



Press Release

Civil society must lead the way in finding alternative solutions to global problems: Opening of CIVICUS World Assembly

Montreal, Canada. 10 September 2011. Stressing that world-wide civil society was “on the cusp of history” in its impact on democracy, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Secretary General Ingrid Srinath, said today that it was up to every single civil society representative to ensure that it would be a positive change and not a slide into irrelevance.

Speaking at the opening of the CIVICUS World Assembly in Montreal, Canada, a three-day global civil society event that discusses the future of the civil society sector, Ms. Srinath joined Institut du Nouveau Monde (INM) General Director Michel Venne and other civil society leaders in highlighting the need for a vibrant civil society sector to tackle global challenges.

“Worldwide outrage at economic injustice combined with loss of faith in institutions, government, business and media, is fuelling mass uprisings from Chile to China,” she said. “Together with new ways of communicating, connecting and mobilising, these present an unprecedented opportunity for civil society, as the most trusted sector, to build critical mass and proffer alternative models.”

The CIVICUS World Assembly is organised in partnership with INM, and is bringing together close to 800 representatives from civil society, donors, governments and business from all corners of the globe.

“To change the world, we need scientific knowledge, we need heart, ideas and a soul,” said Michel Venne, General Director at INM during the opening. “This is exactly what civil society offers through expressing the people’s aspirations.”

However, Srinath said civil society also faced “grave internal and external threats”, identified in CIVICUS’ recent global state of civil society report, Bridging the gaps: Citizens, organisations and dissociation.

“There is disconnect between organised and informal civil society, and between espoused and practiced values,” she said, then added, that the report “also validated the efficacy of networks and coalitions and the threats to both space and resources.”

Earlier this month Srinath told delegates at a state of civil society event in Johannesburg that “we need to recognise that there are multiple platforms for participation and multiple

routes into activism. CSOs need to be both challenged and supported to improve their outreach, refresh their participation bases and help join together a disconnected civil society. If these disconnects are not addressed traditional CSOs risk sliding into irrelevance and possible extinction."

The CIVICUS World Assembly can be watched live at <http://civicusassembly.org/CIVICUSlive.php>. It continues until Monday 12 September.

Website: www.civicusassembly.org

Blog: <http://citizenshift.org/blogs/civicus/>

Live stream: <http://civicusassembly.org/CivicusLive.php>

Twitter: [@CIVICUSalliance](https://twitter.com/CIVICUSalliance) #civWA

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About CIVICUS

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation has worked for nearly two decades to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens' freedom of association are threatened. CIVICUS has a vision of a global community of active, engaged citizens committed to the creation of a more just and equitable world. This is based on the belief that the health of societies exists in direct proportion to the degree of balance between the state, the private sector and civil society.

About Institut du Nouveau Monde

The Institut du Nouveau Monde (INM) is a non-partisan organisation dedicated to stimulating public participation and fresh ideas in Quebec. It seeks to promote social justice and inclusion, in the spirit of respecting democratic values, openness and innovation. Through its activities, the INM proposes a structured and deliberative approach based on the guiding principles of "inform", "debate" and "propose". The INM strives to encourage public participation and contributes to developing citizen skills, strengthening social ties and supporting democratic institutions.

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