Oral Statement
Adoption of the UPR report of Republic of Korea
15 March 2018
Delivered by Jaehyung Choi

Thank you, Mr President.

CIVICUS applauds the government of the Republic of Korea for its continued support and engagement in the UPR process. While recognising the new administration's commitment to ensuring participation in political and public affairs, we remain concerned that such principles are not fully endorsed in its UPR adoption today.

We deeply regret the government's decision not to accept a number of recommendations to promote and protect the rights essential to civic space. Specifically, the state's refusal to accept recommendations to replace criminal defamation and libel laws with civil ones or amend the National Security Law to ensure that it is not used arbitrarily to harass and restrict the rights to freedom of expression, reflect a willful denial of the incongruity of these laws with international standards.

As explored in our UPR submission, the authorities have discriminatorily applied restrictive legislation, including the National Security Law to silence dissenting voices and critics of the government. [1] The law's overbroad provisions, which proscribe "Praising or propagating an anti-state organization," or "Circulating false facts that threaten confusion of social order while a member of an anti–state organization" have frequently been used to stamp out online and offline expression perceived to be sympathetic to North Korea. Recently, on 5 January 2017, Lee Jin-young, owner of Labor Books, an online library, was arrested for violating the National Security Law after disseminating publications that purportedly support "anti-government organizations."

We urge the government to consult with civil society in the implementation of the UPR recommendations in order to ensure that the National Security Law is in line with best practices and international standards in the area of freedom of expression. We thank you.

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[1] Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 29 October 1987.
http://korea.assembly.go.kr/res/low_01_read.jsp?boardid=1000000035