

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Pakistan: Hardline NGO Bill of deep concern to civil society

**Johannesburg, 25 2013 -** Global civil society alliance, CIVICUS and ….are concerned by the text of a proposed Foreign Contribution Bill shared with a delegation of civil society groups in Pakistan last week. In its current form the Bill puts foreign funding of national and international non-governmental organizations under the strictest scrutiny. All those receiving ‘foreign contributions’ will be required to register and the concerned body - the Securities and Exchange Commission, will have arbitrary powers to decide on those it agrees to be conducting permissible foreign funded activities.

“If enacted in its proposed form, this law will make Pakistan look increasingly like a police state.” Said …. “The Bill is drafted in such a vague manner as to make arbitrary and highly politicised decision making on permissible foreign funding very likely. If this Bill is passed without amendment, it could well decimate the capacity of the Pakistani civil society sector to assist in thematic and geographical areas that are not favourable to the government.”

The Bill opens up the possibility of massive abuse of power by the Government and its appointed committees because of the vagueness in the Bill’s drafting. Special audits and the inspection of records and accounts can be conducted ‘for reasons to be recorded’ which in reality would permit politicised harassment and excessive interfence from the executive arm of the state if they do not like an activity or the mandate of a particular NGO or INGO. A prison sentence of up to six months, and/or fine can also be given to those who provide false information, while any person who conceals or assists any person receiving foreign funding may receive up to a year.

In addition to the vagaries of the wording, the Bill also requires an involved application process for registration for foreign funds requiring a memorandum of understanding, a special purpose bank account, the provision of involved detail on future projects and programme activities, as well as geographical locations and the source of these foreign contributions.

As [highlighted by CIVICUS in the past](https://www.civicus.org/en/media-centre/press-releases/1001-pakistan-government-must-protect-civil-society-before-its-too-late) and in the recommendations handed down to Pakistan at its Universal Periodic Review at the UN in 2012, Pakistani civil society has struggled in recent years with human rights defenders and advocacy groups being subject to increasingly violent attacks, particularly in the federally and provincially administered tribal regions. Instead of offering increased protection, this legislation would authorise new victimisation, this time from the arm of the state, therefore multiplying the vulnerability of those with a human rights approach frequently unpopular with more extreme members of Pakistani state and society.

.CIVICUS urges the government of Pakistan to (i) respect its human rights obligations by amending the text of the law in consultation with civil society (ii) guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of all NGO works in Pakistan and (iii) end all forms of discrimination and harassments against all NGO workers with opposing views on national matters.

ENDS

**Notes to editors:**
[CIVICUS](http://civicus.us6.list-manage.com/track/click?u=9283ff78aa53cccd2800739dc&id=aacb07aeca&e=d37b0e6948) was founded in 1993 and is dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens’ freedom of association are challenged.

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