

**Motion proposed by the
Southeast Asia DC Delegate Group
together with Delegate Groups**

**Africa
Presidium
Executive Board
German Volunteer Group
Latin America**

To the Delegates' Conference 2023

We propose that from 2023 to 2028
terre des hommes (tdh) Germany will work on the issue of

**“Realizing child rights through the building of democratic societies”
As FOCAL THEME**

In Recognition of the
importance of safe and enabling democratic spaces as a basic condition
in fulfilling children and human rights.

Through this focal theme, we want to learn about models on citizenship and democracy education for children and youth that are culture- and context-based so that tdh Germany and project partners gain competence in developing project work approaches that integrate this theme within and beyond programme work. The successful implementation of initiatives arising from the implementation of this Focal Theme shall be the partners' and tdh Germany's contribution in preserving spaces for rights-based actions and supporting the work of active children, youth and adult citizens in fulfilling child rights.

Relevant milestones are:

1. **Developed programme framework on citizenship for children.** Most projects currently or supported in the past revolve around supporting children and youth actions around and limited to specific child rights issues. Most target older children and youth. A programme framework will be developed on how to integrate citizenship education that goes beyond a supported project and addressing the general issue of citizen participation of children.
2. **Localized reflection-action for citizenship building.** The first step is the collection of literature and researches presenting case studies on challenges faced by specific programme countries and how issues of populism, moral and nationalism politics, disinformation, electoral disenfranchisement, among others are being tackled. A participatory action research will be designed by and for children and youth to investigate prevailing perspectives about democracy and citizenship; their views on what intersecting factors

hinder their participation, and solutions to address inequalities. Research findings are used to frame local, national, regional (and global) actions impacting on structural inequalities and power imbalances that interfere and hinder with meaningful participation and citizenship-building of marginalized groups.

- 3. Learning exchange on models of civic education, democratization process and hope-based narratives in rights education.** Human rights education approaches are reviewed to emphasize the universality of rights. Capacities in undertaking human rights advocacy are strengthened using strategies that bring together rather than divide communities to promote society building as a common project; and to counter narratives that pits one group against another.
- 4. Innovation projects on citizenship and democracy.** Projects that aim to develop effective approaches that specifically contribute to the strengthening of peoples' (especially children and youth) capacities on citizenship, such as civic and political education that promote critical thinking and liberal learning and that is contextualized to their respective country's situation; and digital literacy/ digital citizenship (in relation to disinformation). These include the practical application of models for collective citizenship actions through grassroots, national and local associations or councils/assemblies; voter's registration and education and use of the electoral process as a venue for advocacy. Innovative approaches are developed to increase recognition of children's citizenship and their inherent right to participate in society as active citizens through passage of guidelines or laws on children's participation/ empowerment is possible. These projects should specifically focus on children and youth who are marginalized, excluded, and disenfranchised by virtue of their socio-economic class, ethnicity, gender, religion, among others.
- 5. Advocacy for accountability and building an enabling environment for citizen rights.** Partners and tdh engage and influence national and international human rights mechanisms for the establishment of safe and enabling environment for demanding the full implementation and accountability for human rights and children's rights. Advocacy aims passage of policies and legally binding guidelines promoting a culture of respectful discourse and conversation; and zero tolerance for political violence and protection of human and child rights defenders, including children and youth themselves.

BACKGROUND AND RELEVANCE

As a motion emanating from Southeast Asia, a programme region of tdh Germany, that is composed of seven countries that share similar histories of authoritarianism, as manifested by one-party political systems and governments that have been documented to repress civil and political rights. According to the Freedom House Report (2021)¹, five out of the seven countries are rated „not free“ in relation to people's access to political rights and civil liberties. Shrinking democratic spaces is therefore a reality in most SEA countries, especially those under military rule. The fact that the Philippines- a country of great risks to climate change impacts- has one of the highest incidents of political killings of environmental activists also exemplifies the importance of safe spaces. Disinformation, as tool for undermining democratic processes (such

as elections) and institutions, is increasingly used. Cultural norms that puts value on obedience to (and fear of) authority hinder the development of collective attitudes that promote active citizenship.

Based on consultations with other DC Delegate Groups, it is recognized that the shrinking democratic spaces, criminalization of citizen activism, and rising populism are issues that cut across all programme countries of tdh; whether in the North (Europe) or in the South. This proposed focal theme embodies the recognition that it has even more so become necessary to re-affirm the aspiration and value that underpins the goal of a shared “Earth of Humanity”.

As proponents of this focal theme, we reiterate the view that efforts aimed at the realization of children’s rights cannot be separated from citizen’s struggle for a just and free society and for development that is universal, accessible and beneficial for all. We further believe that for child rights activism to be truly impactful and meaningful, the work should address root causes which are directly linked with injustices deeply ingrained in institutions and structures in society. The multiple layered socio-political and economic shifts that emerged during and after the pandemic highlights the fact that deteriorating democracies have long-arching impacts on children’s rights. This is evident in the following:

Rise of authoritarian governments in many countries in the South, but also in the North. Parallel to this is the increase in movements that protect the status quo, setting aside the defense of human rights.

Cultural war against “wokeness.” In several countries, “wokeness” and values and actions that promote inclusion, fulfilment of rights of marginalized groups are attacked as unimportant.

Diminishing spaces for children and youth’s participation and active citizenship. Children have increasingly experienced threats to their civil liberties, e.g., limited exercise of freedom of expression online and offline, association, and assembly.

Increasing social, political, and legal injustice and exclusion and discrimination for certain groups of children. Children were not spared from injustices and violence arising from the State’s abuse of their monopoly of power through direct violence or weaponization of the legal mechanisms. This could be clearly seen for example in how children and their families were directly targeted in the war on drugs in the Philippines; and the red-tagging and political attacks against activists not only in Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia) but also in South Asia (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan) and Latin America (Colombia, Brazil).

Distortion of facts through widespread misinformation, disinformation, and historical revisionism. Online and offline, children and young people are bombarded with different and often conflicting versions of truths, often interpreted as facts. This compromises their well-being by increasing anxiety, damaging self-esteem, skewing their world views, and creating distrust to democracy itself. Children, as active users of digital media, unwittingly become spreaders of misleading content among their peers and family members.

End//