



**Public statement  
For immediate release**

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**NGO Bill: NGOs welcome a strong regulatory framework; warn NGO Bill should not be used to restrict civil society activities; call for strong consultation on implementation of Bill.**

13 May 2015 (Juba, South Sudan) NGOs would welcome a strong regulatory framework in South Sudan -- it would be much easier for NGOs to operate within a coherent and consistent legal environment. It's also important to note that the new Bill includes substantive changes that will make it easier for NGOs to continue serving the people of South Sudan. The NGO Forum is encouraged by the willingness to consult with civil society groups, including NGOs, and to take their feedback into consideration.

However, there are still significant concerns that certain provisions of the NGO Bill will not regulate NGO operations, but rather hinder their ability to serve South Sudanese people at a time when needs are escalating due to the ongoing conflict. It's also important to note that NGOs are not currently operating unregulated. NGOs operate under national laws as well as rules and regulations of individual Government bodies. NGOs also operate with a strong commitment to the international legal framework and principles that guide NGO operations around the world.

One of our key concerns has always been the effect this Bill will have on civil society. The work of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should not be seen as threatening or challenging to the government but rather supporting its growth and development. The future of South Sudan relies on a vibrant and free civil society. So to the extent that this bill will be used to restrict civil society activities rather than regulate them in a democratic manner, will remain highly concerned.

The NGO Bill also has enormous implications for the ongoing humanitarian response in South Sudan. If the Bill is implemented in a way that creates a more regressive environment, then this will have potentially catastrophic effects for the large amounts of the South Sudanese population that rely on NGOs to provide basic services and life saving aid.

NGOs are already under mounting administrative pressure and often subject to arbitrary enforcement of rules and regulations. There are increasing incidents of harassment and violence against NGOs. At the same time, the conflict rages on, food insecurity is increasing and NGOs find themselves faced with the daunting task of caring for the people of South Sudan under increasingly difficult circumstances. If the Bill makes getting assistance to people harder rather than easier, it could cost lives at a time of tremendous suffering for South Sudanese communities.

Going forward, it will be essential for NGOs to be involved in the implementation of the Bill. As policies and procedures are developed by Government, it must be assured that this Bill is not used against the very public it is meant to serve. The Bill gives broad powers to the RRC to develop rules and regulations. These rules and regulations can make the difference between an environment that facilitates civil society – including NGO activities – and one that inhibits their activities.

While NGOs are in favour of better regulation in principle – they sincerely hope that the implementation of the Bill will serve the common objective of nurturing a strong civil society and getting assistance to those that need it most.

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