

BRICS CIVIL FORUM STATEMENT 2020

Appeal to the BRICS Leaders

September 25, 2020

Moscow, Russia

We the participants to the BRICS Civil Forum highly appreciate the decision of the BRICS leaders to maintain a permanent consultative process with representatives of civil society of the BRICS member states and to continue holding the annual BRICS Civil Forum as an event included in the official calendar of the BRICS chairmanship.

We the representatives of the civil society of the BRICS countries stand for the peaceful progressive development of our countries, for the recognition of the central role of the UN in international development, and for the consolidation of BRICS positions on key issues on the international agenda.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proved that civil society participation becomes critically important in enabling states to quickly and effectively address new challenges. In the BRICS countries CSOs, NGOs and individual activists have been highly engaged in programmes to help the most vulnerable groups, in assisting medical volunteers to support patients and health workers in hospitals, in research and testing of vaccines and in supporting citizens in other countries who remained abroad during the border closure. Non-profit organisations, media and scientists participated in information and prevention campaigns and timely information notification. Under the most challenging conditions, these combined efforts of the civil society helped to slow down the spread of the virus in the BRICS countries and significantly consolidate government measures to combat the pandemic and its consequences.

In 2020, we dedicated the work of the Civil Forum to the key topics of BRICS development in the light of the new challenges of the post-COVID era. These topics include food security, healthcare, education and science, human capital development, labour legislation during digital transformation, sustainable development, climate change, agriculture, women's agenda, and the struggle to ensure the quality of information in the era of fake news and post-truth.

Our work resulted in a compendium of recommendations that we developed as part of working groups following online meetings and seminars as well as during discussions on the sidelines of the BRICS Civil Forum on September 23-25, 2020 in Moscow. Below we list our proposals and call upon the leaders of the BRICS countries to pay special attention to them.

Regarding Food and Healthcare

- Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, the BRICS countries should take all necessary measures to ensure universal, equal, affordable and timely access to all effective medicines, diagnostics, vaccines and health technologies needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic, including IP-related measures, fast-track

registration mechanisms, cooperation on clinical trials and telemedicine development;

- The BRICS governments should revise the existing regulatory framework in the field of intellectual property and access to treatment to provide for faster, more flexible and transparent mechanisms of facilitating access to treatment and care, broadening the mandate of ministries of healthcare and other relevant authorities in this field; including by creating fast-track pathways for compulsory licenses. The BRICS countries should increase their public R&D investments into major public health needs and impose public interest conditions to these funds such as transparency requirements, accessibility and affordability clauses and non-exclusive licenses for exploitation of end-result products, stipulating that there should be no monopolies or exclusivities attached to them;
- Famine relief has been recognized as the priority task of international economic cooperation among the states. It has been included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development under the second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Eradication of hunger requires political action with a multilateral approach. Depending on the specific conditions in a particular BRICS country, requirements may vary from greater agricultural productivity and secured market access to investing in family farming, small-scale fisheries, and forestry. It is crucial to promote proper land use and natural resource management in order to address the issues of nutrition using social security mechanisms, to eliminate gender inequalities, improve monitoring and coordination mechanisms in the area of food security and nutrition, and invest in education, health, water supply, and sanitation. As country-level social systems become more efficient, sustainable, and nutritionally responsive, government promises to eradicate hunger within the lifetime of this generation can be fulfilled.

Regarding Education and Science

- The BRICS governments should connect fragmented finance support initiatives, using existing BRICS financial infrastructure to establish NDB-based BRICS Research and Development Fund with the main aim to support applied innovative research. The Fund is to become an organizer of grant competition for research projects as well as startups in the natural sciences, medicine and healthcare, ecology, sustainable development, financial security, digitalization, etc.;
- The BRICS countries should set up BRICS Sci-Ed Award as an annual honorary prize for the advanced researchers in several categories grouped in scientific strands (natural science, humanitarian studies, ICT).

Regarding Economic Development in the Digital Era

- To help the economy reap the benefits of digital technology and at the same time protect intellectual property and ensure cybersecurity in BRICS countries, we propose: to initiate the harmonization of digital platforms created in the member countries and begin to work on a common approach to cybersecurity;

- The competitiveness of the BRICS countries will be facilitated by the strengthening of cooperation in the creation and implementation of startups in the fields of IT, high technologies and the development of digital applications and solutions for traditional sectors of the economy;
- The BRICS countries could jointly develop the principles of safe tourism and contribute to the reorientation of world tourist flows to the benefit of their countries.
- It is necessary to exchange experience in the use of various digital financing technologies by non-profit organizations of the BRICS countries. It is proposed to start work on the creation of a joint grant fund for the development of joint civil initiatives. Expand the activities of national crowdfunding platforms to all BRICS countries.

Regarding Information Strategies and Society

- In today's post-truth environment, education plays a significant role for BRICS States in creating societies prepared for the increasing advance of disinformation. Critical thinking courses, modules, and extra curricular classes should be integrated into the joint educational projects, as well as in national school educational programs. It is crucial to teach teenagers and students – young members of society – not only to distinguish between facts and personal views, high- and low-quality sources of information, educate to question information that comes intensively from various media. Students should be trained hard skills in using relevant fact-checking tools to promptly verify the truth in a rapidly changing information space. The development of critical thinking is extremely important in the context of civil responsibility in the modern digitalized world, where everyone can equally become a distributor, recipient or debunker of fake news.

Environment, Climate and Energy

Regarding recovery programs and climate policy:

- The global crisis caused by the pandemic, followed by a lockdown, not only demonstrated the possible consequences of large-scale changes in connection with potential catastrophic climate change, but also provided national governments, including the BRICS countries, with a unique opportunity to achieve a fundamental turning point in solving the problem of climate change and other environmental problems arising from the burning of fossil fuels. To use this opportunity BRICS country at the national level:
- to enhance the NDC targets with a view to entering the trajectory of reducing greenhouse emissions in accordance with the goals of the Paris Agreement;
- to maintain and increase government spending and investments on green infrastructures to stimulate a green recovery, especially in decentralized Renewable Energy and connected with support vulnerable social groups (women, children etc.).

Regarding biodiversity conservation, protection and conservation of natural ecosystems: BRICS countries should respond to global climate change and environmental protection via:

- adopting national plans for the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems in order to stop deforestation and degradation and to introduce digital technologies, GIS and RS monitoring technologies to assess the state of degrading;
- significant increase of the resources allocated to fight forest fires;
- renouncing projects affecting protected and valuable natural areas, including World Heritage Sites and UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, wetlands of international importance;
- preparing and proposing an international initiative on behalf of the BRICS countries to crack down illegal wild animal trade within and among BRICS countries, through introducing national bans, effectively implementing existing national and international laws, and organizing joint actions to combat illegal wildlife trade, primarily mammals and birds, taking into account the risks of transmission of zoonotic (animal-specific) diseases, in order to conserve biodiversity and reduce the risk of pandemics.

Sustainable Cities and Rural Development

- Enhance technical and financial support for urban and rural territories, willing to develop projects, build capacity, generate businesses, and pass regulation/legislation on sustainable urban and rural planning, spatially integrated solutions, and intelligent manufacturing. For example, by working with mayors in the BRICS countries on a pipeline of projects to support local sustainability strategies;
- These Sustainable Cities and Rural Development projects could be considered for funding by the New Development Bank as part of a technology transfer facility to be created by the bank. This facility could be the bedrock of the BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology Cooperation Platform for Innovation, signed in 2019.

Women and Girls

- The BRICS governments should urgently ensure equal representation of women at all levels of decision making in national and international political and economic bodies both in public and private sectors. Gender must be central to COVID 19 Pandemic recovery planning to address its' socio-economic impact;
- Create an international (BRICS) «Crises Management Group» which will include not less than 50% of women and will coordinate the actions of the government bodies addressing the crisis;
- Create councils of women observers (or advisors) within the BRICS countries' defense institutions or include women into national security council meetings;
- Introduce mandatory review of laws for gender equity, especially as regards labor, employment and power dynamics;
- Establish within the New Development Bank (NDB) a digital empowerment fund with innovative schemes. One such example is of national tech-accelerators to catalyze linkages between women producers/farmers and women-led tech start-ups;

- Include Women Right Organizations (WROs) in developing national mechanisms to monitor women's rights violations and guarantee efficient judicial and pre-judicial procedures to protect women from violence and violations of their rights;
- Create a global web platform 'Social Women Adjust Networking' (SWAN) for the BRICS member countries, financed by the NDB, for international employment.

People-to-People Exchanges

- Recognition of the relevance to create the BRICS NGO Association to unite non-governmental organizations within the Alliance with the aim to strengthen the role of public diplomacy in the cultural track of the «five», acquire new points of interaction, deepen and expand the five-sided cooperation of NGOs basing on the clear organization, well-structured coordination of the Association's activities and the formation of a unified base of BRICS NGOs;
- Creative industries are a key for cultural diplomacy. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge creative industries as a growth point and a basis for cultural cooperation and launch a festival devoted to creative industries to offer regular support to creative industries and companies/organizations/people involved in it, to promote knowledge and experience exchanges between the countries;
- Development of cooperation and mutual assistance between the BRICS countries in World Heritage sites preservation, management and protection, cultural property restoration, attribution and examination, as well as by creating a single portal for the experience exchange in the field of education and advanced training for specialists from BRICS countries;
- Development of a unified approach to the legal protection of temporarily abroad cultural property for cultural, educational and research purposes by strengthening the efficiency of the system of State guarantees for the safety and integrity of cultural and historical values transferred between the BRICS state cultural institutions for exposition, scientific or restoration purposes;
- Recognition of the importance and promptness of creation of the BRICS NGO Support Fund to provide grants for multilateral NGO projects and civil initiatives with financial support from the BRICS countries governments on the basis of the BRICS New Development Bank within the framework of multilateral cultural cooperation of the «five».