest instrument to an international arrest warrant in use today - [issued by Interpol](#) in 2014

10,718

[Percentage increase](#), from 2010 to 2014, in the number of people challenging red notices, claiming they are facing spurious or politically-motivated charges (some have been granted [political asylum](#))

84%

Number of Interpol's 190 [member states](#) classified by Freedom House as "not free" or "partially free"

104

Estimated number of people [killed in Burundi](#) since President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for a third term in April, according to civil society groups

240

Estimated number of people who have [fled the country](#) over the same period

200,000

Current number of states in the Commonwealth of Nations (most of which were territories of the former British Empire)

53

Number of them which [criminalise](#) LGBT relations or identities (see protest photo at left)

40

Number of consecutive days that demonstrators have [protested](#) outside of a US military base in Okinawa, as of Nov. 18, 2015

500

Number of civil society organizations that [signed an appeal](#) urging Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to veto changes to the NGO law; he [signed the changes](#) into law on Dec. 2

60

Total amount of overseas development aid (in billions of US dollars) distributed by Sweden in 2014, according to [openaid.se](#). In November, the government was considering [drastic cuts](#) in order to fund refugee costs

5.6

Percentage of Sweden's aid that went directly to NGOs and civil society that year, according to the same source

17.3%

Percentage of humanitarian aid [worldwide](#) that goes directly to NGOs and civil society

1.6%

Protesters gather outside the Commonwealth of Nations Secretariat Headquarters in London on Nov. 25, 2015. They were demanding greater equality for LGBTI people in Commonwealth countries, ahead of the group's annual summit in Malta (photo: [Alisdare Hickson/Flickr](#))

Special Rapporteur urges Chile to scrap proposed 'identity check' bill

GENEVA — Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai [has published](#) a legal analysis warning that pending changes to Chile's criminal procedure code — which liberalize police powers to stop, search and identify people — may violate international law.

Chile's draft bill number 9985-07, which is currently being considered by lawmakers, proposes two significant changes to the country's Procedural Penal Code (Código Procesal Penal).

The bill would introduce a new provision in the law, article 12, giving police the general power to stop and check the identity of any person, without any indication or suspicion of a crime. A person failing or refusing to produce proof of identity could then be brought to the nearest police station, where they would face up to four hours of detention while additional identification procedures take place.

The bill would also amend article 85 of the law to allow broader use of identity checks and searches in the context of a crime or suspected crime.

"These provisions raise two significant questions under international law," Kiai writes in the analysis. "First, since identity controls affect the human rights of the people concerned, when may they be used and how will authorities guard against abuses? Second, do the detention periods of eight (in the context of a crime) or four hours (without any suspicion of a crime), conform to international law, standards and principles?"

During the Special Rapporteur's [country visit](#) to Chile in September 2015, he received information that police allegedly used pre-emptive detention and identity controls against demonstrators traveling to attend assemblies, under existing provisions in article 85. This already chilled — and possibly violated — the exercise of the right to freedom peaceful assembly, among other rights, he said.

"The new provision under article 12 exacerbates this risk, as no justification whatsoever is needed to halt people and ask for their identity," Kiai writes in the analysis. "This increases the chilling effect identity controls may have on the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, in particular for groups most at risk such as students, indigenous peoples, trade unionists and migrants."

He notes that a person's failure to prove their identity immediately could give rise to a detention of four hours, which could overlap with the duration of the assembly.

He further finds "very high risks of disproportionate application of the law."

Kiai also expressed apprehension over amendments to article 85, which concern police stop and search powers. Although these powers must take place in the context of a crime, the provision does not require a clear suspicion of the offence. Rather, it allows police to stop and search individuals when they have "any indication" of a potential crime.

For the full story and the legal analysis in both English and Spanish, [please see our website](#).

English
read the
UNSR's analysis

Español
leer el análisis

Chile

Click for more on the
Special Rapporteur's
official visit

"The new provision under article 12 exacerbates [the risk of chilling assembly rights], as no justification whatsoever is needed to halt people and ask for their identity."

Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai in his analysis of Chile's proposed amendments to the criminal procedure code



High time to protect sexual and reproductive rights defenders in the Americas

GENEVA / WASHINGTON DC — Ahead of the International Women Human Rights Defenders Day on Nov. 29, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, [called for strengthened protection](#) of women defenders promoting sexual and reproductive rights in the Americas. His call was endorsed by Maina Kiai.

"It is not an easy job, and sometimes can be plain dangerous.

Sexual and reproductive rights defenders seek to ensure that women and men know and exercise their human rights to access services, information and education in the field of sexual and reproductive health. They also unmask multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination and injustice based on gender identity and sexual orientation, and in many occasions they help victims of sexual violence.

Women rights activists defending sexual and reproductive rights across the Americas face increased risks and multiple threats, from smear campaigns and stigmatization to physical

and sexual attacks.

And these defenders become particularly vulnerable in countries where access to services related to sexual and reproductive health, such as safe abortion or emergency contraception, is extremely restricted or criminalised.

Not only do these women rights defenders face the same risks as many other rights activists, but they are further exposed to retaliation and violence because they challenge power structures based on patriarchy and deeply-held gender stereotypes about the role of women in society.

They are also targeted due to their own real or perceived sexual orientation and gender or that of individuals who they represent."

For the full statement, and the list of UN experts who endorsed it, [please see our website](#).



Participants watch as UNSR Maina Kiai and Maria Leissner of the Community of Democracies open their Asia regional dialogue on civic space in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on Nov. 5

Civil society needs 'new tactics' to reverse shrinking space, Special Rapporteur tells Asia-Pacific activists in Seoul

SEOUL, REPUBLIC OF KOREA — Civil society must pursue “new tactics and strategies” if it hopes to reverse the trend of shrinking civic space, Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai told a [gathering of activists](#) in Seoul on Nov. 5.

“Governments have been clever” at conjuring new ways to restrict the operations of critical organizations, especially those working on human rights, he said. “The old methods aren’t working. Maybe it’s time for us to think of new ways to push this agenda. We need to think outside the box.”

The UN expert’s remarks came during a consultation with civil society from the Asia-Pacific region, which was convened as part of a joint project on civic space between Kiai’s mandate and the [Community of Democracies](#). The project focuses particularly on civil society’s right to access resources, and aims to expand the body of knowledge on this subject while hearing about challenges that activists face.

Nearly 20 civil society leaders from 14 countries across the region attended in the consultation. Ambassador Maria Leissner, Secretary General of the Community of Democracies, opened the meeting. A follow-up meeting on civic space in the Asia region will be held with governmental representatives in January 2016.

Participants said that restrictions on civic space in Asia have accelerated in recent years, with governments taking escalating measures to silencing dissenting voices. In countries such as India, restrictions have targeted civil society’s ability to access resources, particularly foreign funding. In others, such as Malaysia, Thailand and China, regulations have centered on limiting activities and operations. In virtually every country, however, organizations working

on human rights, democracy and accountability tend to face tighter controls.

“There’s a common trend: States are scared of civil society,” Kiai said. “It is clear that if you’re doing human rights work, you are going to get in trouble. What we’re seeing is the state creating new ways for us to get in trouble.”

Participants also discussed how donor policies sometimes unwittingly contribute to the restriction of civic space.

In some countries, for example, donors urged “engagement” with the government, even for organizations performing watchdog functions. This is not always feasible or productive in some contexts, participants said. Others complained that donors required aid recipients be registered legal entities — which is not always an option in more repressive countries.

Still more criticized complex reporting requirements and an unproductive focus on short-term results, which disfavor small organizations and those working on human rights. The net effect of these policies is that more “professionalized” organizations are favored, at the expense of grassroots groups.

While in Seoul, the Special Rapporteur also participated in the [World Movement for Democracy’s Eighth Assembly](#) on Nov. 1-4. At the Assembly, Kiai and his team convened a consultation on developing new communications tools for the mandate. Photos of both consultations are available [via our Flickr page](#).

For more on the Special Rapporteur’s joint project with the Community of Democracies, please see our civic space hub page at <http://freassembly.net/civic-space>

Background reports compare laws on businesses and CSOs in 34 states

The Special Rapporteur has released [34 country background reports](#) that he consulted in drafting his recent report comparing the enabling environments for businesses and civil society around the world.

The Special Rapporteur’s report, [which is available here](#), was presented to the United Nations General Assembly in October 2015. It found that States and others often impose more burdensome regulation upon civil society, both in law and in practice, with businesses receiving more favorable treatment.

The net result is that for businesses the enabling environment — defined broadly as action or inaction by States and other actors to promote a particular non-State sector — is typically much better than it is for associations.

The country background reports were prepared by pro bono counsel for the American Bar Association’s Center for Human Rights, which coordinated the research on

behalf of the Special Rapporteur. They provide an overview of the legal environment for both businesses and non-profit associations in 34 countries, focusing on: (1) registration procedures, (2) tax laws, (3) financial transaction laws, (4) auditing and reporting requirements, (5) and penalties for non-compliance with the law.

Limited time and resources dictated that research could not be commissioned on all 193 UN Member States. The 34 countries below were selected on the basis of geographical distribution, the type of legal system in place, prior reports of favorable or unfavorable enabling environments; and the availability of researchers with expertise on the jurisdiction.

In drafting his final report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur also relied upon information available within the United Nations system, submissions from Member States, civil society and others, and further research conducted by his team.

Read

the country reports
on our website

Report

Read the UNSR’s
report to the
General Assembly



Special Rapporteur news in brief: November - December 2015

Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai holds a Bersih4 T-shirt that he received as a gift in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on Nov. 5, 2015. Bersih, which means "clean" in Malay, is a coalition of Malaysian NGOs which seeks to reform the country's electoral system

Egypt: UN experts welcome release of journalist Hossam Bahgat

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, welcomed the release of Egyptian journalist Hossam Bahgat on Nov. 11, but reiterated grave concern at the situation of fear and intimidation of journalists and human rights defenders face in the country. Their call was endorsed by Maina Kiai.

Bahgat was detained by military authorities on Nov. 8 solely based on his writing and work as journalist; he was released a few days later. The full statement is [available here](#).

Special Rapporteur visits Cambodia on academic visit

The Special Rapporteur travelled to Cambodia on an [academic visit](#) Nov. 7-9, 2015, his second such visit to the country since 2014. The visit came in part to assess the impact of the recently-enacted [Law on Associations and Nongovernmental Organizations \(LANGO\)](#) which came into effect in Aug. 2015; it imposes mandatory registration on civil society organizations and gives the government broad power to regulate them.

Civil society told Kiai that although there had been no direct attempts from the government in Phnom Penh to abuse the law so far, there have been some troubling signs.

"I received reports that associations in the provinces have faced restrictions from local authorities that require them to register under LANGO's provisions in order to convene assemblies," he said. "The law is already restrictive enough; the uncertainty that we're seeing now around its implementation is not helping. Instead it's contributing to what is already a very disempowering environment."

Kiai also delivered a public lecture, which is [available here in MP3 audio format](#).

How's business in your country? Look to civil society as a barometer

The Special Rapporteur has authored a commentary comparing the environments for business and civil society, which was published in the International Service For Human Rights' annual Business and Human Rights Monitor.

Kiai argues - as he did in his [2015 report](#) to the General Assembly - that civil society is generally treated much worse than businesses. He notes, however, that this is ultimately bad for businesses as well.

"The presence of a robust and vocal civil society sector, without exception, guarantees that a State also possesses a good business environment," he writes. "In other words, there is a significant convergence of interests: when civil society does well, business does well too.

The piece is available via ISHR's website in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

Cutting aid in order to support refugees will allow extremism to thrive

The Special Rapporteur joined four other renowned human rights expert to co-author a [Nov. 23 piece in the Guardian](#) urging the governments of Sweden and Norway to avoid cuts to their overseas development aid budgets. Both countries are considering reducing aid in order to cover the costs of welcoming an unprecedented flow of refugees that started in 2015. The authors argued that aid - particularly when it goes to fund local civil society - is actually critical in helping to avoid future refugee crises.

"People are less likely to leave places that enjoy long-term peace, accountability and stability, since these factors accelerate development," they wrote.

Upcoming & other news

- **ECLAC video address:** The Special Rapporteur delivered a [video message](#) commending and encouraging the work of participants of the "Second Meeting of the Negotiating Committee of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean." The meeting was held in Panama from Oct. 27-29, and was aimed at continuing negotiations to achieve a regional instrument on rights of access to information, participation, and justice in environmental matters. A written statement from a group of UN experts is also [available here](#).

- **Official visit to the Republic of Korea:** The Special Rapporteur's official visit to the [Republic of Korea](#) has been confirmed for Jan. 20-29, 2016.



World briefing: Freedom of assembly and association in the news

Republic of Korea

Police fired tear gas and water cannons at protesters who marched through Seoul on Nov. 14 in the [largest protest](#) in South Korea's capital in more than seven years. An estimated 70,000 people demonstrated and over 50 were detained. The marches, organized by labor, civic and farmers' groups, brought together protesters with grievances against the government of conservative President Park Geun-hye. Less than two weeks later, Park called for a [ban on masks](#) at demonstrations, drawing parallels between masked protesters and Islamic State terrorists. Authorities then declared an upcoming "popular indignation rally" on Dec. 5 to be illegal, and said they would [arrest all participants](#).

France

France declared a state of emergency in the aftermath of a massive terrorist attack in Paris on Nov. 13. The measures meant that protests would be [banned](#) during the COP21 international climate talks from Nov. 30 to Dec. 11, and at least 24 activists were put under [house arrest](#) ahead of the conference. But activists [found](#) other [ways](#) to make their voices heard (and to put protesters' [shoes on the ground](#)).

Maldives

Maldives also declared a [state of emergency](#) on Nov. 4, suspending all basic rights and gave security forces sweeping powers to arrest suspects. The order came just before a major anti-government rally was planned by the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party. The party's leader Mohamed Nasheed, remains in jail following his conviction earlier this year under anti-terror laws.

Uganda

On Nov. 27, Ugandan lawmakers [passed a new NGO bill](#) that gives the government sweeping powers to regulate civil society. LGBTI groups were particularly worried that the bill might be used to target them, given Uganda's history of passing draconian anti-homosexuality legislation. The Special Rapporteur had [previously criticized](#) the government of Uganda for failing to properly consult with civil society on the bill.

Burundi

Burundi's Minister for Internal Affairs on Nov. 23 suspended the activities of [10 NGOs](#), including six human rights organizations. The move came on the heels of the government ordering the country's banks to freeze the organizations' accounts.

Oman

Security forces [arrested and detained](#) Said Jadad, a human rights defender who met with the Special Rapporteur during his 2014 official visit to the country; the arrest came after an appeal court upheld his April 2015 conviction and one-year prison sentence for "the use of an information network in the dissemination of material that would prejudice public order"

Elsewhere

Kazakhstan's president [signed into law](#) controversial changes to the country's NGO law, which among other things establish a single state operator through which all funding for NGOs must be channeled • Thousands of people poured into Afghanistan's capital of Kabul on Nov. 11 to protest over the [brutal killings](#) of seven members of the country's Hazara minority • Imprisoned Azeri human rights defender Arif Yunus, who was the subject of a [public plea](#) from Maina Kiai in August, was [released](#) from jail due to his deteriorating health • The UK's Metropolitan Police issued made an "[unreserved apology](#)" to seven women deceived into relationships with undercover officers, one of whom had a child with an officer; they also agreed to pay compensation • In the latest chapter of a [long-running saga](#), Greenpeace India saw its registration cancelled by the government, only to have it [reinstated](#) by a court later in November — its sixth legal victory over the government • Russia's Human Rights Commissioner said that Russia has too few [human rights NGOs](#), and that they should be "protected, preserved and developed" • Also in Russia, the Prosecutor General's Office classified Open Society Foundations as an "[undesirable](#)" organization, banning it from operating in the country • Myanmar and Burkina Faso both held historic elections: the former on Nov. 8 (which resulted in a [landslide victory](#) for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party) and the latter on Nov. 29 (resulting in the election of [Roch Marc Kabore](#))

Demonstrators at the COP21 climate change conference in Paris, France, leave their shoes on Place de la République in protest. Public assemblies are currently banned in France, after the government declared a state of emergency in the wake of terrorist attacks on Nov. 13 (photo: [Duc/Flickr](#))