

How to create an enabling environment for civil society in the UK

Policy ideas and project summary

February 2026

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About Bond

Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development. We connect and champion a diverse network of over 350 civil society organisations to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice. We work to influence governments and policymakers, develop the skills of people in the sector, build organisational capacity and share expertise.

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Introduction

Civic space in the UK has declined dramatically in recent years as successive governments have eroded protest rights and placed stricter limits on other forms of activism and campaigning. Civil society has spoken out against the restrictions, attempting to halt and ultimately reverse them. But are there other ways to improve our civic space so that it is more open and enabling in the future? This was the question we asked ourselves and others from across civil society after the CIVICUS Monitor downgraded the UK to “obstructed” from “narrowed” in 2023, placing the country in the same category as Hungary.¹

This discussion paper outlines how we explored this question with others from across UK civil society over the past two years and presents the ideas that we surfaced collectively.

In summary, these ideas are:

1. **Expand the list of charitable purposes to include promotion of democratic values and processes.** This would help to clarify which activities are charitable, and it would enable organisations that work on democracy promotion to register as charities and enjoy the advantages associated with this status, while also ensuring these organisations comply with charity law.
2. **Enable charities to engage exclusively in political campaigning or activity for as long as they need to deliver their charitable purpose.** This would permit charities to devote more resources to advocating for a change in law or policy for a longer period, if they believe this is the best way to deliver their charitable objects² and they remain independent of political parties and candidates.
3. **Exempt registered charities from the non-party campaigning rules.** Then organisations that are already required by law to be independent of political parties and candidates would not be deterred from engaging in public campaigning on the issues that matter to them in the year ahead of an election.
4. **Ensure the independence of the Charity Commission.** This can be done by making changes to the chair appointment process so that it is more clearly merit-based (similar to the judicial appointments process). This will prevent the commission from being politicised or being seen to be politicised, as it has in the past, and ensure that it is seen by charities and the wider public as an impartial and effective regulator.
5. **Remove restrictions that prevent organisations that receive government funding from speaking out.** This will help to improve engagement between the government and civil society and ensure that the organisations that receive government funding can operate freely and effectively to deliver their organisational or charitable objects.
6. **Protect protest rights and facilitate peaceful assemblies in line with international law,** including UN General Comment 37, which obliges states to facilitate peaceful assemblies and ensure that any restrictions are not overbroad,³ and urgently regulate the use of facial recognition technology, preventing it from being used at protests.

¹ CIVICUS Monitor, 16 March 2023, ‘United Kingdom downgraded in global ratings report on civic freedoms’ [online article, accessed February 2026].

² A charitable object is a foundational legal requirement for a charity, defining its specific, exclusive and lawful purpose in its governing document

³ International Center for Not-For-Profit Law, General Comment 37 [web page, accessed February 2026].

These ideas received various levels of support within the sector, particularly the first and second. This paper is intended to further stimulate conversation around these suggestions. We hope that, with further refinement, they can become viable policy positions for the UK government to adopt to improve the environment for advocacy, campaigning and protest in the UK.

Definitions

Civil society is where people come together to take collective action or advance shared interests. This could be through informal means, such as online activism, public gatherings and protest movements, or through more formal organisations, including registered charities, trade unions, community groups or clubs and associations. It also includes individuals, such as protesters, activists, campaigners, journalists, whistleblowers, trade unionists and charity or community workers.

Civic space is the environment in which civil society exists, both online and offline. It is the political, legal, regulatory, financial, socio-economic, cultural and security context that the organisations, movements and individuals that are part of civil society operate within. It is underpinned by rights and freedoms, such as the rights to association, assembly, protest, expression, participation and information.

The rationale

Over the last 15 years, the environment for advocacy, campaigning and protest in the UK has become more challenging. These activities are integral to the functioning of civil society, including for many registered charities that rely on advocacy, campaigning and protest to build support for their causes and influence government policy and legislation. These things are also essential for our democracy, which depends on participation, open debate and public scrutiny.

Since the early 2010s, every UK government has introduced new restrictions on civil society and the environment that it operates in. The Conservative-Lib Dem coalition government (2010-2015) introduced stricter rules on campaigning ahead of elections, while the Conservatives under David Cameron (2015-2016) brought in clauses to prevent charities using government funding for advocacy. Conservative governments led by Boris Johnson (2019-2022), Liz Truss (2022) and Rishi Sunak (2022-2024) all sought to clamp down on protest rights by adding a raft of new protest-related offences to the statute, a trend that has continued under Labour since Keir Starmer came to power in 2024. However, with the introduction of the Civil Society Covenant in 2025, the government has committed to reset the deteriorating relationship with civil society. Since the work on this project was undertaken, some positive steps have been promised, and more are expected, as a result of the new Civil Society Covenant.

Throughout this 15-year period, charities have been routinely attacked by parts of the media and some politicians for being too political. This is despite campaigning and political activity being permitted under charity law and regarded by the Charity Commission as a “valuable and legitimate” activity for a charity to

undertake.⁴ Often, it is charities and the people they represent who are the experts in the room –and too often their voices are suppressed. Lately, organisations that work on issues such as racial justice and migrant rights and their staff and volunteers have faced intimidation and violent threats.

Civil society groups have campaigned tirelessly against each new restriction. But this relentless firefighting has made it difficult for campaigners to come together to explore and articulate a positive, long-term vision for civil society and civic space in the UK.

This project sought to change that by providing an opportunity for charities to collaborate to imagine what a more enabling environment for civil society might look like and identify ideas that could help to open space for advocacy, campaigning and protest in the UK.

The process

What do we want the UK advocacy, campaigning and protest environment to be like a decade from now?

This is the question we set out to answer by convening actors from across UK civil society to explore emergent ideas for creating a more enabling civic space in the UK. We aimed to identify and develop the bold, positive and inclusive policies needed to realise this vision, build consensus and support for these ideas among civil society then use these collective suggestions as the basis for future advocacy.

We sought to do this in a highly participatory and collaborative way. We started the project in July and August 2023 by conducting a series of scoping interviews with representatives from across UK civil society, including from organisations that work on infrastructure, human rights, racial justice, community, environment and democracy. From June to October 2024, we worked with a researcher to conduct a literature review and look at the work that has been done on civic space in three other countries (Germany, Republic of Ireland and South Africa).⁵ This helped us to identify existing policies and emergent ideas, which we used to inform and inspire discussions in the core group workshops during the project's next stage.

From November 2024 to February 2025, we held a series of highly participatory workshops with a core group of campaigners, lawyers, funders, policy experts and compliance leads from across civil society. Participants were diverse and represented a range of organisations and sectors. At these workshops, participants were supported to surface, develop and prioritise policy ideas on a range of themes. Finally, in March 2025, Bond presented 12 of these ideas to a wider group of civil society representatives at a sense-making workshop. Here, a diverse group of participants provided rapid feedback and narrowed the list of policy ideas further using participatory voting. The final ideas included in this policy paper are the ones that received the most support in this final session.

Anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion were important to this process. We sought to include racial justice campaigners and organisations at all stages and have considered how the current political, legal and regulatory environments impact marginalised and racialised communities and the organisations that work with them. When designing the workshops, we took steps to ensure we were as inclusive and equitable as possible, including by offering per diems to participants and providing people with different ways to engage in the process. We have also thought through how the ideas contained in this paper might impact particular groups of people, although more work will be done here as the ideas are refined further.

⁴ Charity Commission for England and Wales, 7 November 2022, *Guidance: Campaigning and political activity guidance for charities (CC9)* [accessed February 2026].

⁵ Rowan Popplewell and James Kearney, 17 March 2025, 'How to strengthen civic space: three lessons from Ireland, Germany and South Africa', [online article, accessed February 2026].

The vision

The core group discussed what they'd like the environment for advocacy, campaigning and protest to be like a decade from now. Participants agreed they would like it to be open, diverse and inclusive, and for fundamental rights to be robustly protected in law and, ideally, constitutionally guaranteed. Advocacy, campaigning and protest would be widely valued and accepted by everyone, no matter your social or political views. There would be an equitable and transparent distribution of power and influence, a healthy information ecosystem, a pluralistic and balanced media and safe online spaces. The legal and regulatory framework would be more enabling, and regulators would be independent and focused on providing support and guidance to campaigners.

The future

Over the course of the project, the UK's political, economic and social context has become more divided and even hostile for civil society, particularly for those groups that work on issues such as migration and refugees, climate change and the environment and international development. Attacks on charities are rising, both in the media and in real life, including threats to staff and property. The far right is becoming more organised and visible. A rise in nativist populism, both globally and here in the UK, as well as growing voter dissatisfaction has led to a surge in support for populist parties and policies, which are now becoming mainstream.

When thinking about the future of civil society, and developing policies designed to strengthen civic space, it is vital there are safeguards in place. These are needed to ensure that fundamental rights are protected, and policies do not inadvertently create loopholes that can be manipulated or mechanisms that can be weaponised by a future government with more authoritarian tendencies. Putting in place safeguards that guard against potential unintended consequences must be core to this work as it progresses.

The ideas

These ideas are intended to stimulate debate and, with further refinement (including by thinking about potential unintended consequences and possible safeguards), become viable policy positions that would help to improve the environment for advocacy, campaigning and protest in the UK if they were adopted by the government. None of them on their own will solve the multiple issues civil society faces; rather each idea intends to tackle part of a much larger and more complex problem.

There are several omissions from this list, some of which were beyond the scope of this work, such as funding for civil society. Then there are issues that the group did discuss but couldn't agree on, such as how to make lobbying more transparent or how to limit the influence of money in politics.

Also omitted are ideas for improving engagement between the government and civil society. This was discussed at length by our participants, many of whom also contributed to the Civil Society Covenant which the government adopted in July 2025.⁶ While we believe that the Covenant could go further in places, it has the potential to improve relations between the government and parts of civil society but only if commitments, such as the pledge to protect protest rights, are properly resourced and fully implemented.⁷

⁶ Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 17 July 2025, *Civil Society Covenant* [accessed February 2026].

⁷ Rowan Popplewell and Lena Bheeroo, 28 July 2025, 'The Civil Society Covenant: a step in the right direction' [online article, accessed February 2026].

Idea 1: Expand the list of charitable purposes to include promotion of democratic values and processes

Many organisations that campaign for the electoral system to be reformed to make it more inclusive and equitable, or that work to improve transparency in politics or limit the influence of money in our democratic system, cannot become registered charities because these activities are not considered to be charitable. However, most people would agree that work seeking to make our political system fairer, more inclusive and transparent is for public benefit, especially if it's undertaken by organisations that are independent of party politics and their work is non-partisan.

Some related activities are seen as charitable already, such as encouraging and facilitating participation by the public in democratic and decision-making processes. There are many charities with charitable purposes that are educational or focus on advancing citizenship or promoting racial harmony, equality and diversity, which undertake activities such as encouraging people from specific demographics to register and turn out to vote (e.g., young people or people of colour) or improving understanding of our political and electoral system.⁸

Adding the promotion of democratic values and processes as a separate charitable object would make it clearer which democracy promotion activities are considered charitable and are for public benefit, and which are not. It would enable more organisations to become registered charities and benefit from the advantages associated with this status, so long as they are able to comply with other aspects of charity law such as remaining independent of political parties and candidates. This would enable these organisations to potentially have access to more funds to advance their cause, but it would also mean they would be subject to greater scrutiny and regulatory oversight. The exact wording of the charitable object would need to be discussed and agreed with key stakeholders.

This would not be the first time a new category has been added to the list of charitable purposes in the UK. Following the adoption of the Charities Act 2006, it became possible for organisations that promote “the advancement of human rights” to register as charities in England and Wales.

However, views on this were far from unanimous among our core group. Concerns were raised that the current law is already too permissive of organisations such as the Institute for Economic Affairs, which has been granted charitable status despite its close affinity to certain party-political positions and its lack of transparency about funding. There was a fear that loosening of the rules could enable more such organisations to take on charitable status. Another concern was that attempts to change the law could backfire, inviting incoming governments to review the existing, permissive guidance. These concerns could be mitigated through the publication of strong guidance from the Charity Commission, making it clear which purposes would be permissible, and which would not. This was seen in the guidance accompanying the expansion of ‘human rights’ as a charitable purpose.⁹

⁸ Stone King, *Charity Law rationale for the Promotion of Voter Engagement and Participation in Elections* [pdf].

⁹ The Charity Commission, *The promotion of human rights* [pdf]

Idea 2: Enable charities to engage exclusively in political campaigning or activity for as long as they need to deliver their charitable purpose

Under charity law, registered charities can only exist for charitable purposes, which are for public benefit, and cannot exist for a political purpose. The latter is defined by the Charity Commission as “any purpose directed at furthering the interests of any political party, or securing or opposing a change in the law, policy or decisions either in this country or abroad”.¹⁰ This is a core tenet of charity law in the UK, and we are not proposing this should change.

The law is also clear that charities can advance their charitable purposes through political campaigning or activity, and the Charity Commission regards this as a “legitimate and valuable” thing for a charity to do.¹¹ Political campaigning or activity is defined by the regulator as an “activity by a charity which is aimed at securing, or opposing, any change in the law or in the policy or decisions of central government, local authorities or other public bodies, whether in this country or abroad. It includes activity to preserve an existing piece of legislation, where a charity opposes it being repealed or amended.”¹²

A charity can even engage in political campaigning or activity exclusively for a limited period. According to the Charity Commission, a charity can focus all its resources on such activity but it “cannot be the continuing and sole activity of the charity” and must not become the reason for its existence¹³.

Many of the issues that charities seek to address are complex and structural. Tackling the root causes of these problems often requires them to advocate for changes in law or policy and this can take many years, or even decades in some cases. If a charity believes that the best way to deliver their charitable objects is through political campaigning or activity, they should be able to do this for as long as it takes. In some cases, this may require them to spend their resources exclusively on political campaigning or activity, for some or even all this time. This is not the same as existing for a political purpose.

This idea proposes that the regulations should be amended to remove the implied time limit, so that a charity can spend its resources exclusively on political campaigning and activity for as long as it needs to deliver its charitable purpose. Its purpose must remain charitable or for public benefit and it must also continue to comply with all other aspects of charity law, such as the requirement to remain independent of political parties and candidates.

As with the other proposed change to charity law, there was not universal support for this on the grounds that it might be best to leave well alone rather than open up a political debate in a volatile environment which could ultimately lead to a tightening of the existing law.

¹⁰ Charity Commission for England and Wales, 7 November 2022, *Guidance: Campaigning and political activity guidance for charities (CC9)* [accessed February 2026].

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Idea 3: Exempt registered charities from the non-party campaigning rules

Campaigning by charities at elections strengthens the democratic process. It improves the quality of public debate, bringing in diverse and marginalised voices and making it more informed. Elections are also an important time for charities to raise awareness of their issue and engage with parties and candidates from across the political spectrum.

Registered charities are required to comply with electoral law as well as charity law. If a charity spends over a certain amount of money on activities that are regulated under electoral law in the year before a general election or four months before a devolved election, they must register with the Electoral Commission as a non-party campaigner. This covers specific activities that can be seen by the public and pass the “purpose test” (i.e. could reasonably be regarded as encouraging voters to vote for or against a specific party, candidate or group of candidates that support or oppose a particular policy). Importantly, it’s not the actual intention behind the activity, but how it might be perceived by others that matters.

Studies have repeatedly shown that charities find these rules confusing and struggle to work out whether an activity is regulated or not.¹⁴ Those that have registered with the Electoral Commission have described the reporting requirements as burdensome and disproportionate. In practice, the rules are incentivising organisations to shy away from any activity that could potentially be regulated. Those who lose out are the people directly affected by the issues, who may see slower progress or feel less able to make their voices heard in the democratic process.¹⁵ Although the Electoral Commission has improved its guidance for non-party campaigners, many of these issues remain.¹⁶

At the same time, charities must also comply with Charity Commission guidance which requires them to remain independent of party politics and candidates. Complying with two sets of rules creates a significant compliance burden for charities which can prevent them from using their voice effectively at elections and ultimately, realising their charitable purpose. Exempting charities from the non-party campaigning rules would enable them to engage in public debate ahead of elections while continuing to ensure they remain independent of party politics.

There are two possible ways to exempt registered charities. The first is through an outright exemption; a clause which exempts registered charities from relevant parts of the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The second would involve changing the purpose test so that it is based on actual intention. This was recommended by Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots, who conducted a government-commissioned review of the legislation in 2016.¹⁷ As charities cannot seek to influence how people vote under charity law, this would exempt them by default.

¹⁴ Sheila McKechnie Foundation, *Annual Campaigner Survey Results* [web page, accessed February 2026].

¹⁵ Sheila McKechnie Foundation and Civil Exchange, August 2023, *Defending our democratic space: A call to action* [PDF].

¹⁶ See here for The Electoral Commission’s *Guidance for non-party campaigners* [online resource, accessed February 2026].

¹⁷ Lord Hodgson, 17 March 2016, *Third party election campaigning: getting the balance right* [documents available online, accessed February 2026].

Idea 4: Ensure the independence of the Charity Commission

Registered charities in England and Wales are regulated by the Charity Commission, an independent, non-ministerial department that is accountable to parliament. It is responsible for maintaining the register of charities, deciding which organisations are charitable and can be registered as a charity, providing guidance for charities, ensuring that charities meet their legal and regulatory requirements and taking enforcement action where required.

To have the trust of the public and charities, the Charity Commission and its leadership must be independent from the government and party politics. While the new chair, Dame Julia Unwin, does not have any party-political links and has a good understanding of the charity sector, this has not always been the case. From 2018 to 2021, the Charity Commission was overseen by Tina Stowell, Baroness Stowell of Beeston, a former government minister and member of the Conservative party. The parliamentary select committee scrutinising her appointment found that Baroness Stowell did not have the necessary knowledge and understanding of charities and was also not assured of her political independence. Despite resigning from the Conservative party, Baroness Stowell continued to be criticised for her lack of political independence throughout her tenure as chair.

While neither of her predecessors had explicit links to a political party, both were heavily criticised for their political connections and views. Sir William Shawcross, who was chair from 2012-2018, was criticised for his views on both multiculturalism and Islam and for being too close to the Conservative party. Meanwhile, Dame Suzi Leather, who served as chair from 2006-2012, was seen as being too close to New Labour and was criticised for her views on private schools. Baroness Stowell's successor, Orlando Fraser, was also criticised at the time of his appointment for his party-political links.¹⁸ Additional concerns were raised after his appointment was pushed through by the government, despite the Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport refusing to endorse him.

All future chairs of the Charity Commission must be politically independent, without connections to any political party or personal ties to any party-political figure. They should be able to exercise independent leadership and be able to push back against those who seek to pressure the regulator to support their view of what a charity should be or what activities are charitable. This is particularly important as parts of the sector come under attack for speaking out on issues connected to their charitable purpose or for their work supporting marginalised or racialised groups. Prospective chairs should also have some understanding of the sector as well as experience or knowledge of regulatory work. Changes should be made to the appointments process to ensure that it is robust, independent and transparent, with appropriate due diligence carried out.

¹⁸ NCVO and ACEVO, 9 March 2022, 'ACEVO and NCVO joint statement on announcement of Orlando Fraser as preferred candidate for next Charity Commission chair [online media statement, accessed February 2026].

Idea 5: Remove restrictions that prevent organisations that receive government funding from speaking

In April 2016, the Conservative government announced plans to introduce anti-advocacy clauses into all government grant agreements. Although some changes were made to soften the clause after protest, the minimum standards for grants still require all grant agreements to include terms of “eligible expenditure”. This prohibits most grantees from using government funding for lobbying or “paid-for political activity”, except where explicitly allowed, but activities such as giving evidence to select committees are permissible. This has created a cultural expectation that working in partnership with not-for-profit organisations should be regarded as “lobbying” rather than normal, partnership working.

Around the same time these changes were being brought in, “gagging clauses” in contracts for services became common, apparently outlawing whistleblowing and criticism of the government.¹⁹ The guidance had been amended following representations to exclude whistleblowing or “their ability to fairly criticise a government body or policy”²⁰, but the contract has not been brought in line with this.

Both the anti-advocacy clauses in the grant standards and the gagging clauses in contracts have created a general chilling effect. In some cases, they have had a negative impact on the ability of charities and other voluntary sector organisations to deliver their mission, either by preventing organisations from speaking out on behalf of the people they work with or on the issues they care about or publicly discussing any problems in the services they deliver. It has also required any organisations that want to work in partnership with the government to improve policies and services to do so without grant funding.

Anti-advocacy clauses tend to have the biggest impact on small organisations, which often work with the most marginalised and under-represented communities. While large charities in receipt of government grants with anti-advocacy clauses can use other funds to support their advocacy and campaigning, this often isn’t possible for smaller organisations which have fewer resources available.

At the launch of the Civil Society Covenant, the government committed to make the model contracts, and guidance on contracts for services and grants, compliant with the Covenant. The government did update the grant standards guidance which is better than it was. It now refers to the Covenant and its respect for “the independence and legitimacy of civil society organisations to advocate and campaign, including protecting the right to engage in peaceful protest, and to hold the government to account to make better laws, regulation and decisions”, but it omits to mention a core purpose of the Covenant: partnership working.²¹

The refreshed guidance clearly states organisations in receipt of government funding “can use non-government funding for whatever purpose the organisation deems appropriate”, which has never been in doubt. The guidance also states that these organisations “can use government grant funding to engage with government” which is welcome,²² as is a new email to report any problems. However, partnership working, which is encouraged by the Covenant, is still not listed as an eligible expenditure, and ineligible expenditure continues to include a clause that prohibits “paid-for lobbying, which means using grant funds to attempt to influence parliament, government or influence legislative or regulatory action”, although it adds “except where this is directly relevant to achieving the outcomes specified in the grant agreement”.²³

Promised changes to the model services contract have not yet been made.

¹⁹ The current model contract includes a clause which requires suppliers to “ensure that neither it, nor any of its Affiliates, embarrasses the Authority or otherwise brings the Authority into disrepute by engaging in any act or omission in relation to this Contract which is reasonably likely to diminish the trust that the public places in the Authority”.

²⁰ Government Commercial Function, 20 June 2023, [Supplier Code of Conduct \(HTML\)](#), [accessed February 2026].

²¹ Cabinet Office, July 2025, [Guidance on General Grants: Minimum Requirement Six: Grant Agreements \[PDF\]](#), Version 2.5.1, p8.

²² *Ibid.*, p9

²³ *Ibid.*, p10-11

Idea 6: Protect protest rights and facilitate peaceful assemblies, in line with international law

Everyone should be able to protest on the issues that matter to them. Peaceful protest is fundamental to a healthy democracy as its one of the most effective ways that people can speak truth to power, especially if they are from groups that are underrepresented in politics or are marginalised in other ways. Protest enables people to stand against injustice, raise awareness of and build support for causes that have been overlooked, make their voices heard by decision makers, and play an active part in public debate between elections.

The right to peaceful protest is protected in the UK by Article 11 of the Human Rights Act. It is also protected under international law by various treaties. UN General Comment 37 on the right to free association and peaceful assembly sets out how states should fulfil their obligation to facilitate peaceful protests under international law, including by ensuring that restrictions are not overbroad.²⁴

In the Civil Society Covenant, the UK government reiterated its promise to uphold protest rights. However, the Labour government has followed in the footsteps of its Conservative predecessors, pushing through yet more legislation to erode protest rights in the UK. The Crime and Policing Bill will give police enhanced powers to restrict the wearing of face coverings at protests and prevent marches from passing in the vicinity of places of worship. Labour has tabled an amendment that will require police to take into consider the cumulative impact of repeat protests. It is also the first government to proscribe a direct action group as a terrorist organisation in the UK.

The previous government brought in the Public Order Act 2023, which introduced a series of new protest-related offences, such as “locking on”, and created powers to expand the use of stop and search and ban people from participating in protests. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 gave police broad powers to restrict protests that are noisy or cause “serious disruption”. In the bill, this is defined as causing “significant delay” or “prolonged disruption”. In June 2023, the government tried to change this to any disruption that was “more than minor”, but were blocked by the courts following a successful challenge from campaigners.

At the same time, police forces nationwide are rolling out the use of live facial recognition technology which enables them to scan and compare faces in real-time with those on watchlists. It has been used at sports events, music festivals and protests. While the Home Office has said it will look at introducing a legal framework to govern the use of this technology, currently there are no safeguards in place.

The government must protect protest rights in line with international law, remove all anti-protest measures from the Crime and Policing Bill and repeal all protest-related offences contained in the Public Order Act and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act. It should urgently regulate the use of facial recognition technology and prevent it from being used to police protests. Instead, the focus should be on putting measures in place to facilitate peaceful protests, as set out in UN General Comment 37.

²⁴ International Center for Not-For-Profit Law, [General Comment 37](#) [web page, accessed February 2026].

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