Mr President,

The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) congratulates and welcomes the convening of the Panel on the Promotion and Protection of Civil Society Space, which was established under the auspices of the Human Rights Council Resolution 24/21. SUHAKAM has no doubt that this esteemed Panel would conclude with concrete measures to further encourage partnerships between States and civil society to work toward the shared aspirations of peace and equitable prosperity.

Mr President,

SUHAKAM affirms that a Democracy is not qualified solely by the holding of regular elections. Rather, central to any democratic society is a system that allows, and even encourages plurality of views and public debates through the assurance of the rights to the freedom of expression, association and assembly, that allows the basic freedom of choice and ensures the legitimacy and accountability of the government. SUHAKAM notes that in spite of wide acknowledgement, there is a proliferation of laws and policies around the world that seek to restrict civil society’s ability to have their voices heard.
In the Malaysian context, the assurance of the right to freedom of assembly has been weakened by numerous restrictions and conditions affixed to that right. SUHAKAM was further alarmed with the recent "banning" of a coalition of NGOs, after they had expressed their concerns over the human rights situation in Malaysia during the UPR process last year. Moreover, the lack of direct consultations between the Government and NGOs for the purpose of Malaysia’s UPR is a matter of great concern.

It is imperative for the Government to ensure that provisions of laws and policies encourage the vibrant operation of NGOs, instead of resorting to actions that are tantamount to reprisals against people who work for the promotion and protection of human rights. SUHAKAM calls on the Government, to respect and protect civil society’s right to actively participate in the democratic process.

Thank you Mr. President.