



The closing space for civil society and implications for environmental actors

# THE CLOSING SPACE: is it really a new phenomenon?



# KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Proliferation of laws to curtail freedom of assembly, expression and association
- Pace and spread
- Global and viral

# DEFAMATION



# DRIVERS

- Suspicion of western agendas on democracy and human rights
- Fear of people power + resisting accountability
- NGOs viewed as the political opposition
- Counter terrorism laws post 9/11
- Development agenda

# CASE STUDY 1: INDIA

## **The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 2010:**

- Prohibits designated groups (farmers; students, workers, and Dalits) from receiving foreign funds
- Defines groups who utilize common tools of protest and action such as rallies, road blocks, jail fills and surrounding police stations as political and illegible for FCRA status

# INDIA



# CASE STUDY 2: CANADA



- Excerpt from Canadian Counter Terrorism Strategy 2012:
- *“Although not of the same scope and scale faced by other countries,” [the report said](#), “low-level violence by domestic issue-based groups remains a reality in Canada. Such extremism tends to be based on grievances—real or perceived—revolving around the promotion of various causes such as animal rights, white supremacy, environmentalism and anti-capitalism.”*  
The document discussed environmentalists, who have never harmed anyone, alongside the Oklahoma City bombing and the 2011 Norway massacre as examples of “domestic issue-based extremism.”



# CASE STUDY 3: RUSSIA

## RUSSIA'S FOREIGN AGENT LAW



any non-profit organisation engaged in 'political activities' and receiving **foreign money** is considered as a 'foreign agent'



this term has a strong association with Cold War era **espionage**



'foreign agent' status must be **registered**, implies special accounting **records and checks**, and must be stated in all published **media or online materials**

failure to follow this regulation entails

**fin**es from \$100 to \$15,000



more than **1000** organisation have faced **inspections and raids** in relation to this law

This law is part of a wider strategy aimed at restricting freedom of expression and association and limiting, discrediting and delegitimising the work of human rights defenders all over the country

Human rights defenders = everyday heroes

**f** FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

# RUSSIA

## The Russian media on Kutepova:

- On 1 June 2015, another film about Kutepova was aired on the Yekaterinburg TV channel Rezonans. The film included an interview with Alexander Kalinin, then-mayor of Ozyorsk and a former head of the local Federal Security Bureau.
- *“She [Kutepova] still wants to close the plant and open the [closed] town. Her goals strangely correspond to the wishes of western countries and competitors,”* he said in the interview. *“Without a doubt, her actions are a threat,”* Kalinin added.

## Nadzeda Kutepova on the Russian media attacks:

- ***“We make a strange nest of spies,” “Our staff of four is made up of single mothers and a pensioner, who became an invalid after working on the Chernobyl clean up. I can’t think of a less likely fifth column.”***

# QUESTIONS PART 1

- Do you recognize your experience in this phenomenon?
- If so can you share how it's affecting you and your ability to do your work?
- What do you believe are the root causes behind the closing space you or other environmental actors are experiencing?
- What gaps are there in our understanding of how the space for environmental actors to operate is under attack?

# STRATEGIES AHEAD

- Development agenda
- Unlikely allies: Relationships with corporations
- Challenging the unintended impact of counter terrorism laws
- Strengthening and diversifying counter-narratives
- Building and strengthening alliances against the closing space
- Strengthening resilience

## QUESTIONS PART 2

- What strategies, and tools are you using or what alliances could be developed to respond to physical, administrative or smear attacks?
- Does the impact of the closing space on environmental actors – and especially attacks on freedom of association - require a different kind response to how you normally engage in advocacy and alliance building?
- Are there concrete steps you could agree to take at this conference as a first step?