



Letter from the GSA regarding the cancellation of RightsCon 2026

The Global South Alliance expresses its deep concern regarding the recent developments that led to the cancellation of RightsCon 2026 in Zambia.

We recognize the extensive work of organizers and local partners who have invested significant time, resources, and political capital in enabling this convening under complex conditions. Their efforts, and the risks they often carry, must be acknowledged, respected and supported.

At this stage, we believe any public response should be attentive to the views and safety of those most directly affected, particularly local civil society organizations and communities in Zambia and across the region.

At the same time, what we are witnessing in Zambia raises serious concerns about restrictions on civic space, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and the ability of civil society to convene independently across borders, as pointed by U.N Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Gina Romero.

The cancellation of a global digital rights convening at the last minute cannot be treated as merely a logistical disruption. It reflects how political conditions, democratic tensions, and shrinking civic space can directly shape and constrain the conditions under which civil society is able to organize, participate, and convene globally. Governments that agree to host global human rights and digital rights convenings should uphold clear guarantees that protect the independence, safety, and meaningful participation of civil society.



We are also deeply concerned about the disproportionate impact on Global South organizations, especially smaller and under-resourced groups. These organizations often commit significant financial and institutional resources to participate in spaces such as RightsCon, frequently with limited safeguards when disruptions occur. Travel costs, visas, accommodation, institutional planning, lost opportunities, and security concerns cannot be merely treated as collateral damage.

For many participants, considerations related to safety, access, and visibility, including for LGBTQI+ individuals and other historically marginalized groups, were already part of the preparation process. These are not exceptional conditions, but structural realities that shape who can participate, under what terms, and at what cost. Inclusion cannot be premised on the normalization of risk.

As a network grounded in solidarity across the Global South, we believe this moment requires more than caution. It requires collective accountability and a rethinking of the prevailing model of global convening. This includes exploring more decentralized, hybrid, and regionally anchored approaches that do not concentrate risk, cost, and political exposure in ways that systematically disadvantage those already operating under constrained conditions.

We must also resist the temptation to let this setback default us back to the Global North. We acknowledge the efforts of CSOs to advance regional diversity in convenings and call on other stakeholders — funders, multilateral bodies, and governments — to step up so these efforts can continue. We recognize that Zambia’s decision was not merely a political lapse but symptomatic of deeper constraints on Southern agency. To this end, we call on stakeholders to help address systemic issues of structural inequality and



neocolonial dependencies that shape these realities. We also call on governments to uphold their commitments to civic space, human rights protections, safety guarantees, accessibility, and the ability of participants to engage without intimidation, discrimination, and political interference.

We remain committed to working in coordination with partners to identify responses that are not only careful but also just, and to advancing conversations that strengthen the integrity, inclusiveness, and sustainability of our shared spaces.

April 30th 2026