

Amnesty International

Consultancy Opportunity: Terms of Reference

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1. Purpose

Amnesty International (AI) invites applications for an 18-month part time fellowship that will explore the nexus of closing civic space and stories of resistance globally. Fellows will analyze current trends and context, emerging resistance and rights movements as well as causes for concern. They will convene ideas for a tool kit of resistance that can be useful for activists working and resisting shrinking civic space all over the world. The fellows will be spread globally but convening periodically to share learnings and co-create a praxis of human rights based activism and resistance to authoritarianism.

DURATION: 18 MONTHS

**SUMMARY**

Shrinking civic space globally is not a new phenomenon. Threatening the ability of individuals and groups globally to voice dissent and challenge autocracy, it is gathering alarming pace, threatening the work of human rights defenders in multiple countries. Amnesty International has felt the closure of space for human rights work directly in its own work and threats continue to exist in the field with the authoritarian resurgence, consolidation and renewal becoming a major threat to global civic space, enjoyment of rights and survival of civil society. Building on a comprehensive internal global review of responding to threats to civic space, Amnesty will address the issue by engaging innovative thinkers representing broad regions and countries globally where these challenges are seen, to:

- (a) Produce cutting edge think pieces, reflecting on the root causes of shrinking civic space and its reflection on societal fissures of group and individual identity including gender, race, class, caste and other identity markers including the rise of the anti-rights movements;
- (b) Convene voices in the regions that already strategise on tactics to successfully challenge and dismantle authoritarian tactics such as the weaponisation of legislation, cyber surveillance and digital attacks on civic space with a view to incubating new ideas, learning from successful mobilisation and bringing together synergies and networks of activism;
- (c) Devise strategies to fight the use of [SLAPPs](#) to curtail the work of human rights defenders (HRDs)
- (d) Work with civil society and HRDs to create approaches that are grounded in the regions to survive, thrive and turn the tide of shrinking civic space, and
- (e) Work with, learn from and co-create with existing movements and groups to use some of these tools in the existential struggles to challenge authoritarianism and defend human rights in jurisdictions that are increasingly challenging.

Amnesty seeks to capture, distil, share and co-create a toolbox of strategies, learning from strategies that activist groups are already using to fight back, to respond and to raise the cost of authoritarianism in global hotspots where authoritarian regimes are thriving. Effective documentation and packaging of these tactics and strategies can propel and share learnings for groups globally, providing impetus for new narratives of resistance to authoritarianism and its obsession with closing civic space.

The program will link to academic institutions, HRDs, journalists and activists through an innovative and expansive fellowship program. The global civic space fellows will document tactics for challenging authority through analysis of allies and influencers that impact shrinking civic space, identifying root causes and addressing deep societal inequalities through public mobilisation, trends of resistance, new ways of responding to authoritarian impacts, develop locally-appropriate strategies for human rights defenders locally and internationally to tackle shrinking civic space that are innovative, revolutionary and geared to the changing landscape of human rights.

## 2. Background

As the world faces alarming use of violence in IOPT, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Yemen- the widespread use and abuse of NGO bills such as we see in Zimbabwe and Uganda and the deployment of law under the late Magufuli in Tanzania, the importance of civic space becomes even more relevant.

Activist-led engagements, as well as academic musings on civic space, shed light on the existential, ideological, programmatic and engagement issues that Amnesty faces today. These include the increasing threats to the space for dissent and operation of liberal ideas, both in digital and physical spaces.

Threats to civic space have not only physical consequences for fundamental freedoms but also pose mental barriers when it comes to restricting the ability of human rights defenders and others to challenge those structures and obstacles.

In 2021, Amnesty undertook an internal review of responding to threats to civic space globally in a paper titled “Be Water”. The paper starts by considering the founding ethos of Amnesty and the context in which it operated, the hope, agency and solace it offered to both its members and those it spoke for. The paper considers the strategies laid out in the report “Standing For Humanity: Changing Amnesty To Overcome The Politics Of Us Vs. Them”, published in 2020, which offers a comprehensive strategy to address issues of shrinking civic space globally. Finally, the paper deals with some of the ways in which different actors, internal and external, perceive this perennial issue of protecting civic space and Amnesty’s role, to arrive at some ways that can shape the larger body of work.

The conclusions that emerge from this paper suggest that the tactical response of documenting is insufficient and instead, a curative, prescriptive approach, where Amnesty proactively identifies threats and finds solutions is required if it wants to halt the shrinking of civic space.

This conclusion is also true for some of our partners who are working in the same field. While the dominant narrative around the world has continued to be a descriptive one in how civic space is shrinking, the fact that authoritarian resurgence is now on steroids, and the articulation of the damaging impact of a combination of toxic law and predatory politics used and abused by authoritarian leaders on civil society, limited attention has been paid to the equally vital work

of how people around the world are responding, resisting and engaging in this phenomenon. Authoritarian leaders are often supported by a diverse set of allies ranging from corporate actors and religious leaders to extreme groups that advocate violence or abuse of human rights, whether it is restricting women's right to access abortion, the rights of LGBT people, or torture and arbitrary detention of people fleeing war and violence and seeking asylum.

In this context though, groups and individuals are resisting this erosion of rights. The impact of resisting this trend and the need to raise the cost of authoritarianism is significant, if considered with other options. Countless episodes of resistance go unnoticed, undocumented and unimagined, because of the pervasive narrative of civic space erosion, in almost fatalistic terms.

At a global level, a holistic response is required that challenges the existential and identity factors, ideological issues, engagement tactics and messaging given that the drivers of closing civic space are multifaceted and complex. Beyond the descriptive narrative of shrinking civic space there are hopeful signs of response and fight back that can create more helpful narratives.

Amnesty's "Be Water" paper recommends considering the four interlinked pillars: programmatic decision making, existential issues, engagement issues and outreach and messaging. The following recommendations are from the analysis; some of these tactics are already used, others are in progress and some require more investment and resources.

#### PROGRAMMATIC DECISION MAKING

- Adopt a propositional approach to human rights advocacy, campaigning and research since the naming-and-shaming model has diminishing returns.
- Invest in long- term change that focuses on drivers of shrinking civic space but also invest in short term initiatives to complement these.
- Continue to document learnings and co-creation of tactics
- Prioritize setting the narrative based on human rights values while reacting to narratives of demonization.
- Reach out to mass audience platforms where possible especially through human rights education (HRE).

#### EXISTENTIAL THREATS

- Prepare and proactively strengthen sections, national and regional offices in monitoring, preparing for and responding to existential threats.
- Ensure continuity of work in every jurisdiction even if existential threats lead to the closing down of a physical location through preparedness and risk management.
- Diversify our active members in the global south, providing opportunities for international members to become fee-paying, involved members even in regions/countries where sections do not currently exist.
- Ensure that we are conscious of the existential threats faced by NGOs and HRDs as well as ourselves.
- Balance remote and physical presence in order to ensure continuity of programmatic functions in all countries where Amnesty currently works.

#### ENGAGEMENT ISSUES

- Invest in long-term research, advocacy, campaigns, mass education and human rights awareness.

- Call people in as we call governments out; focus on embedding human rights in societal values.
- Recognise that Amnesty is often seen as elitist, and consciously champion the struggles of the working class that make up the membership of Amnesty.

Approach coalitions and partnerships with humility

- Diversify our membership across race, religion, gender, class and caste identities.
- Ensure that we refrain from over-professionalizing our interventions.
- Prepare ourselves with audience analysis and engagement tactics to bring in youth to the movement.
- Improve our engagement with groups that mobilize people on the ground for defending human freedoms.
- Recognize and act on the importance of engaging with faith-based groups and non-traditional allies to reach the masses and create societal acceptance of the value of human rights.

#### OUTREACH AND MESSAGING

- Use simple and relatable language to communicate messages.
- Use local languages and communicate; our regional presence makes this much easier for Amnesty.
- Use formats, tools and lengths that are relatable and accessible to the audience.
- Work with local influencers and non-traditional allies to get our message across.
- Recognise that hope-based communications may work for some platforms but not for others.

A fellowship program is a logical next step following our “Be Water” report because it creates concrete ways to incorporate the recommendations into the praxis of Amnesty’s work at the regional level. The paper’s recommendations are currently wide and applicable across teams and themes. The fellowship program will take these recommendations and provide clear, practical pathways to implement them in a way that makes sense for the political, economic, social context of each country and region.

The fellows will be selected for their ability to think outside of the box in coming up with innovative ideas in human rights. They need not necessarily be established leaders in human rights work, but instead, people who are able to offer new ways of thinking and are open to new ideas and different ways to solve problems, in particular to demonstrate how resistance, response, engagement with civic space closure is unfolding and what lessons we are learning in the nature of the response. This response does not need to be led by Amnesty. It could be how Brazilians responded to the authoritarianism of the former leader Bolsonaro, how Americans used midterm elections to push back on Trumpism, or how communities are using courts and solidarity to push back on authoritarian resurgence and its civic space corollary.

The fellows will be provided with stipends for the 18-month program and will be expected to work part time (maximum one day a week) for Amnesty. Fellows will be based out of their home countries/current locations. The fellows will be managed by the Office of the Senior Director for Regional Impact and will report to the Senior Director. The fellows for this program will look at emblematic jurisdictions where civic space is shrinking. The program will aim to take a balanced approach, combining countries where civic space appears almost completely closed like North Korea or China, to emerging countries of concern globally.

### 3. Objectives and deliverables

The project aims to support local human rights defenders, academics and human rights practitioners with lived experience to work intensively on collecting innovative grassroots strategies for tackling authoritarianism and defending civic space in their region. The fellows will use this information to create tangible recommendations and tools which could be applicable to other settings and can better inform Amnesty's work on civic space to ensure it remains innovative, passes the test of theory and praxis and contributes to new knowledge of resistance.

The Consultant will be expected to deliver regular short written pieces to be independently published either as opinion pieces or blog posts in their own capacity (not specifically as Amnesty outputs). They will convene people who are working on issues of civic space in their region, in virtual, in-person or hybrid meetings, to share ideas, incubate new strategies and create spaces for learning and sharing. The consultant will produce a longer think-piece at the end of the fellowship for Amnesty to be utilized for internal strategy and processes (the external publication of which will be at the discretion of Amnesty International). All outputs and events produced will be expected to comply with standards approved by Amnesty International. The Consultant fellows will be supported by the Office of the Senior Director for Regional Impact. They will be expected to regularly join meetings with regional office/s and global teams related to the consultants' project proposals and the Senior Director's office to update on progress. They may be required to produce written updates from time to time.

The Consultant will be required to abide by Amnesty's internal policies on behaviors which includes accountability, collaboration and anti-racism as well as safeguarding principles that apply to all of our work. The consultancy will be carried out in an inclusive and anti-racist manner that takes into account feminist leadership principles, the need for an intersectional approach to the praxis of human rights.

### 4. Known Project Stages

Month 1-6

- Each fellow will review existing context and literature to establish the current state of play with regards to civic space, build relations with activists, HRDs, trade unions and others in the community of practice.
- Fellows will speak with Amnesty teams, sections, national offices and entities, and regional offices, ensuring to build on existing relationships, ongoing projects and work and to avoid duplication or undermining of current initiatives on civic space.
- Fellows will engage non-Amnesty constituencies that are on the frontline of change and fight back to restore civic space.

Month 6-12

- Each fellow will conduct interviews, have round table discussions and convene meetings in their countries/regions and will feed these into a white paper that proposes a concrete roadmap for Amnesty to implement in that region and country.

- Each fellow will organise regional virtual/hybrid dialogues with academics, activists, civil society and grassroots movements in their region or country, to discuss and incubate ideas on tackling the issue of shrinking civic space and connecting those who are already working on these issues in the region and country with Amnesty's work.

Month 12-18

- Each fellow will craft recommendations for local civil society constituencies as well as to Amnesty's advocacy with regional and international human rights bodies as relevant, to discuss support for human rights defenders in the region in surviving and thriving despite shrinking civic space.
- This white paper will be shared internally once completed and feed into implementation.
- Fellows will be facilitated by the Office of the Senior Director for Regional Impact to come together for experiential sharing and learning.
- Each fellow will produce one or more think-pieces on tackling shrinking civic space in the region which can translate into a global options paper for strategy and tactics. These can be published as blogs/opinion pieces in their own capacity contributing to a literature of practice and activism on civic space in each region.
- Throughout the project Amnesty will organise regular virtual briefings with the fellows for the Senior Director for Regional Impact and their teams to exchange ideas.

The results of the work will be seen in the longer term and therefore regular monitoring and evaluation, learning and impact assessment is an important part of this project.

The work will be signed off by the Office of the Senior Director for Regional Impact.

## 5. Deadlines for Delivery

Deadlines for regular write ups, meetings and events will be set by the Office of the Senior Director together with the consultant. The Consultant will be expected to deliver the final paper towards this project in the last six months of the project time line (month 12-18), which will be calculated from the start date of the consultant (18 months).

## 6. Essential Requirements

*Language:* This project will require fluency in written and spoken English. Fluency in one or more regional languages to which the project proposal relates is desirable.

*Location:* This project will not include relocation. Therefore, the consultant will be required to work from their preferred location, and will be required to already possess work authorization to do so.

*Experience:* The consultant is expected to have experience working with or on issues of resistance to civic space either formally in academia or in NGOs, in grass roots organisations, in non-formal groups and movements or in professional spaces that include journalism, tech and human rights activism. The consultant is expected to possess knowledge of the region on which the consultant will submit the project proposal. Experience is not quantified in this call for applications in acknowledgement of the non-formal engagements of people in human rights activism and to encourage a diverse pool of candidates to apply for this role.

Experience writing on human rights issues involved in shrinking civic space and resistance movements to authoritarian practices will be essential for this role.

*Qualifications/ Certifications:* Specific qualifications or certifications are not required for this consultancy in order to encourage a diverse group of applicants. Minimum expertise for this role will require knowledge of human rights frameworks, experience in activism on civic space, and past work and writing on civic space issues.

## **7. Desirable Requirements**

Examples of previous work both writing and involvement in human rights issues related to civic space and activism is desirable.

## **8. Bidding Instructions**

To bid for this work, please submit the following:

- A short bio, outlining your recent experience (no more than 1 page)
- Relevant case studies/ descriptions of experience working on civic space issues
- Your proposed approach to this Opportunity (Project proposal)
- A detailed breakdown of the fees you would charge for this work

Prices must be given in USD and should not exceed \$25 000 for the consultant's fee for the duration of the 18 months and \$10 000 for the expenses associated with the fellowship.

As standard, payments are made by Amnesty International 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice for the agreed work milestone completed.

Bids must be in PDF, Word, PowerPoint or Excel format.

## **9. The Small Print**

The chosen bidder will be expected to conform to our Supplier Code of Conduct and our standard Consultancy Terms and Conditions and will receive a contract containing these documents to review once this process has concluded.

Your responses will be treated as Confidential Information.

*Amnesty International Limited shall not be liable for costs borne by, or any claims arising from, bidders participating in this tender process.*

*We reserve the right to modify this Opportunity at any time prior to the scheduled date for written responses. Additional scope and requirements can be added. Notification of such changes will be provided to all known bidders.*

*Amnesty International Limited also reserves the right to:*

- *reject any or all responses to this Opportunity*
- *single or multi-source*
- *cancel the tender at any time and for any reason*