

AUSTRALIA

ONGOING EROSION OF CIVIC FREEDOMS



(Photo Credit: @BlockadeAustraliaOpen)



INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, the CIVICUS Monitor, a global tool that tracks civic freedoms, [downgraded](#) Australia's civic space rating from 'open' to 'narrowed'. This reflected a deterioration of civic space, with concerns about the targeting of whistleblowers, anti-protest laws, press freedom, the right to privacy and increased surveillance.

Many in civil society were hoping for a reversal of this trend with the Labor party's [national election victory](#) in May 2022, which made party leader Anthony Albanese prime minister. Ahead of the election, the [Labor party said](#) that 'promoting universal human rights is an essential policy objective' of the party.

However, more than two years on, CIVICUS remains concerned about ongoing restrictions on civic freedoms, including the prosecution of whistleblowers, the disruption of and restrictions on peaceful protests and the criminalisation of climate and environmental activists and people protesting about the conflict in Gaza. There are also concerns about the increasing number of anti-protest laws introduced at the state level, press freedom restrictions and other efforts to silence dissent.

These actions are inconsistent with Australia's international human rights obligations to respect and protect freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it is a state party to.

Australia's human rights obligations apply to laws and regulations at whatever level – federal, state or territories – and the federal government must ensure human rights are respected in all states, whatever the internal governance arrangements.

The government has also failed to effectively implement civic space recommendations made in 2021 by states at the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council during Australia's [Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#). This includes recommendations to amend or repeal national security laws that violate the right to freedom of expression and the privacy of journalists and whistleblowers, repeal laws that criminalise public interest reporting, provide civil society members, human rights defenders and journalists with a safe and secure environment to carry out their work and put an end to the violation of freedom of peaceful assembly and the excessive use of force by law enforcement officials.

Australia has no comprehensive federal-level fundamental human rights instrument to protect human rights in law, including civic freedoms. However, in May 2024, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights delivered a report to parliament setting out a [series of recommendations](#), including that the government introduce legislation to establish a Human Rights Act.

This brief highlights some of CIVICUS's current concerns with the state of civic space in Australia and makes a series of recommendations.

ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The [CIVICUS Monitor](#), an online platform that tracks threats to civil society in countries across the globe, rates civic space – the space for civil society – in Australia as "**Narrowed**".

The data provides the basis for civic space ratings, which are based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Countries can be rated as:

CLOSED

REPRESSED

OBSTRUCTED

NARROWED

OPEN



PROSECUTION OF WHISTLEBLOWERS

Human rights groups have long called on the authorities to [overhaul](#) whistleblower protection laws, particularly the Public Interest Disclosure Act (PID Act), the federal law that protects public servant whistleblowers, and to establish a whistleblower protection authority. There have also been calls to drop the prosecution of whistleblowers, which has continued under the Albanese government.

In 2018, lawyer Bernard Collaery was [charged](#) with allegedly helping his client, an ex-spy known as Witness K, to unlawfully disclose information about an Australian Secret Intelligence Service mission to bug Timor-Leste government offices to gain an advantage in negotiations over oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea in 2004. Collaery had to endure a [lengthy court process](#) over the level of secrecy to apply to his trial and other related issues. His case has involved almost 100 court dates and over a dozen interlocutory judgments, across the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal and High Court. After four years of advocacy by human rights groups, in July 2022 the attorney general [dropped the prosecution](#). In January 2023, the [courts found](#) that the government's reasons for shrouding the trial in secrecy were 'replete with speculation and devoid of any specific basis' and gave too much weight to national security.

Former Australian army lawyer David McBride was [sentenced](#) to five years and eight months in jail in May 2024 for revealing information about alleged Australian war crimes in Afghanistan. McBride leaked documents to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that formed the basis for the broadcaster's landmark Afghan Files reporting, which showed [credible evidence of war crimes](#) committed by Australian forces in Afghanistan. The reporting was subsequently confirmed by the Brereton Inquiry that found evidence that Australian forces had [unlawfully killed](#) 39 Afghans during the war.



Whistleblower and former Australian army lawyer David McBride
(Photo Credit: Twitter/@AssangeCampaign)

Whistleblower Richard Boyle is a former Australian Taxation Office (ATO) employee who [blew the whistle](#) on aggressive debt recovery practices targeting small businesses. His evidence ultimately led to several reviews and policy reform. He initially raised his concerns internally in accordance with the PID Act, but after nothing was done, he went to the media in April 2018, a move also in accordance with the Act.

Boyle was subsequently charged with 66 offences, 42 of which were [dropped](#) after a federal parliamentary report found the ATO had conducted a 'superficial' investigation into his public interest disclosure.

However, if found guilty of each of the alleged offences — including using a listening device to 'overhear, record, monitor or listen' to a private conversation, recording another person's tax file number and disclosing protected information — Boyle could still face a maximum sentence, which means he could spend the rest of his life in jail. His trial is due to start in September 2024.



PASSAGE OF RESTRICTIVE PROTEST LAWS

There are serious concerns about the increasing number of restrictive laws related to protests, which vary from state to state.

[New regulations](#) (the Crown Lands Management Regulation 2018) came into effect in New South Wales (NSW) in July 2018 giving low-ranking officials broad powers to disperse or ban protests, meetings, rallies and gatherings on any state-owned land.

In October 2019, new anti-protest laws were [pushed](#) through in Queensland that impose sentences of up to two years in prison for using 'lock-on' devices, such as bicycle locks or handcuffs that protesters use to secure themselves in their place of protest, to disrupt transport or hinder business. Under the Summary Offences and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2019, police also have the power to search anyone they reasonably suspect is in possession of a lock-on device. In a [letter](#) to the Australian government, four UN human rights special rapporteurs outlined [concerns](#) about the law, stating that it is at odds with international obligations.



*Demonstration against the passage of the anti-protest law in NSW
(Photo Credit: CounterAct)*

In April 2022, the NSW parliament [passed a law](#), the Roads and Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, to punish protesters who disrupt economic activity. Penalties of two years in jail or fines of AU\$22,000 (approx. US\$15,598) could be enforced against people protesting on public roads, rail lines, tunnels, bridges and industrial estates. The laws apply around Port Botany, Port Kembla and the Port of Newcastle. In a victory for protesters, the NSW Supreme Court [overturned sections of the law](#) in December 2023, saying it was unconstitutional and had a 'chilling effect on public assemblies'.

Following the Labor party's 2022 election win, further laws were introduced in other states. In Victoria, a law to [crack down on protests at logging sites](#) was passed

on 4 August 2022. The [Sustainable Forests Timber Amendment \(Timber Harvesting Safety Zones\) Bill 2022](#) passed Victoria's upper house by 30 votes to five after Labor and the Liberal-National coalition joined forces. Under the law, people who may be peacefully attempting to prevent or disrupt native forest logging could face a maximum jail sentence of 12 months or fines of at least AU\$21,000 (approx. US\$13,395).

That same month, in a move human rights groups say erodes the right to protest, Tasmania [passed](#) the [Police Offences Amendment \(Workplace Protection\) Bill 2022](#). Under the new law a community member who obstructs access to a workplace as part of a protest could face 12 months in prison. A community member protesting against the destruction of old growth forests on a forestry site could face a penalty of at least AU\$13,000 (approx. US\$8,291) or two years in prison. An organisation supporting members of the community to protest could be fined at least AU\$45,000 (approx. US\$28,698). Leading Tasmanian and national civil society organisations labelled the bill as unnecessary, disproportionate and anti-democratic, and called for it to be repealed at the earliest opportunity.



Action against South Australia's anti-protest laws in Adelaide
(Photo Credit: Extinction Rebellion Australia)

In May 2023, South Australia's government [passed a law](#) to ramp up fines for disruptive protests. The law was rushed through the South Australian lower house of parliament without any public consultation, with both the Labor government and the Liberal opposition supporting the changes. The Summary Offences (Obstruction of Public Places) Bill 2023 (SA) could see people hit with three-month jail terms and [fines](#) of up to AU\$50,000 (approx. US\$33,650) for obstructing a public place. Previously, the maximum fines were AU\$750 (approx. US\$504). The [bill was proposed](#) just two days after the state's energy minister told fossil fuel industry representatives at a conference that the state was 'at your disposal'.

On 3 July 2024, a report by the Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC), '[Protest in Peril](#)', provided evidence of how states across Australia have introduced laws to limit the right to protest over the past 20 years. The report highlighted that 49 laws affecting protest had been introduced in federal, state and territory parliaments between 2003 and 2023, although all were not passed. The report found that NSW is the state of greatest concern, since it has enacted the highest number of anti-protest laws and these laws consistently targeted activists from the animal rights, climate and environmental movements.

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTESTERS TARGETED

The CIVICUS Monitor has also documented government harassment, arrest, detention and prosecution of climate and environmental activists and protesters. In some cases, the authorities have used excessive force in violation of international law and standards. In some instances, they have arrested legal observers.

In December 2022, climate activist Deanna 'Violet' Coco was [jailed](#) for 15 months with a non-parole period of eight months after staging a protest on the Sydney Harbour Bridge in April 2022. She blocked a single lane of traffic on the bridge to draw attention to the climate emergency. She was the first person jailed under the controversial NSW law passed in 2022. She spent [13 days in jail](#) before being released on bail.



Deanna 'Violet' Coco being arrested as part of a climate protest
(Photo Credit: Wikipedia)

At the time, Clément Voule, the UN's special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, [said](#): 'I am alarmed at a NSW court's prison term against climate protester Deanna Coco and refusal to grant bail until a March 2023 appeal hearing'. Over 220 organisations [condemned](#) the jail sentence. On 15 March 2023, the sentence was [quashed upon appeal](#). A judge threw it out, saying it was [based on false information](#) provided by police.



On 19 June 2022, police [raided a private property](#) in the Blue Mountains near Sydney, NSW where climate activist group Blockade Australia was camped, a week before planning to hold a protest in Sydney. The huge raid featured helicopters, the paramilitary Public Order and Riot, Raptor Squad and Operations Support Group, the Dog Unit, Police Rescue and plainclothes officers. According to the police, it was a 'preemptive operation' against 'planned unauthorised protest activity'. Statements by climate activists indicate that the police provoked a confrontation with a group of people on the property as a pretext for the massive police mobilisation and arrests.



Queensland climate activists outside Brisbane magistrates court, October 2023 (Photo Credit: The Guardian)

Around 40 people were [detained](#) during the raid and eight were charged with offences including conspiracy to obstruct a road. Several civil society organisations [expressed alarm](#) at the raid, saying 'the extensive covert surveillance and pre-emptive policing sets a disturbing precedent for protest rights and the raid also continues a troubling trend in the state of disproportionate crackdowns on the right to protest'.

Fourteen Extinction Rebellion climate protesters were charged for a protest inside the Queensland state parliament in November 2022. The protesters used a balcony that overlooks the Queensland parliamentary chamber to [unfurl banners](#) demanding an end to fossil fuel use, with some gluing themselves to handrails. The activists were later charged with disturbing the legislature under section 56 of Queensland's criminal code, which carries a maximum penalty of three years in prison.

In March 2023, [four people were arrested](#) for trespassing following a climate protest in NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet's office. The Rising Tide Australia group entered Perrottet's office and accused him of worsening climate change by approving new coal and gas projects. In April 2023, police [arrested](#) dozens of climate activists linked to Rising Tide, with at least two charged for malicious damage, after protesters scaled a train bound for the Port of Newcastle and began shovelling coal out of its wagons.



Blockade at the Newcastle port, November 2023 (Photo Credit: Twitter/@GreenLeftOnline)

In November 2023, NSW police [charged over 100 people](#) in Newcastle after protesters blocked a major coal port. An estimated 3,000 people from across Australia took part in the 30-hour weekend blockade. Groups of protesters took turns paddling out into Port of Newcastle's shipping lane to maintain a 30-hour blockade, with hundreds paddling on kayaks, pontoons and surfboards. Dozens of protesters [remained in the water](#) following the protest cut-off point, which triggered the arrests. According to the NSW Council of Civil Liberties, legal observers were also arrested at the protest.

In December 2023, police [arrested and fined 72](#) climate activists AU\$385 (approx. US\$258) each for blocking a Melbourne Central Business District (CBD) intersection. The action was held by Extinction Rebellion activists to call on the federal government to cut carbon emissions.



On 20 February 2024, police [arrested](#) climate activists protesting against Woodside Energy's Browse gas project outside the company's Perth headquarters. They said that the project in the offshore Browse Basin could endanger marine life and contribute to the release of billions of tonnes of greenhouse gases. Dozens of activists gathered holding placards and flags, blocking traffic outside the Woodside building. Police carried protesters off the road towards police vehicles.

[Two environmental activists were jailed](#) on 5 March 2024 for causing major traffic disruptions in Melbourne, after they used a rental truck to block the West Gate Bridge. Extinction Rebellion members Deanna 'Violet' Coco and Bradley Homewood were each ordered to spend 21 days in prison after pleading guilty to charges of public nuisance and intentionally obstructing police.

On 8 July 2024, Laura Davy, a Blockade Australia climate protester who secured herself to a piece of machinery during a climate protest at a Newcastle coal terminal, was [sentenced](#) to three months in prison. She also received an AU\$1,100 (approx. US\$744) fine for entering enclosed non-agricultural lands. Around 30 others [arrested](#) at the protest were given fines.

CRACKDOWN ON PROTESTS OVER GAZA

Since the conflict in Gaza began in October 2023, people have held protests in Australia to call for a ceasefire and accountability for human rights violations, among other concerns. Some of these protests have been met with restrictions and arrests.



Pro-Palestinian demonstrators gather during a protest in Sydney, October 2023 (Photo Credit: Roni Bintang/Getty Images)

On 2 October 2023, the authorities said it would [prevent marches](#) proceeding in NSW. Police also rejected an application to hold a protest in Sydney on 15 October 2023 on the grounds it was submitted with less than a week's notice. The protest, initially planned as a march through the city, then became a [static rally](#) in Hyde Park. The police also said they would use 'extraordinary powers' under Part 6A of the Law Enforcement (Power and Responsibilities) Act 2002 (NSW) to search protesters without reason and arrest and charge people who refused to identify themselves.

The HRLC [condemned](#) the NSW Police Minister and NSW police for refusing to allow the protest to go ahead as planned and said that 'requiring peaceful protesters to seek authorisation to protest, or face jail time and a AU\$22,000 [approx. US\$14,763] fine, is undemocratic and completely unjustified in Australia'. HRLC's acting legal director, Alice Drury, [said the response](#) from the police and government had been 'disproportionate' and set a 'very dangerous precedent'.

On 7 November 2023, police used pepper spray on activists during a [protest](#) on Gaza that blocked part of a busy intersection next to the Flemington racecourse ahead of the Melbourne Cup horserace. Police also arrested and detained four people. Videos show police dragging protesters away from the scene as they attempted to move traffic through the intersection.



NSW police [charged 23 activists](#) on 22 November 2023 after they gathered at Sydney's Port Botany to protest against the unloading of a vessel operated by ZIM, the Israeli-owned shipping company. Around 400 people [protested at the port](#), with children and older people among those in attendance. Protesters waved flags and carried signs calling for a boycott of ZIM and an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. They were charged with failing to comply with a direction to move on and damage or disruption to a major facility. Riot police and mounted officers forcibly tried to disperse the crowds. Protesters claimed the police were aggressive and appeared unconcerned about the potential for a crowd crush as a result of their actions.



Police attack pro-Palestinian protesters with pepper spray at Webb Dock, January 2024 (Photo Credit: WSWS)

The organisers, Palestine Justice Movement Sydney and Unionists for Palestine, along with civil rights groups, [condemned the police](#) for their response. The Australian Democracy Network, the HRLC and the NSW Council for Civil Liberties said they were 'deeply concerned' about the 'police repression of a peaceful protest' and [reported](#) that a protester was pinned down on the ground by three officers, with one officer pushing down on her back with his knee, and that several protesters were apprehended with a wrist hold which bent their hands forward to the point of making them scream in pain.

On 22 January 2024, police arrested at least 10 people at a protest at the Port of Melbourne. Activists [protested](#) at the Webb Dock, preventing a ZIM vessel unloading and forcing it to anchor in the bay. Nine were charged with trespassing and one with criminal damage. Volunteer legal observers from Melbourne Activist Legal Support (MALS) who were at the rally raised concerns about what they said was an unlawful use of pepper spray and the treatment of an activist in a wheelchair who they said was 'pushed over and dragged out of the chair'.



Pro-Palestine protest at Port Botany in Sydney, March 2024 (Photo Credit: Aman Kapoor/Solidarity Sydney)

Another Free Palestine march on 4 February 2024 in Melbourne CBD was also met with unnecessary force. MALS [expressed](#) concern about the violent and unsafe policing of protesters and legal observers. Legal observers witnessed and recorded multiple instances of police grabbing, shoving, pushing and using offensive language towards protesters. Many of these incidents appeared to be forceful, intimidating and dangerous. MALS legal observers also encountered obstruction by police when trying to identify and contact police forward commanders before the protest began. At least one person was arrested.

Nineteen people were arrested at a protest at Port Botany on 25 March 2024. Protesters, [including](#) members of the Maritime Union of Australia, were demonstrating against ZIM. The [union said](#) police moved in 15 minutes after the protest began and started to assault and arrest protesters.

On 4 July 2024, four protesters were [arrested](#) after scaling the roof of Parliament House to unfurl banners criticising the Gaza war. They were charged with trespassing.

In July 2024, Amnesty International raised concerns about [restrictions](#) on student protests about Gaza in universities, including instances of authorities banning students from protesting without advance notice and the use of surveillance technology to identify student protesters.



ARREST AND ILL-TREATMENT OF ACTIVISTS

There have also been concerns about the arrest and ill-treatment of activists by the police.

In February 2023, the NSW police undertook a [midnight arrest](#) and detention of a university student over a protest at the Reserve Bank of Australia against bank profits, the cost of housing and the Reserve Bank's



Protester and student activist Cherish Kuehlman, (Photo Credit: Twitter/ @DavidShoebridge)

monetary policy. Cherish Kuehlmann, a student at the University of NSW, was taken to a police station in Sydney and charged with one count of unlawful entry onto enclosed land. Kuehlmann said she was detained for around four hours before being released on strict bail conditions, including a ban on travelling to within two kilometres of Sydney's town hall. On 1 March 2023, a magistrate threw out what she described as ['inappropriate' bail conditions](#) imposed on Kuehlmann. The magistrate, Clare Farnan, told the court she 'didn't understand' why NSW police had imposed bail, given Kuehlmann had no prior convictions and was charged with an offence that carried a maximum fine of AU\$5,500 (approx. US\$3,680).

In the same month, Hamid Sotounzadeh [was seriously injured](#) while protesting outside the Iranian Embassy when he was arrested for failing to comply with a lawful direction. He had frequently protested at the embassy over the previous four months. Video from the incident shows an officer repeatedly pushing Sotounzadeh. Subsequent videos show him lying on the ground, seemingly unresponsive, and being cared for by friends and officers. He was also handcuffed. According to reports, Sotounzadeh suffered serious injuries, including three rib fractures, and had to be taken to hospital.

In June 2024, police were accused of using [unnecessary force](#) against protesters during a visit by Chinese premier Li Qiang to Parliament House. Human rights activist and journalist Vicky Xu was filmed being dragged away by officers. She claimed an officer placed a hand on her neck and that her finger was twisted during the incident.

RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Over the last year there have also been reports on restrictions and reprisals against people for exercising their right to freedom of expression.



Sacked radio host Antoinette Lattouf (Photo Credit; Twitter/@TheNewDailyAu)

Senior management at the publicly funded broadcaster ABC [summarily terminated](#) the contract of journalist Antoinette Lattouf on 19 December 2023, apparently because she had posted critical comments on Israel's attacks on people in Gaza. Among the posts was an [Instagram post](#) from Human Rights Watch that said 'The Israeli government is using starvation of civilians as a weapon of war in Gaza'.



Lattouf is a Lebanese-Australian social commentator, columnist and diversity advocate. She is a [contributor](#) to various outlets including the Guardian, and is the co-founder of Media Diversity Australia. Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance said: ‘The decision to sack Antoinette Lattouf from her role as an ABC radio presenter over sharing a social media post from a reputable human rights organisation is incredibly disturbing’.

In a decision published on 3 June 2024, the [Fair Work Commission](#) rejected the ABC’s argument that Lattouf’s employment was not actually terminated – because she was paid for the days stipulated on her contract – and found she was terminated by her managers during a meeting on 20 December 2024. The ruling paves the way for Lattouf to pursue an unlawful termination case, which has been filed at the Federal Court.

In February 2024, the State Library of Victoria [abruptly terminated](#) the contracts of four pro-Palestinian writers who were supposed to run workshops for it, with the library claiming it had [concerns](#) over ‘child and cultural safety’. The workshops covered fiction, nonfiction, playwriting and poetry. The four are award-winning poet Omar Sakr, young adult author Alison Evans, journalist Jinghua Qian and Ariel Slamet Ries, a comic artist and illustrator. All four have publicly opposed Israel’s war on Gaza.

Authors around the country rallied to publicly express their support for the four writers. In a [protest letter](#), authors said that ‘the library’s reasoning implies the institution, and the writers themselves, are dangerous or unsafe and is completely unacceptable for the writers involved’. They added that ‘we consider this defamatory and damaging’.

LAWS IMPACTING ON JOURNALISTS AND WHISTLEBLOWERS

Concerns have also been raised about laws that could be used against journalists and whistleblowers at risk.



Australian parliament in Canberra (Photo Credit: Wikipedia)

A report in October 2022 found that [journalists working for foreign-owned outlets](#) could face jail under Australia’s foreign interference laws for exposing defence force war crimes or misuse of surveillance powers.

According to a press freedom report published by the University of Queensland, the broadly worded laws ‘have the capacity to criminalise legitimate journalism’ and should be amended to protect public interest reporting. The report highlighted that current laws could be used to target journalists because the offences include ‘covert’ conduct on behalf of a foreign principal that might influence Australian politics or prejudice national

security. Recklessly doing so can result in a jail term of up to 15 years, while intentionally doing so carries a maximum sentence of 20 years.

Civil society groups said in May 2023 that a [complex web of secrecy laws](#) is undermining democracy and silencing whistleblowers, journalists and human rights defenders.

In a [joint submission](#) to a review of secrecy provisions by the Attorney-General’s Department, Griffith University’s Centre for Governance and Public Policy, the HRLC and Transparency International Australia have called on the Albanese government to swiftly repeal the worst excesses of Australian secrecy laws and strengthen safeguards for whistleblowing and public interest journalism.



The joint submission's recommendations include reform to minimise the application of secrecy laws to non-public servants, a reduction in penalties to ensure proportionality and robust exemptions for whistleblowers, human rights defenders and journalists.

The Alliance for Journalists' Freedom (AJF) has proposed a '[Media Freedom Act](#)'. The AJF argues this is needed because Australia doesn't have any constitutional protection for press freedom, and many national security laws limit journalists' ability to investigate the government and protect their sources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal and state governments of Australia should:

- Adopt a Human Rights Act at the federal level to ensure the protection of freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly in all jurisdictions that currently do not have such law.
- Overhaul Australia's whistleblowing laws, establish a whistleblower protection authority to oversee and enforce whistleblower protections and ensure stronger protections for whistleblowers who make disclosures to the media and members of parliament.
- Repeal all laws criminalising public interest reporting and provide civil society members, human rights defenders and journalists with a safe and secure environment to carry out their work.
- Overturn the conviction of war crimes whistleblower David McBride and drop all charges against tax office whistleblower Richard Boyle.
- Protect the right to protest in federal law and repeal or amend all anti-protest laws to ensure their provisions are consistent with international human rights law and standards guaranteeing the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Ensure state-level policing powers and responsibilities and laws and regulations include the responsibility to uphold and protect the right to peaceful protest, consistent with international human rights laws and standards.
- Drop charges against all activists and protesters, particularly climate and environmental activists and people protesting about Israel's war on Gaza, for peacefully exercising their fundamental freedoms and review their cases to prevent further harassment.
- Immediately and impartially investigate all instances of excessive force committed by the police in the context of protests.
- Ensure that protest observers are able to monitor police conduct during protests without fear of arrest, harassment or restrictions.
- Adopt best practices on freedom of peaceful assembly, as put forward by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.
- Ensure that people including journalists and writers are able to exercise their right to freedom of expression without facing harassment or reprisals.
- Pass a Media Freedom Act, as recommended by press freedom and civil society groups.
- Review all national security and secrecy laws so they are not used to create a chilling effect against journalists, whistleblowers and activists and ensure these laws are consistent with international human rights law and standards.