Dear Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel,

As you prepare for the G20 Summit under your presidency, we urgently want to alert you to the dire reality of many civil society actors in the G20 member states and ask you to place this concern at the heart of the G20 Summit agenda.

According to the CIVICUS Monitor all G20 member states, except for Germany, narrow the space for civil society or even repress civil society violently. Peaceful and democratic civil society organisations – from grassroots movements to large international civil society organisations – and their staff face undue vilification, threats, arrests, frozen bank accounts, revoked licenses, blocked websites, coerced registrations with government bodies, and the closure of their offices. Civil society activists have to fear for their lives, with many disappearing and becoming victims of murder.

The perpetuation of this negative trend for civil society actors over the last years causes serious concern for civil society, enlightened governments, farsighted business, philanthropy and the media. As the global community is confronted with persistent poverty, growing inequality, violent extremism, and climate change, we are in dire need of the active engagement of civil society.

The G20 are dependent on peaceful organized civil society if they want to tackle the challenges you laid out and address the priorities you set out for this year’s G20 agenda: Organised Civil society plays an important role in communicating the needs of the people to the government and thus ensuring the usefulness and sustainability of political and economic measures. Civil society actors expose corruption and human rights violations, and hold the state accountable – all of which are prerequisites for a just and peaceful society. Moreover, the active engagement of people in their societies contributes to alleviating poverty, protecting the environment, achieving gender equality and countering the dangers of radicalisation and violence by working with the marginalised and disenfranchised. Repressing democratic civil society makes for an unstable economic and political environment; and without the active and unrestrained engagement of people around the globe, the transition towards a just, equitable, and sustainable world as laid down in the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement will not be possible.

During the past year, the International Civil Society Centre facilitated a global civil society process which created a Civic Charter. The Civic Charter contains national governments’ obligations to secure civic rights for all people, as enshrined in UN conventions and international law. We expect all governments world-wide to fully implement the Civic Charter.

As the host of this year’s G20 Summit, we ask you to remain true to the respect we know you hold for civil society: please make sure that the topic “Civil Society Participation” features prominently on the G20 Agenda and implore your fellow G20 leaders to guarantee all people the right to fully participate in shaping their societies.

Sincerely,
Burkhard Gnärig, Executive Director

Barbara Unmüßig, President

International Civil Society Centre

Jonathan Duffy, President

Adriano Campolina, CEO

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, Chairperson

Wolfgang Jamann, Secretary General/CEO

ActionAid

Adventist Development and Relief Agency

BRAC