



Positioning Paper

Defending Civic Space: Strengthening Protection for Civil Society Organizations and Women's Rights Organizations

2026



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Defending Civic Space: Strengthening Protection for Civil Society Organizations and Women's Rights Organizations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democratic backsliding in Indonesia is becoming increasingly evident. In this situation, civil society organizations—particularly women’s rights organizations—occupy a vulnerable position. The criminalization of civil society through policies containing vague or overly broad provisions has turned the law into an instrument to silence activists and critical organizations (*autocratic legalism*), including women’s groups. In digital spaces, cyberattacks, hacking, and doxing increasingly target women activists and feminist journalists. These situations demonstrate how online violence intersects with entrenched social misogyny.

At the same time, the state and conservative groups have produced public narratives portraying activism as a threat to development, morality, and national security. Alongside the rise of militarism—through the revision of the Indonesian National Armed Forces Law and the increasing involvement of security forces in civilian affairs—citizen participation is increasingly monitored and controlled in the name of political stability.

This positioning paper refers to the findings of an assessment study conducted by INFID (International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development) together with Kalyanamitra and Asosiasi LBH APIK Indonesia in February 2026. The study employed qualitative methods, including a literature review, workshops in three regions

of Indonesia (Bandung, Makassar, and Jakarta) attended by representatives of civil society organizations and women’s rights organizations, and in-depth interviews with key actors. The positioning paper was further refined through a peer-review process involving experts and representatives of student press organizations focused on democracy, environmental, and gender issues.

The study examining patterns of attacks, strategies, and good practices has certain limitations. In terms of geographical coverage, workshops conducted in Bandung, Makassar, and Jakarta do not fully capture the diverse social and political contexts faced by civil society organizations and women’s rights organizations across Indonesia.

The study produced two key findings regarding patterns of attacks, strategies for responding to these attacks, and good practices observed in the field. **First**, the patterns of attacks faced by civil society organizations, including women’s rights organizations, include: the rise of *autocratic legalism*, the securitization of civic space, stigmatization and delegitimization of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), and economic violence against women used as a tool of control. These attacks are carried out by both state and non-state actors.

Second, strategies and good practices identified include: (a) strengthening advocacy networks and solidarity; (b) strengthening

the capacity of civil society organizations and women's rights organizations; (c) strengthening organizational governance; (d) building cross-actor support; (e) strengthening support and assistance services; (f) strengthening economic resilience; and (g) mainstreaming inclusive journalism.

This positioning paper proposes three recommendations. **First**, strengthening organizational capacity and consolidating collaboration among organizations. This includes: (a) strengthening legal security and advocacy pillars; (b) strengthening physical and digital security; (c) strengthening psychosocial security; (d) building an ecosystem that reinforces social movements through positive narratives to counter stigma, build solidarity, and highlight the contributions of the women's movement.

Second, strengthening cross-actor engagement, including: media collaboration with national organizations and regional partners, networking with key actors such as

religious leaders to enhance acceptance of diversity and social support, cooperation with law enforcement agencies, ensuring civil society meaningful participation—including women's rights organizations—in the implementation of the 2023 Memorandum of Understanding between Witness and Victim Protection Agency (LPSK), Komnas HAM, and Komnas Perempuan, and ensuring the implementation of judicial policies concerning women, children, and persons with disabilities.

Third, ensuring a review of policies containing ambiguous provisions that could be misused to restrict civic space. For example, several articles in the Criminal Code related to incitement and insults against the head of state are open to multiple interpretations and threaten freedom of expression. Similarly, provisions in the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law) concerning defamation, hate speech, and information dissemination are frequently used to suppress criticism of public officials and state institutions.



Caption: Indonesian Women's Alliance Protest, September 2025. (Photo: INFID/Fikriyah Nurshafa)

INTRODUCTION

Global trends show a growing tendency toward democratic decline in many countries. According to the *Global State of Democracy 2025* report, approximately 94 countries—or 54 percent of all countries—have experienced a decline in at least one indicator of democratic performance. In contrast, only around 32 percent of countries have recorded improvements. The four pillars of democracy—Representation, Rights, Rule of Law, and Participation—are all under pressure. The report also highlights a decline in press freedom, including restrictions on freedom of expression and limitations on public discourse.

Democratic decline has also been highlighted in the *Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)* report released in 2024. Several countries previously categorized as “full democracies” are now showing signs of regression, while many others remain classified as “flawed democracies” or even “authoritarian regimes.” According to discussions within the International Civil Society Week (ICSW) forum, only around 4 percent of the world’s population enjoys the freedom to organize, mobilize, and express opinions¹.

This democratic decline is also reflected in the findings of the *Country Focus Report (CFR) Indonesia 2025* prepared by INFID. Out of six principles of an enabling environment²

Indonesia is categorized as “Obstructed.” This obstructed status is reflected in several aspects: (a) Threatened fundamental freedoms; (b) Restrictive legal frameworks; (c) Unsafe digital spaces; (d) The weakening of a healthy opposition; (e) Limited resources. Civil society organizations in Indonesia—especially grassroots organizations—are financially constrained due to their ongoing dependence on foreign donors and the lack of independent local or state funding³.

Within this context, women and women’s rights organizations occupy both vulnerable and strategic positions. The Annual Report of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan, 2024) indicates an increase in attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), including legal threats, digital violence, and social stigmatization⁴. The most frequently reported attacks include intimidation when assisting survivors of sexual violence, online harassment directed at women journalists, and threats against environmental activists and Indigenous women advocates.

Civic space restrictions also affect gender-diverse communities and networks advocating for sexual rights. In recent years, growing moral pressure and religious conservatism have further narrowed advocacy spaces both online and offline. Reports by Human Rights Watch (2022) and Outright International (2023) document

¹ INFID public webinar, “Civil Society Resilience Amid the Rise of Authoritarian Regimes,” November 25, 2025.

² Six principles of an enabling environment: (1) Respecting and protecting citizens’ fundamental freedoms; (2) A supportive legal and regulatory framework; (3) Accessible and sustainable resources; (4) Openness and responsiveness of the state; (5) A supportive public culture and discourse on civil society; (6) Access to a secure digital environment.

³ Indonesia Country Focus Report – EU SEE. (September 22, 2025). <https://eusee.hivos.org/document/indonesia-country-focus-report/>

⁴ KOMNAS Perempuan “CATAHU 2024”, December 2024, page 78-79.

that gender-diverse groups have faced escalating discrimination and violence, including event bans, arrests, and online persecution. For activists advocating for sexual and reproductive rights, these threats endanger not only freedom of association and expression but also pose direct risks to their personal safety. Tactics such as doxing, outing, and sexual threats are often used to silence them.

In digital contexts, threats against women and vulnerable groups have become increasingly complex. Findings from SAFEnet (2023) indicate that more than half of cases of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) target women human rights defenders and feminist activists. These attacks often involve doxing, the unauthorized dissemination of personal data or photos, and coordinated social media harassment. A study by *The Conversation Indonesia* (2023) also found that online attacks against women activists frequently rely on moralistic or sexualized narratives to delegitimize their political messages. Digital violence has directly reduced women's participation in online public spaces while exacerbating emotional and psychological burdens for activists working on sensitive issues.

Critical groups such as journalists and media workers are also highly vulnerable amid shrinking freedom of expression. According to the *World Press Freedom Index 2025* published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Indonesia ranks 127 out of 180 countries with a score of 44.13, placing it in the "difficult" category. The decline is driven by growing media oligarchy intertwined with political interests, which strengthens control over independent and

critical media while promoting information manipulation through online trolls⁵, paid influencers, and partisan media outlets. Between January and December 2025, 96 cases of attacks against journalists, media institutions, resource persons, and student press organizations were documented in Indonesia⁶.

Beyond these factors, security-political dynamics further contribute to the shrinking civic space. The deployment of security forces to suppress dissent reflects militaristic patterns of response. In several incidents, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and police have reportedly used repressive measures against peaceful demonstrations, including those involving student groups and women's networks. In Papua and Maluku, security approaches that treat Indigenous communities as objects of surveillance directly affect women who serve as community facilitators. They often experience intersecting forms of violence: state violence, gender-based violence, and social pressure within their own communities.

Finally, the challenges faced by civil society organizations and women's rights organizations cannot be separated from the global funding crisis. This crisis is not merely financial but also a crisis of democracy. It weakens civil society organizations, reduces protection for human rights defenders, limits safe spaces for vulnerable groups, and diminishes civil society's bargaining power vis-à-vis the state⁷.

5 An online troll is someone who deliberately posts provocative, inflammatory, or irrelevant comments on social media and internet forums to elicit negative emotional reactions, disrupt discussions, or cause chaos.

6 Layong at the Jakarta Workshop, January 14, 2026.

7 INFID public webinar, "Civil Society Resilience Amid the Rise of Authoritarian Regimes," November 25, 2025.



Caption: 18 Years of Thursday Action. (Photo: INFID/Fikriyah Nurshafa)

In response to this situation, this positioning paper is jointly developed by INFID, Kalyanamitra, and Asosiasi LBH APIK Indonesia as part of efforts to protect civil society rights—including freedom of expression as a key instrument for strengthening democracy in Indonesia—while ensuring the active participation of women and vulnerable groups. The paper is based on a qualitative study conducted in February 2026 through literature review, workshops in Bandung, Makassar, and Jakarta, and in-depth interviews with key actors⁸. It was further refined through

a peer-review process involving experts and representatives from student press organizations.

The study serves as a foundation for strengthening protection mechanisms for civil society organizations, including women’s rights organizations in Indonesia. It also aims to contribute to the development of advocacy strategies and policies that are more responsive to women’s experiences and needs in defending civic space that is free, safe, and equal.

⁸ The data was collected from workshops held in three regions in Indonesia: Bandung, Makassar, and Jakarta. The workshops in Bandung and Makassar were held in November 2025, while the one in Jakarta was held in January 2026. The events were attended by representatives from various civil society organizations, journalists, and women’s rights

organizations. A total of 24 organizations attended the workshop in Bandung, 25 organizations participated in the workshop in Makassar, and 21 organizations attended the workshop in Jakarta.

PATTERNS OF SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

The findings on the shrinking of civic space presented in this section are based on reflection and experience-sharing processes conducted through a series of workshops with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Women's Rights Organizations (WROs), and human rights defender networks in three regions: Bandung, Makassar, and Jakarta. These workshops brought together various key actors, including human rights defenders, Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), journalists, legal advocates, and psychosocial support providers. Participants shared their direct experiences regarding the civic space challenge they encounter in their advocacy work and case assistance.

During these discussions, participants not only mapped various incidents but also explored the root causes behind them. They further identified patterns of violence, problematic policies, flawed law enforcement practices, and social norms that legitimize violence.

Based on this process and analysis, several findings illustrate the shrinking civic space in Indonesia, which can be grouped into four interrelated themes: (1) the rise of autocratic legalism; (2) the securitization of civic space; (3) the stigmatization and delegitimization of civil society actors; (4) economic violence as a tool of control over civilians, particularly women who voice critical perspectives.

1. The Rise of Autocratic Legalism

One of the issues frequently raised by CSOs and WROs in Bandung, Makassar, and Jakarta is the growing use of autocratic legalism. In this practice, the law is not employed as an instrument to protect and fulfill citizens' fundamental rights; instead, it serves as a tool to legitimize repression. While such practices may appear legally justified, they pose a fundamental threat to individuals and the quality of democracy itself.

Several regulations used in this practice include:

- a. Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code (KUHP): Several provisions on incitement, insults against the head of state, "living law," public morality, adultery, and cohabitation remain open to multiple interpretations and pose significant threats to freedom of expression.
- b. Law No. 20 of 2025 on the Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP): Several provisions expand the authority of law enforcement officials. For instance, Article 79(8)(a) permits restorative justice mechanisms even at the investigation stage, despite the absence of formal parties to the case and the existence of a criminal act may still be uncertain. Similarly, Article 237(5)(d) requires judges to consider the lifestyle and morality of

witnesses, which is highly vulnerable to subjective interpretation and misuse.

- c. Law No. 1 of 2024 on the Second Amendment to the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law): Provisions on defamation, hate speech, and information dissemination are frequently misused to silence criticism directed at public officials and state institutions. Rather than safeguarding digital space, these provisions generate a chilling effect and foster self-censorship among citizens.
- d. Law No. 2 of 2025 on the Fourth Amendment to the Mineral and Coal Mining Law (Minerba): This regulation prioritizes investment interests over environmental protection and the rights of Indigenous peoples. For affected communities, this has at least two major impacts: the loss of the right to a healthy environment and the heightened risk of criminalization when resisting extractive projects.
- e. Law No. 3 of 2025 on the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI): The revised law expands the scope of Military Operations Other Than War (OMSP) and increases the number of civilian positions that active-duty military officers may hold. This raises concerns about the potential return of the military's dual function, reminiscent of authoritarian eras in Indonesia's past.
- f. Law No. 16 of 2017 on Mass Organizations (Ormas Law): This regulation authorizes the state not only to administratively regulate organizations but also to

control civic space. Under the law, the government can dissolve organizations without prior judicial review.

- g. Discriminatory Regional Regulations: Various regional regulations based on morality, family resilience, social order, and "public tranquility" are frequently used to control women's bodies and restrict the activities of vulnerable groups. For example, several discriminatory regulations in West Java have been used to limit the religious practices of the Ahmadiyya community. For women in the Ahmadiyya community, such policies not only restrict religious freedom but also narrow their social space. As women often stand at the forefront of maintaining community life, restrictions or dissolutions of religious activities expose them to social pressure, stigma, and uncertainty in practicing their faith in public spaces.
- h. Bill on Countering Disinformation and Foreign Propaganda: Although still in the drafting/planning stage, this bill carries significant risks of restricting freedom of expression and opinion.

Autocratic legalism is further reinforced by legislative processes that increasingly deviate from substantive democratic principles. In recent years, two recurring patterns have emerged:

- a. Fast-tracked legislation with limited or no meaningful public participation, such as the revision of the Corruption Eradication Commission Law (KPK), the Job Creation Law, the Indonesian National Armed Forces Law (TNI), and the Criminal Code.

- b. Tokenistic participation, where the public is formally involved in legislative processes but their input does not influence the substance of resulting policies, as observed in the revision of the Criminal Procedure Code.

These patterns demonstrate that the state manages democracy through procedural mechanisms rather than substantive democratic values. Nevertheless, certain legal frameworks continue to serve as safeguards within the narrowing civic space. Several progressive laws include:

1. Law No. 7 of 1984 on the Ratification of CEDAW, which binds Indonesia to international legal and human rights standards on gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women.
2. Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights, which promotes equality without discrimination, including gender-based discrimination.
3. Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence, which recognizes domestic violence as a criminal offense rather than a private/family matter.
4. Supreme Court Regulation No. 3 of 2017 on Guidelines for Judges in Adjudicating Cases Involving Women in Conflict with the Law, which requires judges to consider women's experiences, power relations, and potential discrimination.
5. Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes, which broadens the definition of sexual violence and places victims at the center of legal protection.

2. The Securitization of Civic Space

Beyond legal instruments, the shrinking of civic space also occurs through securitization, where civil society activities are framed as threats to national security and stability. Security forces—including the police and military—are increasingly present in civic spaces that should otherwise remain participatory and democratic. This securitization manifests in several ways:

- a. **Repression of civic actions and activities.** The repressive dispersal of demonstrations, the use of violence by security forces, and the presence of authorities at community events have become increasingly common. Even dialogue-based or educational activities are sometimes attended by security personnel, creating an atmosphere of intimidation.
- b. **Security force support for extractive projects.** In several regions, security forces are involved in safeguarding extractive industry projects and National Strategic Projects (PSN). Their presence is often perceived by communities as state support for corporate interests, reinforcing unequal power relations between citizens and corporations.
- c. **Surveillance and politics of fear.** Monitoring of activists and community organizers has become another dimension of civic space securitization. Women leaders in rural areas have reportedly been identified and monitored by security forces. This creates a climate of fear, discouraging

citizens from participating in advocacy activities. For women, persons with disabilities, and SOGIESC groups (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics), securitization further exacerbates vulnerability because they face not only state repression but also intersecting forms of identity-based social discrimination.

3. Stigmatization and Delegitimization of Women Human Rights Defenders

The shrinking of civic space is also manifested through social stigmatization targeting vulnerable groups and Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). In many cases, activists and civil society actors are labeled as provocateurs, anti-development agents, or threats to national stability. These stigmatizing narratives aim not only to discredit individuals but also to undermine the legitimacy of civil society movements in the public sphere. Common patterns include:

- 1. Stigmatization of activists and human rights defenders.** Activists advocating for environmental protection, women's rights, and social justice are often accused of obstructing development.
- 2. Delegitimization of Women Human Rights Defenders.** WHRDs often face personal and gender-based attacks. They are portrayed as "overstepping boundaries" when discussing politics or

human rights, while their morality and family roles are questioned. Women's bodies and sexuality are frequently targeted to undermine their credibility in public spaces.

- 3. Digital attacks based on stigma.** Digital platforms have become arenas for reproducing stigma. Activists experience doxing, hate speech, and gender-based harassment. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence are even used to create abusive or defamatory content targeting women activists.
- 4. Stigma against gender-diverse communities.** SOGIESC groups are often targeted with a stigma rooted in religious morality and majority norms. In some cases, discriminatory regulations further restrict their participation in public life.

Challenges also emerge internally within organizations. Gender-diverse activists sometimes face rejection within their own movements. Identity delegitimization, heteronormative pressures, and the absence of safe organizational mechanisms show that civic space restrictions are also reproduced internally, weakening intersectional solidarity.

4. Economic Violence Against Women as a Tool of Control

Civic space restriction also occurs through mechanisms of **economic control**, where access to economic resources is used to discipline citizens who voice critical perspectives.

a. Threats of social assistance withdrawal.

Cases identified in Makassar show that women active in community struggles face intimidation through threats to terminate social assistance programs such as the Family Hope Program (PKH). Social assistance, which should be a basic right for vulnerable groups, is instead being used as a tool to silence dissent.

b. Economic dilemmas for women.

This situation forces women into a difficult position: choosing between preserving access to essential economic support for their families or continuing their advocacy for community rights.

c. Multiple burdens for women.

Women face compounded pressures as they continue to carry domestic responsibilities and care work within their families. The threat of losing social assistance affects not only individuals but also the survival of their children and family members. Moreover, ecological damage from extractive projects further increases women's workloads. Crises related to water, food, and health force women to work harder to sustain their households. As a result, women's time and space for organizing and advocacy become increasingly constrained. Women bear the brunt of the loss of livelihoods, yet their voices are simultaneously marginalized.



Caption: The PINTAR event in Yogyakarta. (Photo: Doc. Bima Artoko)

STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES

Despite the increasingly constrained civic space, civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs) across various regions in Indonesia continue to develop strategies to sustain their movements. Through the workshops conducted in Bandung, Makassar, and Jakarta, participants shared a number of strategies and good practices that have been implemented to respond to the challenges they face. These strategies demonstrate the resilience of civil society actors in maintaining civic space and strengthening democratic participation.

Strategy 1: Strengthening Advocacy Networks and Solidarity for Civic Space Resilience

One of the key strategies identified is strengthening advocacy networks and solidarity among civil society actors. Collaborative networks enable organizations to share information, mobilize support, and respond collectively to threats or attacks. Advocacy networks allow civil society organizations to amplify their voices and build stronger collective pressure on policymakers. They also help ensure that advocacy efforts are not isolated but instead supported by broader coalitions of actors.

In many cases, solidarity networks are activated during emergencies, such as when activists face criminalization, digital attacks, or intimidation from state or non-state actors. Through coordinated responses, networks can mobilize legal assistance, media attention, and public support.

Best Practices:

BALAD (Bandung Lautan Damai) is an annual festival initiated by JAKATARUB (Jaringan Kerja Antar Umat Beragama / Interfaith Network) together with dozens of communities in Bandung Raya that has successfully reclaimed inclusive public spaces through creative activities such as *Melukis Keberagaman* (Painting Diversity), *Cafe Religi*, *Cafe Humanity*, and youth-led campaigns. This practice continuously expands interfaith dialogue, promotes tolerance, and celebrates diversity in a sustainable way, while building a strong local solidarity ecosystem in Bandung around issues of inclusivity.

LBH Makassar serves as a "Rumah Gerakan" (Home for Movement) for CSOs and WROs by providing assistance on legal, human rights, and democracy issues while also facilitating spaces for consolidation and collective learning. LBH Makassar prioritizes the development of accessible services to the community, particularly in the form of structural legal protection and recovery/rehabilitation processes.

KOBAR Makassar regularly conducts paralegal training to build and strengthen a robust and resilient network of grassroots legal aid supporters at the community level. This network enhances the community's capacity to access justice, while also serving as an important pillar for the advocacy and monitoring work of CSOs in areas vulnerable to legal restrictions.

Strategy 2: Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society and Women's Rights Organizations

This strategy focuses on improving advocacy, assistance, and resilience capabilities through training and internal support mechanisms for CSOs and WROs.

Best Practices:

LBH Makassar, LBH Bandung, Asosiasi LBH APIK Indonesia, and LBH APIK Jakarta regularly conduct training for paralegals to build and expand grassroots networks of community-based legal assistants. This approach is further reinforced by coalitions like KOBAR (Koalisi Bantuan Hukum Rakyat / People's Legal Aid Coalition) in Makassar through regular training for paralegals.

Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama as Indonesia's largest Islamic organization operates LKP3A (Lembaga Konsultasi Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak / Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Consultation Institute) as a dedicated unit for case assistance, counseling services, and women's and children's empowerment with increasingly intensive capacity building for

paralegals in recent times.

Fatayat NU West Java has implemented religion-based advocacy innovation through the Dakwah Daiyah Mahmudah module, which serves as a guideline in training female preachers to integrate perspectives on peace, interfaith brotherhood, and understanding of gender issues ensuring that preaching moves beyond normative religious content to actively address discrimination, gender-based violence, and respect for diversity of beliefs.

KPI (Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia / Indonesian Women's Coalition), a broad network advocating for women's rights and democracy, has established a "members protect members" mechanism through BPPIPA (Balai Perempuan Pusat Informasi, Pengaduan, dan Advokasi / Women's Center for Information, Complaints, and Advocacy). This includes: (a) capacity building for members; (b) receiving and handling complaints related to criminalization or violence; and (c) advocacy. As KPI is not a direct service agency, it is also equipped with a referral scheme linking members to appropriate service agencies at the village/sub-district, district/city, and provincial levels.

Strategy 3: Strengthening Organizational Governance

Organizational governance strengthening is carried out through the development and implementation of Digital and Holistic Security Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for institutions. These SOPs serve as practical guidelines for CSOs/WROs in addressing risks such as cyberattacks, intimidation, and other forms of threats.

Best Practices:

LBH APIK Jakarta has developed and implemented SOPs on digital and holistic security in direct response to the escalating intensity of attacks against civil society over the past 1–2 years. To maximize impact, LBH APIK Jakarta organized SOP Training through a consortium approach which not only builds the capacity of its internal team but also shares the module knowledge with other service-oriented organizations in various regions. Examples include: the Humanitarian Volunteer Team in East Nusa Tenggara (a Catholic faith-based organization), ASB (Aliansi Sumut Bersatu) in North Sumatra, and GWL INA (Gaya Warna Lentera Indonesia) in the context of digital security with gender-diverse communities.

Solidaritas Perempuan Anging Mammiri in Makassar is currently developing a holistic security SOP that encompasses physical protection, digital security, and psychosocial support from a feminist perspective. This approach was developed in recognition that the threats faced are not only in the form of direct violence, but also include psychological pressure, fear, excessive workload, and emotional impacts resulting from an increasingly restrictive political environment.

Strategy 4: Strengthening Local Context through Cross-Actor Consolidation and Support

Civil society organizations (CSOs) actively consolidate at the local level by building cross-actor support involving local governments, religious leaders, and relevant authorities. This aims to open spaces for dialogue, obtain protection, and prevent or address sensitive

issues such as discrimination and the prevention of violent extremism.

Best Practices:

BALAD (Bandung Lautan Damai) serves as an annual consolidation platform through a festival that successfully creates shared spaces among diverse communities and religious groups in Greater Bandung, strengthening solidarity and enabling ongoing dialogue on tolerance.

Advocacy for the revision of discriminatory regional regulations (PERDA) in Bandung has been carried out through a cross-stakeholder approach. This advocacy engages key stakeholders—particularly influential local political figures and religious leaders—thereby building broader political and social support for more inclusive policy changes.

A service organization based in Jakarta, after experiencing a digital attack and direct intimidation (including the arrival of thugs at their office accompanied by threats), immediately established cooperation with the LPSK (Lembaga Perlindungan Saksi dan Korban / Witness and Victim Protection Agency). This collaboration aimed to secure protection for the victims they assist while also strengthening the organization's internal protection mechanisms in case of similar attacks in the future.

Strategy 5: Strengthening Support and Assistance Services

Civil society organizations are strengthening service provision as a form of direct protection for human rights defenders and vulnerable groups affected by the shrinking civic space. This strategy stems from the

recognition that attacks on civic space are not only legal and political in nature, but also generate medical, psychological, social, and economic impacts that require professional and sustained responses.

Best Practices:

Yayasan JARI provides free and comprehensive assistance based on three main pillars: Physical (Medical) Services, Psychological Services, and Legal Services. These services are supported by general practitioners, forensic doctors, clinical psychologists, and legal counselors. Access to these services is not limited to direct victims of violence but also includes indirect victims, such as journalists experiencing burnout or stress related to their work.

Strategy 6: Strengthening Economic Resilience

This strategy was developed to address vulnerabilities related to the sustainability of funding for civil society organizations. The shrinking civic space not only restricts advocacy work but also impacts access to resources, including for women's rights organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities.

Best Practices:

PWYP (Publish What You Pay) Indonesia maintains a reserve fund for members facing critical situations. The mechanism for accessing this fund is intentionally simple for members experiencing criminalization, legal defense needs such as hiring lawyers, medical expenses due to attacks, and other urgent situations. The reserve fund

is sourced from the organization's own savings that are specifically set aside for crisis scenarios.

BILIC Bandung fosters economic empowerment for persons with disabilities through productive business units as part of its broader community independence strategy. BILIC serves as a hub enabling persons with disabilities to access training and workspaces in areas such as sewing and massage services, enabling them to earn decent income while also strengthening their self-confidence.

Yayasan Bumi Sawerigading in South Sulawesi runs a waste management program that treats waste as a valuable economic resource. The management process has been developed through years of learning, enabling all incoming waste to be utilized optimally with zero discard. The waste is processed into various products that have both practical and economic value.

Strategy 7: Mainstreaming Inclusive Journalism through Alternative Media

Through a journalistic approach that prioritizes marginalized groups, alternative media highlight critical issues such as human rights violations, agrarian conflicts, intolerance, and other social justice concerns that are often considered too complex, risky, or not "market-friendly" by mainstream media. At the same time, alternative media serve as key tools for CSOs/WROs to build and strengthen positive public perceptions

of their reputation, roles, structures, and contributions to democracy and social justice through critical narratives and advocacy for often-marginalized issues.

Best Practices:

BandungBergerak has become an important platform for critical narratives

and voices from marginalized communities while demonstrating the role of alternative media in strengthening positive public perceptions of the vital contributions of CSOs and WROs in preserving diversity perspectives, exercising social control functions, and upholding the quality of democracy.



Caption: Inclusive marathon event. (Photo: Doc. Bima Artoko)

RECOMMENDATIONS

NFID, Kalyanamitra, and Asosiasi LBH APIK Indonesia highlight the importance of state recognition and protection of human rights defenders and women human rights defenders in Indonesia. In an increasingly narrow democracy, protection mechanisms for civil society as part of an enabling environment are crucial. Here are some recommendations:

First, strengthening organizational capacity and inter-organizational collaboration. This involves reinforcing the civil society protection ecosystem to build internal resilience within civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs), particularly those linked to grassroots communities. Inter-organizational consolidation also aims to build a comprehensive gender equality ecosystem (both at the local and national levels), including ecosystems of support, protection, and care. This section includes:

- **Strengthening the pillar of legal security and advocacy** through three aspects: (a) **Emergency legal aid funds.** It is important to establish mechanisms to provide readily available funding to cover legal process costs for human rights defenders (HRDs) and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) who experience criminalization; (b) **Gender-responsive networks of lawyers.** It is essential to provide training for lawyers to develop gender perspectives when defending HRDs, including WHRDs, in cases of

attacks; (c) **Strengthening organizational capacity in developing digital and holistic security SOPs.** It is important to regularly update and review SOPs, improve complaint channels and service information systems, and periodically develop case referral information systems to ensure accessibility, rapid response, and effective referrals. The development of security mechanisms within each organization must also consider the specific needs of women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.

- **Strengthening the pillar of physical and digital security,** which focuses on protecting the bodies and privacy of human rights defenders from both real-world and digital threats. Three aspects support this pillar: (a) **Early Warning Systems.** Protection efforts require effective early detection mechanisms, particularly to identify discriminatory and threatening narratives. Tracking such narratives enables civil society and women's rights organizations to analyze risks, understand potential threats, and respond accordingly. Community-based data collection is an important strategy to support more accurate and context-sensitive responses; (b) **Digital security training,** particularly regarding the protection of accounts from hacking and mitigation of doxing (the dissemination of personal data). Continuous digital security training is crucial to increase

preparedness and protection against various forms of digital threats, particularly for WHRDs who are highly vulnerable to online gender-based violence (OGBV); (c) **Field security protocols.** These protocols can serve as practical guidelines for HRDs and WHRDs when conducting activities in conflict areas, including within agrarian conflict contexts.

- **Strengthening the pillar of psychosocial security**, which includes two aspects: (a) **Rapid response units for OGBV (Online Gender-Based Violence)** consisting of dedicated teams that assist WHRDs facing intimidation or harassment on social media; (b) **Trauma counseling services and peer support.** Psychological support is essential for addressing mental pressure caused by threats faced by HRDs and WHRDs, particularly WHRDs working in agrarian contexts.
- **Building a movement-strengthening ecosystem through positive narratives** to counter stigma, foster solidarity, and reaffirm the contributions of the women's movement. In this context, the WHRD movement needs to actively connect with youth organizations to expand its support base while ensuring the sustainability of the movement. Encouraging the leadership of young women activists—within universities, community spaces, and among young journalists—is key to strengthening the quality of democracy.

Second, strengthening cross-actor engagement. The involvement of key actors plays an important role in expanding public understanding of the existence, role,

and contributions of the gender equality ecosystem, including knowledge production. This section includes:

- Collaboration between local and national media is important to elevate regional issues to the national level. Media coverage also serves as a data source for documenting cases of attacks related to the shrinking civic space.
- Engaging key actors such as religious leaders is also essential to strengthen social support. The religious leaders involved are those who uphold the principles of equality, reject all forms of discrimination, and support the creation of inclusive social spaces. They also have a track record in promoting interfaith dialogue, encouraging peace, and prioritizing persuasive and educational approaches in addressing differences.
- Cooperation with law enforcement agencies (APH) through strengthened inclusive approaches is necessary to ensure that all law enforcement processes are conducted fairly, equally, and without discrimination against women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. This cooperation is generally carried out by organizations focusing on legal assistance.
- Ensuring the involvement of civil society, including women's rights organizations, in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) agreed in 2023 between Witness and Victim Protection Agency (LPSK), Komnas HAM, and Komnas Perempuan regarding the Rapid Response Mechanism

of National Human Rights Institutions for the protection and fulfillment of the rights of human rights defenders.

- Monitor and ensure that institutions responsible for implementing policies within the judiciary effectively carry out their mandates related to internal regulations concerning women, children, and persons with disabilities. For example, Supreme Court Regulation No.3 of 2017 on the handling of cases involving women in conflict with the law. Additionally, Law No. 20 of 2025 on the new Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP) contains specific chapters and provisions that strengthen the rights of vulnerable groups—such as women, persons with disabilities, and older persons—within criminal justice processes.

Third, policy reform to prevent the criminalization of civil society. Articles contained in policies that are open to multiple interpretations need to be reviewed and advocated for reform to prevent misuse in restricting civic space. For example, several

provisions in the Criminal Code (KUHP), such as those regulating incitement and insults against the head of state, are ambiguous and potentially threaten freedom of expression. Similarly, provisions in the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law) concerning defamation, hate speech, and the dissemination of information are often used to silence criticism of public officials and state institutions. In addition, various other policies containing ambiguous provisions also need to be reviewed to prevent their use in criminalizing civil society voices.

On the other hand, protection of freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed under the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, particularly through Articles 28E and 28F, which guarantee the right of every person to express opinions and obtain information. Similar protections are also regulated in Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights and international instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which has been ratified by Indonesia.



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