
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY OF PARTIES November 24, 2020

I. INTRODUCTION

1. It is a privilege to present my first report to the Assembly of Parties one year after this body entrusted me with the stewardship of IDLO.
2. My term as Director-General began in January 2020 at the same time that the world entered the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
3. My objective on taking office was to help position IDLO as a leading change agent in the field of rule of law and justice and, in turn, to strengthen the scale and scope of its distinct contributions to the global effort to build more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The unexpected disruptions and tumultuous events of this year, and their impact on the people we serve, have only strengthened this resolve.
4. In a short period of time, COVID-19 has derailed or even reversed progress toward many of the Sustainable Development Goals. Beyond its severe disruption of public health systems, the pandemic has exacerbated prevailing conditions of inequality, discrimination, insecurity and injustice, especially for the most vulnerable.
5. Global deterioration in human development, linked to and aggravated by environmental crises and disruptions to social protection systems, basic services and livelihoods, have led to the first projected rise in worldwide poverty in over two decades. In other words, the pandemic is multiplying the impact of pre-existing challenges.
6. At this time the importance of SDG16 as a transformative goal and enabler of the whole 2030 Agenda has become clear. Peaceful, just and inclusive societies, access to justice and effective and accountable institutions are key to sustainable peace and economic and social progress.
7. I believe that IDLO, as the only global intergovernmental organisation exclusively devoted to promoting the rule of law, can leverage its country level experience, multi-stakeholder convening power, thought leadership, and flexibility to respond to evolving situations, to make a tangible contribution to the global response to COVID-19 and to the Decade of Action.

8. IDLO considers that a rule of law-based response is key to effectively managing the crisis while laying the foundations for an equitable, just and sustainable recovery.
9. The rule of law, defended by an independent judiciary, supports the protection of human rights, safeguards civil liberties, and helps to ensure transparent and accountable governance. The rule of law protects the dignity of all citizens and recognises the capacities people require for active participation in civic life.
10. The rule of law serves not only as a guarantor of individual rights but as a vital means to foster the trust of people in governments, to prevent conflict and fragility, to build and maintain peace, and to enable countries to unlock their development potential.
11. In this context, IDLO focused on three key priorities in 2020:
 - Adapting our ways of working to the changed environment to ensure mission continuity while protecting colleagues;
 - Contributing to the global response to the pandemic, and to the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, in line with our mandate, resources, and comparative advantages; and
 - Developing through a wide-ranging, multi-stakeholder process a forward-looking new Strategic Plan that reflected our objectives.
12. Despite an unpredictable and challenging year, we succeeded in making significant advances in relation to each of these three priorities. Three principles have been at the core of our efforts. They are:
 - **Inclusion:** Recent events around the world have demonstrated the importance of equality, non-discrimination and ensuring participation of all parts of society to help advance policies that are fair and equitable, effectively implemented, and sustainable. IDLO has used its convening power to bring together key stakeholders to ensure that policymaking is as inclusive as possible.
 - **Integration:** We have prioritised the integration of our ways of working, bringing together the Organisation's programmes, policy advocacy, and research to maximise impact.
 - **Innovation:** Building on our strengths and added value, we have developed innovative proposals, strengthened partnerships, and pioneered new ways of working in order to be able to respond to these new challenges, based on our comparative advantage and mandate.

II. ENSURING MISSION CONTINUTIY

13. Over the past year, my colleagues and I have focused much of our attention on IDLO's response to the COVID-19 crisis. Our foremost priority has been to ensure that the Organisation can protect employee health and well-being while continuing to carry out its critical work around the world.
14. As the scope and impact of COVID-19 became apparent, IDLO acted quickly to establish a Crisis Management Team (CMT) to ensure situational awareness and timely crisis response. The CMT follows developments and assesses their impact on IDLO operations; tracks the latest guidance from national and local authorities; and puts in place organisation-wide measures to respond to the rapidly evolving situation.
15. Business Continuity Plans for COVID-19 were developed for all offices. IDLO took several precautionary steps, including instituting teleworking for most colleagues at affected offices and minimizing in-person contact. These measures continue to be adjusted and updated on an ongoing basis in response to new developments.
16. Ensuring colleagues have access to up-to-date information and support has been a major priority. We created a COVID-19 resource page on the IDLO intranet that aggregates the latest alerts, travel advisories, and other information and is a central point of reference. We also set up a dedicated hotline to centralise information flow and respond to colleagues' questions.
17. IDLO also took special measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of colleagues around the world including extending insurance coverage for medical evacuations for eligible staff dependents in the field and liaising with diplomatic missions to secure access to medevac facilities.
18. We are in close contact with staff members throughout the Organization through regular COVID-19 updates, situation reports, and other means to understand any challenges they might be facing and respond with practical solutions.
19. In accordance with guiding principles established for the safest possible return, all offices have developed 'return to office' plans, taking into account local contexts and containment measures imposed by host governments. Within this framework, preventive and protective measures have been enforced in all IDLO offices. The gradual return to offices has been accompanied by constant monitoring, flexibility, and adjustments as needed.

20. At the same time, colleagues around the world continue to deliver on IDLO's mandate in some of the most complex and demanding working environments, challenges which have only expanded with the spread of the pandemic.
21. IDLO continued to implement programmatic activities across its operations, although some have been affected by travel restrictions, postponement of events and activities, and inability to meet with key counterparts. To mitigate their impact on our work, IDLO has revised workplans and adapted them where possible, including replacing travel with teleconferencing, and substituting meetings and events with webinars and other virtual activities.
22. As the situation evolves, the Crisis Management Team continues to meet regularly and adjust IDLO's response and posture accordingly. We are taking this opportunity to reflect on what we have learned from this experience, so we can move to better, smarter, and more flexible ways of working.

III. CONTRIBUTING TO THE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

23. Despite restrictions in almost all countries of operation, IDLO responded quickly to needs that emerged at the onset of the pandemic by leveraging programmatic expertise, adapting to changing contexts and drawing on its ability to mobilise multi-stakeholder coalitions. This could not have been accomplished without our longstanding international and in-country networks and relationships of trust with key national partners.
24. In March, I issued a Policy Statement on the ways in which the rule of law and the justice sector are concrete enablers of the response to COVID-19, and the imperative of continued investment in a culture of justice. In the document I outlined the structure of our targeted pandemic response, which has focused on three strategic areas:
 - strengthening the legal and policy frameworks for managing COVID-19;
 - mitigating the impact of the crisis on justice systems and justice seekers, with a specific focus on those most vulnerable, particularly women and marginalised groups; and
 - advocating for the critical need to maintain the rule of law, to help countries to strengthen their governance and institutions, and to support and invest in a culture of justice to protect the rights and dignity of people everywhere.
25. In August, we highlighted the contribution of IDLO and other justice actors in each of these areas in a Policy Brief on Rule of Law and COVID-19. The brief recommends eight forward-looking actions to help policymakers at national, regional, and global

levels to formulate rule of law responses to the pandemic, supporting pathways to *Build Back Better*.

A. Promoting Enabling Legal and Policy Frameworks

26. Enabling legal frameworks are key to effective crisis management and laying the foundations for a sustainable recovery. IDLO has been supporting governments in effective crisis management and response, providing policy advice and implementation support, and promoting enabling legal frameworks in priority areas.

a. Contributing to crisis response and preparedness

27. Building on existing partnerships with leading multilateral and humanitarian organisations, IDLO is implementing two projects that advance a key part of its contribution to the COVID-19 response in line with our mandate and comparative advantages, and strengthen the Organisation's expertise in key thematic areas.

28. The first, on Pandemic Preparedness and Response, seeks to strengthen legal and policy frameworks on pandemic preparedness and response to public health emergencies. In collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the programme supports countries in strengthening national legal and policy frameworks on preparedness and responses to public health emergencies, such as the current pandemic, through a participatory, nationally-owned approach compliant with human rights standards.

29. The second project seeks to mitigate the adverse impact of emergency laws and regulations on access to food, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable groups, and women and girls in partnership with the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). The project will be piloted in two countries – Honduras and Uganda - with the potential for further scale-up and expansion.

30. The ongoing crisis has shed light on the importance and challenges of managing, coordinating, and expanding the foundational components of an inclusive and well-functioning health system. IDLO is also engaging with partner organisations to strengthen the capacities of civil society, public health, and justice institutions to address large-scale public health crises.

31. In collaboration with WHO, the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University, and the University of Sydney, IDLO published a key lessons brief on *The Vital Role of Law in the COVID-19 Response: Key Lessons from Advancing the Right to Health*. Highlighting the contribution of the law in enabling swift and effective responses to public health emergencies, including those caused by

infectious diseases like COVID-19, the brief presents key lessons for national policy makers as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

IDLO is working with WHO and the International Development Research Centre to strengthen the capacity of countries to promote healthy diets and increase physical activity for the prevention of Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs). The programme works to promote more effective regulatory and fiscal measures, supports the development and use of relevant research, and contributes to the work of multi-stakeholder coalitions.

b. Promoting Inclusive Economic Development

32. IDLO's work to promote inclusive economic development through the rule of law has acquired renewed relevance and urgency in the face of the economic crisis generated by COVID-19. This is particularly the case in least developed and developing countries.
33. In collaboration with the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Islands Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), our Investment Support Programme for Least Developed Countries (ISP/LDCs) provides technical and legal advice, as well as complementary capacity-building, to LDC governments and eligible private sector entities on investment-related matters, including negotiation and dispute settlement. The assistance is provided at no cost to beneficiaries.
34. In September 2020, IDLO successfully completed its first ISP/LDCs project in **The Gambia** in the course of a now-settled investor-State arbitration case. IDLO's assistance, in the form of quantum expert services, proved essential in helping the Government of The Gambia defend its national financial interests.
35. IDLO has developed a new project under ISP/LDCs in **Malawi**, assisting a State-owned entity with the structuring and management of sustainable agricultural investment projects, and is exploring new projects in **Ethiopia** and **Liberia**.
36. In **Armenia**, we assisted the newly established Insolvency Court in developing a transparent and effective commercial and civil law system by supporting the creation of civil asset forfeiture legislation and introducing its application to judges and prosecutors. We also conducted an analysis on gaps in insolvency procedures and presented recommendations for the Insolvency Court to key stakeholders via an online presentation.
37. In the **Bahamas**, IDLO analysed the existing legal framework for anti-corruption and reviewed laws and policies on investigation and prosecution of financial and corruption crimes. The study's findings will be used to inform reforms to enhance the transparency, integrity, and accountability of the legal system.

38. In **Jordan**, IDLO reoriented its work to assist civil society and women entrepreneurs as they deal with the impact of COVID-19. We have organised several virtual awareness sessions for women entrepreneurs on matters concerning social security and labour laws. IDLO also facilitated the formation of an expert working group to assess the impact of COVID-19 on justice sector institutions and develop policy, legal and institutional recommendations.
39. IDLO supported the **Montenegro** Agency for Protection of Competition to procure econometric software to conduct anti-trust analyses and helped to build the capacity of the Agency's case handlers in its use as well as on the substantive aspects of anti-trust and merger cases.
40. In collaboration with the Palestinian High Judicial Council and the Palestinian Judicial Institute, IDLO has begun implementation of an e-learning activity as part of a new project, in partnership with EBRD, to promote judicial training on commercial law in the **West Bank and Gaza**.
41. In the context of its Commercial Law Judicial Training project, IDLO has provided capacity development support to more than 200 **Romanian** judges and prosecutors on Economic and Financial Crime, Commercial Mediation, Law and Markets and Breach of International Contracts.
42. As part of its work to promote improved legal frameworks for investment in **Tunisia**, IDLO is working with the Ministry of Development, Investment, and International Cooperation to assess the short-, medium-, and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the investment climate. IDLO also held virtual consultation meetings with international development partners on the pandemic and its impact on access to justice.
43. IDLO, in close cooperation with the National School of Judges and the Antimonopoly Committee of **Ukraine**, conducted a training needs assessment for administrative and commercial court judges to identify priority areas for capacity building in the fields of competition, trade remedies, and state aid.

B. Mitigating the Impact of the Crisis on Justice Systems and Justice Seekers

44. The pandemic has exacerbated existing equalities and vulnerabilities. Its severest impact has been on people already living in conditions of injustice, inequality, and insecurity.
45. IDLO is working to ensure that most vulnerable members of society are aware of their rights and remedies at a time when the ability to access services and the fair

distribution of public resources can make a difference between life and death. In particular, we have adapted our work on combatting Gender-based Violence (GBV) to address the increased demand for support and services during the current crisis.

We are assisting courts and other justice institutions in ensuring service continuity by employing technological solutions and helping to reduce institutional workloads through the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and equitable customary and informal mechanisms.

a. ***Promoting Access to Justice for those most at risk***

i. **Supporting access to legal aid and services**

46. Through its coordinating role in the **Afghanistan** Legal Aid and Advocates Network, IDLO has been monitoring the impact of the pandemic on detainees and prisoners and ensuring that those eligible for release under the government's early release scheme receive the legal aid they need to make their claims. IDLO has also been assisting the Afghanistan Shelter Network to aid women who require safe spaces after their release from detention.
47. In **Honduras**, IDLO is supporting the Municipality of San Pedro Sula to protect children's and adolescents' rights in the municipality, with an emphasis on preventing infection of at-risk street children. In light of new restrictions, IDLO employed innovative methodologies to continue supporting municipal services and rights awareness in vulnerable communities, including through our Model for Response to Violence campaign.
48. IDLO has also provided technical support to guarantee the rights of prisoners and detainees in Honduras working with the National Penitentiary Institute and the National Commission for the Prevention of Torture (MNP-CONAPREV) to develop a workplan to address health challenges arising from COVID-19 in penitentiaries. Our technical support paved the way for the MNP-CONAPREV to present a habeas corpus petition to the Supreme Court of Justice to protect at-risk prisoners from exposure to COVID-19.
49. We are working with independent oversight bodies in **Kenya**, such as the National Human Rights Commission and the National Gender and Equality Commission, to ensure business continuity by providing them with technical support to address rights violations, especially for women, children, and other vulnerable persons, and supporting them in conducting public awareness activities.
50. In **Myanmar**, where restrictions have been in place since March, IDLO has been working to ensure that vulnerable populations continue to have access to reliable information on their rights and to raise awareness on the impact of the crisis. IDLO

also facilitated online community engagement activities between state and regional rule of law coordinating bodies and communities on local government response to COVID 19.

51. In **Uganda**, IDLO began implementation of the Community Justice Programme following the conclusion of a Host Country Agreement despite pandemic-related restrictions on mobility. The programme will focus on the provision of legal aid, legal information, and other justice services both at the national and community levels in nine districts in Uganda, with an emphasis on access to digital platforms in the COVID-19 context.
52. IDLO is undertaking legal assessments in **Kenya, Mali, the Philippines, and Sierra Leone** in the implementation of our global strategy for the elimination of discriminatory laws, in collaboration with UN Women. The joint strategy provides a framework for a concerted and multi-stakeholder approach aimed at fast-tracking the elimination of discriminatory laws and documenting experiences and lessons learned for scale up and replication.

ii. **Combatting the rise in Gender-based Violence**

53. During the pandemic, restrictions on movement and commerce, increased stress, the disruption of social and protective networks, and decreased access to services have all contributed to a rise in the number of cases of domestic violence against women.
54. To address the increased demand for support and services during the current crisis, the Organisation has developed a global programme on Gender-based Violence and COVID-19, focusing on access to justice for Gender-based Violence survivors in the context of pandemic preparedness, response and recovery, through a coordinated and integrated justice sector approach. We are currently working in over ten countries to promote victim-centred responses to Gender-based Violence.
55. IDLO's work in this area aims to increase the gender sensitivity of justice institutions in their response to GBV in COVID-19 preparedness, response and recovery efforts; supports women and girls in seeking legal redress for GBV; and promotes GBV prevention and elimination in legal and policy frameworks enacted in the context of COVID-19 mitigation measures.
56. In **Mongolia**, IDLO supported the establishment of a nation-wide forum of civil society organisations providing services to survivors of GBV. We are working to adjust this support to the current situation through interventions such as increasing the capacity of national partners to provide information and support on domestic violence through webchats and hotlines, conducting workshops to address psycho-social issues of women in violent relationships, and supporting partners to obtain medical supplies to allow them to continue providing vital services.

57. In **Somalia**, IDLO is working with the Puntland and Federal Attorney-General Offices to deliver a support package to the two institutions in response to pandemic-related challenges. A key focus concerns logistical and operational capacity development in response to a recent rise in reported GBV cases.
58. In **Tunisia**, IDLO is helping to empower women to access justice at the local level and is improving the capacity of justice actors to assist female survivors of GBV. In collaboration with the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs and civil society organisations, IDLO established a legal aid centre for survivors and developed a procedural manual for women’s shelters. The manual was recently adopted by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to serve as an official guide for women’s shelters around the country, and will improve the quality of services and support to survivors.

b. Supporting justice institutions to deliver essential services

59. At a time when restrictions on movement and assembly have affected physical access to courts and tribunals around the world, the Organization is supporting affected justice institutions to perform key functions in a number of countries.
60. In **Afghanistan**, IDLO supported the development of e-justice tools, including an updated Legal Aid Online Database to track the use of legal-aid motions and requests for court action. We also provided tele-mentoring tools to prosecutors of violence against women cases and improved the usability of the Elimination of Violence Against Women online database.
61. Building on the Continuing Professional Development Support project, IDLO is launching a new capacity development programme to support the country’s increasingly robust and independent Professional Training Departments.
62. A new project was initiated in **Indonesia** to support the Office of the Attorney General in strengthening its capacity through establishing a case management system and performance-based budgeting.
63. In **Kenya**, IDLO supported the development and delivery of e-justice tools, including transcription programmes, archive systems, and payment modules, to ensure the continued provision of court services throughout the lockdown period.
64. Following successful pilots in the Commercial and Tax Division of the High Court, IDLO provided legal assistance to enable their integration into court proceedings. The operationalisation of these systems has led to a significant increase in efficiency and their adoption by the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, and other Divisions of the High Court in Nairobi.

65. IDLO continued its work to enhance the capacity of police and other law enforcement agencies to respond to trafficking in persons (TIP) in **Liberia**. Our support involved developing a TIP curriculum for prosecutors and judges, case monitoring procedures and protocols for law enforcement officers, and capacity building for the National Anti-Trafficking Taskforce (NATT) Secretariat and country-level bodies.
66. The US State Department's 2020 Trafficking in Persons report, released in June, elevated Liberia to Tier 2 after three years on the Tier 2 Watch List due to recent progress.
67. IDLO advanced a wide range of digitalisation efforts in **Kyrgyzstan**, including improvements in court information systems and remote participation capacities of court users in judicial proceedings. We are now supporting the judiciary to respond to the changing needs of court users, identified through recently completed self-assessments by justice sector institutions.
68. In October, the project received the first USAID Digital Project Award in recognition of IDLO's support to the Kyrgyz judiciary in implementing a locally-driven and expandable electronic system to help strengthen judicial integrity, fight corruption, and enhance transparency
69. In **Mexico**, as part of a project supporting the reform of the criminal justice system, we developed online learning tools to complement in-person trainings for police officers that were postponed in light of the pandemic. IDLO also adapted and strengthened the GBV components of the trainings, as well as the human rights and gender components of the training curriculum in response to emerging needs and requests from our partners.
70. The **Philippines** is one of IDLO's countries of operations most severely impacted by the pandemic. IDLO supported efforts of national justice institutions to adjust to online working modes, delivering several webinars on distant learning techniques and interactive web conferencing. These events included workshops on the Learning Management System "EFront" in preparation for the virtual conversion and delivery of in-person training modules by the end of 2020.
71. In December 2019, IDLO launched a major sub-regional programme in the **Sahel** in the border area between **Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger**. The programme aims to strengthen criminal justice systems and make them more accessible, protective of human rights, and responsive to the needs of communities.
72. The inception of the programme was completed successfully despite operational challenges posed by the pandemic and political instability. In recent months, IDLO and the governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger reaffirmed the importance of access to justice in times of crisis. IDLO deployed staff to the three countries and has

hosted meetings with government and civil society representatives to discuss urgent justice needs to inform future work.

73. IDLO continued to support the Office of the Prosecutor General in **Ukraine** in its reform efforts by helping to conduct national and regional attestations of active-duty prosecutors, a process consisting of professional knowledge tests, integrity checks, interviews, and merit-based evaluations of applicants to open positions. IDLO is also working to strengthen the enforcement of judicial decisions by helping to develop an e-platform for the Court Enforcement Service.
74. In **Yemen**, IDLO continued supporting the National Commission with capacity-building of human rights monitoring and accountability mechanisms. While travel to Aden remains restricted due to the pandemic, IDLO is shifting its focus to support greater digitisation, including through the development of mobile monitoring and case management and online trainings to allow the Commission to carry out its activities

*c. **Engaging Customary and Informal Justice and Alternative Dispute Resolution Systems***

75. At a time when courts and tribunals face slowdowns and backlogs, IDLO is engaging with customary and informal justice (CIJ) systems and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms to promote greater access to justice for users.
76. While such mechanisms can offer advantages, CIJ systems may also favour entrenched power inequalities and patriarchal values, and result in discriminatory and harmful outcomes for women and girls. IDLO's engagement seeks to ensure greater respect for the rights of end users and consistency with internationally agreed human rights norms and standards.
77. Recognizing the critical role of traditional justice sector actors in changing the perception of the **Afghan** public towards women's rights, IDLO has been engaging with the leadership of the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs to sensitise its officials to issues linked to Gender-based Violence. We have also been organising online educational sessions for imams, khatibs and religious leaders from the Ministry on the Rights of Women on the role and services of Women's Protection Centres for victims of violence.
78. IDLO supported a regional roundtable in **Kyrgyzstan** with representatives of the Ministries of Economy and Justice, private sector, mediators, and international organisations on the need for enhancing the legislative foundations for mediation and the potential of remote mediation. Emphasising ADR's growing importance, IDLO produced a video highlighting mediation as a flexible and effective mechanism for dispute resolution during and in the aftermath of COVID-19.

79. As part of a larger initiative promoting ADR usage in commercial disputes in **Montenegro**, IDLO launched a set of webinars for mediators and business sector actors on online mediation as a dispute resolution mechanism in the context of COVID-19.
80. To strengthen the confidence of the commercial sector in **Moldova's** macroeconomic framework, IDLO is supporting the implementation of a legislative plan for mediation and arbitration. IDLO organised a series of webinars to raise awareness and share information on online dispute resolution in times of crisis as a response to the growing number of disputes due to widespread economic disruption in the context of COVID-19.
81. In **Serbia**, we conducted an analysis of international best practices on commercial mediation and made recommendations to the Ministry of Justice and Commercial Appellate Court of Serbia to promote mediation as a mechanism for resolving commercial disputes.
82. IDLO assisted the **Tajikistan** Chamber of Commerce and Industry in establishing the first national Commercial Mediation Center in the country and continues to coach and build its institutional capacity.
83. IDLO is supporting six ADR centres in **Somalia**, where community leaders can help resolve disputes through the customary *Xeer* system in line with national laws and international standards. We also continued to support the government to reintegrate low-risk former combatants back into their communities through rehabilitation, trainings, and traditional “forgiveness ceremonies.”
84. IDLO also launched a brief on *Women and Customary and Informal Justice Systems*. The third publication in our series on engaging with CIJ systems, the brief brings together current research, expert perspectives, and programmatic experience, addressing legal and policy debates on women and CIJ. It identifies entry points for engagement and good practices for promoting gender equality in CIJ systems.

C. Advocating for continued investment and support for the Rule of Law

85. IDLO strongly believes that multilateralism and “whole of society” approaches are needed to respond effectively to COVID-19 and lay the foundations for a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future. The toll of COVID-19 on the global economy is likely to be reflected in ODA and public sector budgets over the next years, and could have a severe and negative impact on the ability of countries to realise progress on SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

86. During the past year, we engaged with governments, the UN system, civil society, academia, parliamentarians, the private sector and other partners to promote greater political and financial support for the rule of law.
87. COVID-19 has affected many of the events the Organisation uses to amplify our policy advocacy contributions to global debates, including the Commission on the Status of Women, the International Crime Congress, and the SDG 16 Conference. We have adapted by taking the opportunity to participate in intergovernmental forums, and by organising and intensifying our engagement in online dialogues, webinars, and other modalities.
88. In recent months I have had the opportunity to represent IDLO in key high-level meetings, as well as side events, in connection with the 75th session of the UN General Assembly with its theme of “Confronting COVID-19 through Effective Multilateral Action”.
89. In my statement to the official High-level meeting of the UN General Assembly to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, I emphasized the importance of a renewed spirit of international cooperation and solidarity, and advocated for investment in the rule of law as a crucial component of the international response to the Secretary-General’s call to *Build Back Better*. I also joined fellow leaders of Rome-based international organisations in a celebration of the occasion organised by our host country Italy.
90. I submitted a statement to the High-Level meeting of the UN General Assembly convened to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Conference, where I described our work to promote and protect women’s human rights, remove barriers to women justice professionals, and eliminate gender discriminatory laws.
91. I participated in the Annual Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), where I expressed IDLO’s commitment to contribute to meeting the special needs of these countries, in the context of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, building on our experience with the ISP/LDCs programme.
92. Key to our efforts to promote advocacy on the 2030 Agenda and rule of law based response to COVID-19 was the Crisis Governance Forum, launched in July with an opening address by Italian Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Del Re. The forum is a multi-stakeholder platform to exchange policy-making experiences in COVID-19 response and recovery aligned with the principles of equity and inclusiveness embodied in the rule of law. Focusing on the links between crisis governance and the rule of law, the first Forum sought to identify key justice and governance challenges posed by COVID-19.

93. Our second event in October featured policymakers on the frontlines of ensuring equitable access to health services, particularly for vulnerable populations. With a keynote address by The Rt. Hon. Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and former Administrator of UNDP, the discussion highlighted disparities in health responses to COVID-19 at national and international levels, and identified context-specific pathways to advancing universal health coverage and protecting against future health crises.
94. Our advocacy work on Justice for Women and Girls seeks to highlight the link between SDGs 5 and 16 as enablers and accelerators of women's empowerment, gender equality and sustainable development. Our efforts in this area were informed by the findings of IDLO's 2019 Report of the High-Level Group on Justice for Women.
95. IDLO released a follow-up report on Justice for Women Amidst COVID-19 in partnership with UN Women, UNDP, UNODC, the World Bank, Pathfinders, and The Elders. It provides a rapid assessment of major challenges to women's access to justice in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and provides recommendations for mitigating the disproportionate impact of the crisis on women and girls.
96. We have disseminated the findings of this report to policymakers and practitioners, including through a series of webinars. This included a webinar on Gender-based Violence and COVID-19, which focused on GBV-specific justice responses in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath and aims to catalyse information sharing between global and national experts on lessons, entry points and emerging solutions to ensure access to justice for GBV survivors.
97. On the occasion of Global Justice Week in October, IDLO also co-organised a high-level panel discussion on justice for women and girls amid COVID-19 to discuss addressing justice gaps and accelerate joint action and investment on justice for women and girls.
98. Another major advocacy priority is the link between human rights and the rule of law. In February, I addressed the annual High-level Segment of the Human Rights Council at its 43rd Session. My statement highlighted the symbiotic relationship between the rule of law and human rights.
99. In commemoration of this year's International Day of Democracy, IDLO and International IDEA organised an event, co-sponsored by Italy and Sweden as respective host countries of the two Organisations, on 'Democracy Day in the Time of the Pandemic: A Sustainable Response to the Global Crisis based on Multilateralism and the Rule of Law.' The event included a video message by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and a keynote address by Sweden's Ambassador-at-Large for Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law. In my intervention, I illustrated how rule of law, democracy, and human rights are inextricably linked as

entry points for addressing the interrelated social, economic, and environmental challenges posed by COVID-19, and to advancing in a mutually reinforcing way the objectives of SDG 16.

100. IDLO participated in the 44th and 45th Sessions of the Human Rights Council, where we contributed our sectoral expertise to multi-stakeholder dialogues on the impact of corruption on legal systems, and the importance of gender mainstreaming in the work of the Council and of its mechanisms. This included engagement with the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers during the presentation of his annual report to the Human Rights Council.
101. IDLO participated for the first time as an Observer in meetings of various subsidiary bodies of the Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). This included the preparatory meeting for the Special Session of the General Assembly Against Corruption (UNGASS), planned for June 2021. We intend to strengthen our partnership with UNODC in this area of work.
102. We participated in several climate justice advocacy initiatives, and organised a webinar on the rule of law, climate, and conflict in the Sahel in the context of the Berlin Climate and Security Conference 2020, sponsored by the Government of Germany. IDLO also contributed a policy statement to the Online Platform on Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from COVID-19, sponsored by the Government of Japan and UNFCCC.
103. Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on justice institutions and justice seekers in our countries of operation, IDLO organised several regional webinars to facilitate the exchange of experiences and emerging practices in upholding the rule of law in the context of the pandemic. These webinars discussed the impact of COVID-19 on trafficking in persons in West Africa, access to justice in East Africa and debt and insolvency in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. IDLO also published a series of ‘notes from the field’ documenting the effect of COVID-19 on the justice sector in our countries of operation.
104. Another important way in which IDLO maintained its policy advocacy this year is by marking ‘International Days’ on themes related to our mandate. IDLO engaged in these events by issuing policy statements and social media publications to highlight the contribution of the rule of law to different aspects of peace, development and human rights.

IV. PARTNERSHIPS AND OUTREACH

105. I believe that the pandemic has highlighted the importance of cooperation and solidarity in the midst of the current crisis and in its aftermath. This year, I have prioritised outreach to key IDLO stakeholders to strengthen existing partnerships,

hear and learn from their perspectives, and broaden the outreach and engagement of the Organization.

106. Since January, I have aimed to reach out to a broad range of stakeholders. Before the introduction of public health restrictions, I travelled to The Hague, Geneva, and New York to meet with key partners. I intend to resume visits to all our of partners and to field offices as soon as circumstances allow.
107. While the crisis has curtailed physical travel and meetings, IDLO has continued to engage with partners through videoconferences, correspondence, and virtual events. I am pleased to have been able to hold many remote meetings with key stakeholders in all regions.
108. As part of our outreach efforts, I have sent a periodic “Letter to Partners” to keep stakeholders updated on IDLO’s key achievements this year, with a focus on our contribution to the global response to COVID-19.
109. An important way in which we have engaged with our partners has been through the development of IDLO’s new Strategic Plan 2021-2024. IDLO undertook its broadest ever multi-stakeholder consultation process, conducting a series of virtual interviews and focus groups, and engaging stakeholders around the world, including in our country offices.
110. The exercise has provided valuable insights and helped to deepen our understanding of issues and trends that are likely to affect the rule of law sector in the coming years.
111. It has also been a good opportunity to connect with a wide range of partners, including government representatives, parliamentarians, officials from the United Nations system, the judicial and legal community, academia, civil society and youth representatives to raise IDLO’s profile and gain their perspectives.
112. Strengthened collaboration with Rome-based international organisations is a key priority for IDLO. Over the past year, we have expanded our engagement through active participation in working groups, initiatives and platforms, including the COVID-19 Food Coalition, launched by FAO and led by the Government of Italy, the Committee on Food Security, and the UNIDROIT Governing Council.
113. As part of ongoing work to advance South-South and North-South cooperation, IDLO contributed to a report on regional COVID-19 responses in collaboration with ASEAN, Grow Asia, IFAD and the World Economic Forum and developed an outreach plan for engagement with the African Union on Agenda 2063.

114. Pursuing a strategic partnership with the European Union, the second largest funder in the justice sector, was an important priority for IDLO. We took a major step forward by submitting an application for a pillar assessment.
115. During the year we made efforts to engage more actively with our global network of thousands of IDLO Alumni by launching a new newsletter – “Alumni Voices” – featuring interviews with several high-level Alumni from Uganda. A second edition of the newsletter highlighted Alumni from Latin America, while similar outreach is continuing in other parts of the world.

V. MANAGEMENT

a. Internal Communication and Learning

116. COVID-19 has disrupted life as we knew it, forcing us to adopt new working patterns and shifting interactions with others to the screens of our computers and mobile devices. I have made it a priority to communicate regularly with staff through messages, updates, and meetings.
117. IDLO used a new video-conferencing platform to hold regular town hall meetings as part of efforts to improve communication and integration across the Organisation. For the first time, all IDLO colleagues who connected were able to see and interact with each other.
118. At the start of the lockdown, we introduced new online courses on the IDLO E-Learning Platform, on subjects related to the new complexities and challenges of a full remote working arrangement faced individually by employees as well as collectively by teams.
119. To promote information sharing and a culture of learning within the organization. IDLO launched a “Learning at Home Webinar series”. Internal webinars were organised on a number of topics including irregular migration, climate change, research, and monitoring and evaluation.
120. As the Organisation continues to improve and enrich our employee learning programme, we are exploring innovative ways to offer learning opportunities to staff and teams across the globe.

b. ICT Improvements

121. Remote working underlined the importance of investment in technology solutions. Thanks to the migration of core ICT services to cloud-based platforms, IDLO staff were able to rely on online services and maintain operations over the course of the pandemic and long periods of teleworking.

122. ICT improvements in 2020 were primarily focused on facilitating the remote working, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. The adoption of virtual technology and platforms for internal and external meetings, trainings, and webinars were supported and prioritised as well as ICT security, data protection and privacy.
123. We have initiated a full review of our ICT plans to respond to the new needs and to allocate the resources required for effective implementation of new ways of working. Some immediate investments have been made in new communication tools, with less critical, longer term projects reprioritised for 2021.

c. Transparency and Accountability

124. IDLO revised and adopted a number of new policies and procedures to strengthen transparency and accountability as we adopted new ways of working in response to the pandemic.
125. We developed and implemented a new organizational Transparency Policy to strengthen IDLO's commitment to transparency and open and publicly accessible information in its operations, in line with our core values.
126. In response to the special circumstances presented by the crisis, IDLO also developed guidance in several areas, including Workforce Guidelines for COVID-19 and the processing of personal data related to COVID-19, and an electronic approvals process.
127. Policies on Delegation of Authority were updated to reflect newly delegated authorities and new guidelines issued for working with implementing partners to strengthen accountability.

d. Risk Management

128. In addition to following the evolution of the pandemic, our Security Management Team is working to ensure general safety throughout the Organization and is closely monitoring developments in all locations where we operate, with a special focus in volatile security environments.
129. To coordinate local preparations and benefit from the experiences of Rome-based organisations, I have participated in the United Nations Security Management Team for Italy, chaired by FAO and supported by the Italian government.
130. We have also prioritised outreach to our partner countries to secure recognition of IDLO's legal status as an intergovernmental organisation through appropriate means including Host Country Agreements (HCA). These agreements are crucial to our

ability to operate efficiently and fundamental to the ability of our employees to work effectively and securely.

131. This year IDLO has concluded Host Country Agreements with Burkina Faso, Mongolia, Niger, and Uganda and is making good progress in negotiations with several other partner countries. A report on the progress made in providing for the legal status of the Organisation in the countries in which it operates, as requested by Resolution 3/2019, is before the Assembly.

e. Organisational Changes

132. In order to introduce a more strategic approach to our external relations and partnerships and following the review of IDLO's external relations functions envisaged in the Management Plan 2020, I have made some changes to IDLO's organisational structure.
133. Based on the recommendations of the review, I have established a Department of External Relations and Partnerships. The Department will have global responsibility for the planning, coordination, and implementation of IDLO's external relations agenda, including development of partnerships and communications strategies, resource mobilisation and support for governance.
134. As part of these changes, a dedicated Strategy and Policy Planning Unit has been established within my Office to assist me in articulating an organisation-wide policy framework. The Unit will be responsible for the coordination of strategy and policy planning; data and knowledge management; and organizational monitoring and reporting.
135. As envisaged in the 2020 Management Plan, I also commissioned a review of IDLO's human resources functions. I look forward to implementing the review's recommendations, including developing a new Human Resources Strategy to promote a more comprehensive approach to human resources management aligned with IDLO's values, mission, and strategic priorities.

f. Financial Results

136. IDLO started 2020 in a sound financial position with healthy reserves and an Operational Fund, which gave us some confidence in navigating a fast-changing financial environment.
137. Thanks to organisational reforms, IDLO now has International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) compliant financial structures in place and has

produced for the first time the 2019 financial statements in an IPSAS compliant format.

138. To mitigate the impact of the global recession caused by COVID-19, we are actively taking steps to minimise our financial exposure through prudent management of our low-risk investment portfolio, including by reallocating our Euro account balances to minimise the impact from negative interest rates.
139. As noted above, the crisis has had an impact on our programme implementation and consequently on programme revenue. Thanks to the Organisation's ability to adapt our programming and take appropriate mitigation measures, IDLO continues to be on track to meet revenue targets for 2020 based on the approved budget.
140. IDLO recognizes that we are working in a fast-evolving environment and has taken a conservative but flexible approach to the development of the 2021 Operational Budget.

VI. LOOKING AHEAD

141. We are still in a period of profound and unprecedented uncertainty as the pandemic impacts all aspects of daily life around the world. IDLO will continue to make its best efforts to contribute to the global response to COVID-19.
142. The pandemic encountered a deeply divided and unequal world, beset by environmental crises, social inequality, conflict, disruptive innovation, and declining public trust. By shining such an unforgiving light on our vulnerability and lack of preparedness, the pandemic has starkly revealed the need for renewed multilateralism and global solidarity.
143. Restoring and sustaining our progress to date will require reinvigoration of the international development agenda, with increased collaboration at local, national, and global levels and placement of the rule of law and justice at the heart of recovery efforts.
144. Following extensive consultations with our stakeholders and a review of IDLO's accomplishments and challenges over the last strategic cycle, we have developed a new strategy for IDLO that seeks to contribute to these efforts, building on IDLO's comparative advantages and key strengths.
145. Strategic Plan 2021-2024 is forward-looking and aims to promote a people-centred approach to justice, human rights, and the rule of law to build more peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies.

146. Dispossession, inequity, conflict, and climate change present menaces as great as or greater than ever. Against these enduring threats, the rule of law is an essential bulwark and means to justice for vulnerable populations around the world.
147. That truth is the motivating force for all of our work here at IDLO.
148. I would like to express my deep gratitude to IDLO's Member Parties and partners for their ongoing support, with particular appreciation to the President and Vice Presidents of the Assembly of Parties.
149. I extend my special thanks to IDLO staff for their dedication, resilience and commitment during this extraordinarily challenging time, without which none of the achievements in this report would have been possible.

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