

Civil Society calls for protection of human rights and return to democracy in Nepal

Statement of International Civil Society Networks

24 September 2025



Gen Z protest in Chitwan, Nepal (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

We, international civil society networks, are deeply concerned regarding the situation of hostility against freedom of expression and crackdowns on peaceful protest in Nepal within recent weeks. We are concerned that police fired at protestors, killing and injuring several students who were protesting against corruption.

We condemn the killings of students by the Nepali police and express concern regarding the violent destruction of public property and attacks on politicians. The political vacuum created in the country following the resignation of the previous Prime Minister is extremely troubling.

This statement and set of recommendations contained herein has been compiled by a number of global civil society networks working at the intersections of peacebuilding, access to justice, human rights, economic justice, and civic space.

Gen Z youth protest following social media ban

After the ban on social media by the Nepal government, youth hit the streets of Kathmandu on September 8, 2025 in a peaceful demonstration to oppose the ban. Though the ban was an immediate trigger for the youth called the 'Gen Z', the protest was also a result of deep frustration against rampant corruption, nepotism and mis-governance in Nepal. The rising unemployment crisis against the backdrop of conspicuously lavish lifestyles among the political elite has caused outrage among the youth.

On September 8, the police forces in Nepal opened fire on the demonstrations, killing 19 protesters and injuring about 500 people in total. The overall death toll, due to police shootings and wider violence, stands at 73 and the number of injured people is more than 1300.

Following the students' deaths, the protests continued despite the curfew as thousands of youth poured onto the streets the next day to protest against the killings, which took a violent form. The protesters set fire to several government buildings like the Parliament, Prime

Minister's residences, ministries, Supreme Court etc. Politicians' houses were also attacked. Politicians were seen being charged by the protesters on the streets.

There is a risk that different actors may try to co-opt or suppress the youth-led movement. It is therefore vital to recognize this moment as a genuine generational shift, not "business as usual." Ensuring meaningful participation of Gen Z in decision-making and governance structures — including through robust digital governance and accountability mechanisms is necessary.

Resignation of the Prime Minister

The protests resulted in the home minister tendering his resignation on the first day of the protest. But as the protests grew in scale and turned violent, Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli resigned on 9 September, resulting in government collapse at which point the Army took control and appealed for peace. Questions have been raised about the origins of the violence as the Gen Z protests had no intention to use violent methods.

After the discussion between the President and the leaders of the Gen Z movement, Ms Sushila Karki, the (former) first Supreme Court chief justice of Nepal, was appointed as the interim Prime Minister on September 13, 2025, becoming the first woman Prime Minister of Nepal. The Parliament has been dissolved and the interim government will conduct an election in six months' time.

Economic Inequality

The protests demonstrate deep discontent with the present economic and political situation in Nepal. In South Asia, similar protests have happened in Sri Lanka and in Bangladesh in 2022 and in 2024 where large numbers of youth and common people took to the streets resulting in the toppling of the governments. South Asia has a significant percentage of young people who need employment.

The international debt burden on several low- and middle- income countries is insurmountable, which has a direct impact on people's lives and livelihood. Governments exhibit apathy towards people's problems, and are seen as serving corporate interests while failing to deliver services that meet people's basic needs. The lack of accountability of governments towards their people and the worsening debt crisis are among several factors triggering such unrest.

These youth-led protests are clearly connected to severe dissatisfaction with how the economy is being managed (or rather mis-managed). One can witness similarities of economic conditions in several southern nations. While there is an economic growth in terms of GDP, the resources are mostly cornered by the top echelons of the society, so is the model of governance. The inequality has sharply risen in recent years and the general condition of the people is not improving, rather deteriorating. The Oxfam report suggests that the billionaires' wealth surged by \$2 trillion in 2024, three times faster than a year before, while the number of people living in poverty has barely reduced since 1990. The new generation is facing multiple challenges of unemployment, inflation, inequalities, and the impact of climate change. Many, especially the youth, are losing hope that their future will improve.

Nepal's situation is a warning bell for all governments in low and middle income countries to respond to the problems of the people and to serve their interests.

Backlash against Civil Society

Civil society organisations are also facing backlash, with old political parties and some media outlets accusing NGOs of supporting “violence” or “revolution,” and even raising the possibility of banning NGOs. In this climate, it is crucial to reaffirm solidarity with civil society, defend civic space, and underscore our role in protecting the rights of youth, women, children and marginalized communities — while clearly rejecting violence and destruction.

Our Demands

We the undersigned call for:

1. The interim government to implement rule of law within the framework of Nepal’s Constitution, while addressing the demands of protestors and guaranteeing the meaningful participation of Gen Z and civil society actors in political and governance processes.
2. Patience and restraint both among youth and politicians to maintain peace and stability, while protecting Nepal’s sovereignty, democracy, human rights, civic space and fundamental freedoms.
3. All effort should be made to stave off any possibility of an authoritarian takeover.
4. The interim government to form an independent commission to find the authorities responsible for excessive and indiscriminate use of force on peaceful protestors and ensure justice, reparation and accountability.
5. Reaffirm civil society’s legitimacy and protect NGOs, activists and human rights defenders against smear campaigns or threats of banning.
6. Protection of Civil Society Organizations, activists, and human rights defenders.
7. Free access to social media as underpinned by the freedoms of expression and information enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
8. Take all effort to rebuild peace and conduct free and fair elections in six months time as mandated, facilitating democratic participation of Gen Z and their leaders.
9. Special focus and attention to be given to the marginalised communities like the women, youth, persons with disabilities, Dalit and indigenous communities ensuring their participation in this democratic processes.
10. As global civil society networks we are calling for the transformation of the International Financial Architecture including a UN Debt Convention and to end the debt crisis for countries like Nepal by cancelling unsustainable and illegitimate debts.

Signed by:

Action For Sustainable Development (A4SD)

Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF)

CIVICUS

Forus International

Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)

Global Forum of Communities Discriminated by Work & Descent (GFoD)

Transparency Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network