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Concern over shrinking civil society space: Call for transparency and accountability in climate finance

We the Chapters of Transparency International in Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, gathered at the TI Bangladesh-Transparency Maldives Integrity Talk on Climate Finance Governance, held from 25-27 April 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand, are deeply concerned about the shrinking space for civil society and climate activists in the South Asia region.

We observe with disappointment that civil society actors throughout the South Asian region are increasingly restricted in their work, often on unjust and politically motivated grounds. We note with further concern that rights-based CSOs in particular are being subjected to further restrictions by the imposition of new legal and policy provisions often in the name of national security that are also curtailing fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of opinion and freedom of association. We are disturbed that the relevant authorities do not seem to realize that such restrictions are fully contradictory to not only their constitutional and legal commitments, but also the series of international pledges that they have made by being state parties to international conventions and covenants.

We demand that national government institutions ensure the existence of a constructive and safe operational space for the functioning of NGOs and climate activists. A safe space for these groups is an essential element to ensure accountability and transparency in the use of public money, including climate funds. Governments of the South Asia region must refrain from any actions or initiatives that may threaten civil society space, including reform of laws and policies to restrict the fundamental freedoms and rights of the public to voice their opinions and demands.

We ask that developed country governments and multilateral funding institutions support our push for civil society space to ensure that funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation is delivered as committed and used transparently and accountably. The use of climate funds in a way that effectively benefits the most climate vulnerable communities can only be ensured in a context where civil society organizations have the necessary space to operate, and rights of activists and whistle blowers are fully protected. Restricting civil society space is the most convenient means of promoting and condoning various forms of corruption and impunity by undermining transparency and accountability.

Finally, we call upon all stakeholders, including governments, multilateral institutions, civil society and the private sector to actively build partnerships to ensure that climate finance and action initiatives are undertaken with the overarching goal of reaching the most vulnerable people and contribute towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

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