To:  
President Jim Yong Kim, World Bank  
Managing Director Christine Lagarde, IMF

CC:  
Fionna Douglas, Acting Vice President, World Bank Group External and Corporate Relations  
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Jill Wilkins, Manager, Global Engagement in External Affairs, World Bank  
Gerry Rice, Director, Communications Department, IMF

via email

Protecting the voices of civil society at the World Bank and IMF meetings

Dear President Kim and Managing Director Lagarde,

We write to you as longstanding CSO participants in the World Bank- and IMF-hosted CSO Forum, held bi-annually at the spring and annual meetings. We wish to express our concern over recent changes to the CSO Forum. The Forum provides legitimacy to the Bank and Fund; however, the changes which have recently been imposed with insufficient consultation or consideration have diminished the Forum’s independence and compromised its role enabling meaningful CSO engagement with the Bank and Fund.

Civil society’s freedom to determine the issues addressed through Forum events has been undermined. Bank and Fund staff organizing the Forum vet and alter event proposals, diminishing the space for constructive engagement and potentially stifling criticism. This has been justified by space constraints; however Bank and Fund events at the Forum are proliferating. These often appear aimed at positive public relations rather than open discussion.

Moreover, and partly due to inadequate consultation, the chaotic implementation of recent changes has led CSOs to cancel events and even attendance at the 2015 spring and annual meetings due to uncertainty to secure travel visas and the financial implications of delayed decisions. This is especially problematic for Southern-based CSOs’ participation or when facilitating the attendance of community representatives affected by the Bank or Fund’s work.

The public accountability of the Bank and Fund has been reduced due by the Forum’s relegation to a location outside of the secure cordon when meetings are held in Washington DC. Consequently, media accredited to participate in the spring and annual meetings lack unaccompanied access to the Forum and consequently participation by journalists, staff and member state officials has dramatically declined. Furthermore, the Forum’s schedule of events is not easily visible on the Bank and Fund’s official meetings websites, where prominence is instead given exclusively to official Bank and Fund seminars.

CSOs wish to use the Forum constructively as a mechanism to publicly engage with the Bank and Fund, as a platform to highlight concerns and as a mirror to flag limitations in existing accountability mechanisms. CSOs, as the Bank and Fund have both recognised, play a crucial role in improving policy by revealing limitations in policy design or implementation and highlighting impacts upon stakeholders and intended beneficiaries. The Forum is a unique opportunity to do so when Bank and
Fund staff, management, governors and member state officials, as well as media, gather.

The CSO Forum must reflect the principles of autonomy, visibility and participation. To achieve those principles, we recommend:

1) A regular, and fully open consultation mechanism for CSO Forum participants to engage with the Bank and Fund over the Forum’s organisation;
2) Development of jointly-agreed guidelines for events’ inclusion in the Forum, via the regular and ongoing consultation mechanism;
3) Forum location in the main space dedicated to the meetings where all accredited persons can circulate;
4) Integration of CSO Forum and official Bank and Fund seminars’ schedules on Bank and Fund spring/annual meetings websites;
5) CSO autonomy over the proposal and theme of events to be held at the Forum, and a return to the first-come, first-served event booking system with clear deadlines set well in advance to maximise participation and inclusion of international civil society;

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We welcome the opportunity to work together toward improving the Annual and Spring Meetings for the benefit of all participants and for those directly affected by the institutions.

**Signatories**

ActionAid
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Arab NGO Network for Development, ANND
Balkan Green Foundation
Bank Information Center
Both Ends
Bretton Woods Project
Centre national de coopération au développement CNCD-11.11.11
Debt and Development Coalition Ireland
Debt Justice Norway, SLUG
Derecho Ambiente y Recursos Naturales DAR
Eurodad
Forest Peoples Programme
Friends of the Earth United States
Heinrich Boell Stiftung
International Planned Parenthood Federation, IPPF
International Trade Union Confederation, ITUC
KOSID
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