



**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Foreign Contributions Bill: Another setback for Civil Society in Pakistan**

**3 March 2014.** Global civil society alliance, CIVICUS and the Pakistan Development Alliance have expressed strong reservations on the proposed Foreign Contributions Bill, 2014 to regulate international funding for civil society activities in Pakistan.

"The overall environment in the country is already punitive to the working of NGOs and civil society voices,” said Zia ur Rehman, National Representative of the Pakistan Development Alliance. “The proposed legislation would further instigate the undesirable bureaucratic actions against civil society organisations. When five different laws already exist to control and regulate the sector, we must ask ourselves whether we need another one.”

National and international civil society organisations will be required to register with the Securities and Exchange Commission if they receive more than 50 million Pakistani Rupees from abroad in a financial year (approximately USD 470,000). The application process for registration subjects organisations to enhanced control and supervision by government agencies, requiring a memorandum of understanding for International NGOs with the Federal Government and the need to provide details of various projects and programme activities, including geographical locations. Registration for receiving foreign contributions is subject to renewal every five years and can be cancelled in the “public interest” which is not defined in the bill. Officials are empowered to conduct special audits and the inspect records of accounts of organisations ‘for reasons to be recorded’ under the bill. 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 prison.

“The bill opens up the possibility of harassment from the executive arm of the state if they do not like the activities or mandate of a particular civil society organisation or international NGO,” said Mandeep Tiwana, Head of Policy and Research at CIVICUS. “There is a high likelihood that the bill’s provisions will be used to silence outspoken independent groups, and also prevent them from working in ‘sensitive’ geographical locations. At this point, there is a need to build not deplete the capacity of civil society in Pakistan.”

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](http://www.civicus.org/media-centre-129/press-releases/1101-civicus-calls-on-the-government-of-pakistan-to-implement-upr-recommendations) made to Pakistan at its Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in 2012, civil society groups in Pakistan operate under extremely difficult circumstances, and are in need of support and protection by the state.

CIVICUS urges the government of Pakistan to (i) reconsider the Foreign Contributions Bill in light of the provisions enshrined in the [UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration.pdf) which guarantees civil society organisations the right to solicit, receive and utilise resources domestically and from abroad, (ii) guarantee an “enabling environment for civil society” as agreed in the [Busan Partnership for Development Effectiveness](http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/49650173.pdf) at the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.

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**Notes to editors:**  
[CIVICUS](http://civicus.us6.list-manage.com/track/click?u=9283ff78aa53cccd2800739dc&id=aacb07aeca&e=d37b0e6948" \t "_blank) 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.

PDA is an alliance of National level NGOs and networks working together on developmental and rights based approaches to address issues in governance and accoutability  
  
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