The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association (UNSRAA)

The UNSRAA outlines the importance of the promotion and protection of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association (FoAA) in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Special Rapporteur defines Freedom of Peaceful Assembly as the right to collectively express opinions by organizing public demonstrations and assemblies in order to attract the attention of government, the media and the public at large.

The Special Rapporteur defines Freedom of Association as any group of individuals or any legal entities brought together in order to collectively act, express, promote, pursue or defend a field of common interests. Associations can include non-governmental organization, civil society organisations, clubs, cooperatives, religious associations, political parties, trade unions, foundations and online associations.

The UNSRA states the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms strengthens social cohesion and democratic governance leading to more inclusive development, ensure increased transparency and accountability in the implementation of development and also provide individuals with a sense of agency and self-determination where they are fully engaged in decision making.


Importance of FoAA
The UNSRA states identified eight global trends in relation to increasing limitations on the ability to exercise the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association:
1. the use of legislation to suppress the exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly and of association;
2. the excessive use of force to counter peaceful protest;

Sustainable Development Goal 16:
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Limitations to FoAA
The UNSRAA emphasizes the importance of the exercise of the rights to freedom of association and freedom of assembly in facilitating public participation and civic activity. These freedoms are key for ensuring the government and other institutions are held accountable.

The Digital Era: The enjoyment of exercising the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly in the digital era

The UNSRAA identified the enjoyment of the rights to FoAA face new opportunities and challenges in the digital age. The UNSRAA emphasizes the responsibility of states to protect the rights to FoAA online as well as offline according to international human rights standards.

"States have used technology to silence, surveil, and harass dissidents, political opposition, human rights defenders, activists and protestor, and to manipulate public opinion"

Fake News Legislation and FoAA

The UNSRAA identified the implications of Fake News Legislations to the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms online:

1. Prohibit the sharing of videos and photos of police abuse against protestors
2. Prohibit the dissemination of arrangements for assemblies
3. Impede online political campaigns;
4. Civil Society Organizations face being shut down for spreading prohibited content.