
MAKING LAW AND JUSTICE WORK FOR WOMEN

A Roundtable organized by the International Development Law Organization (IDLO)
on the occasion of International Women's Day



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Monday, March 9, 2015
IDLO Branch Office, Hofweg 9E, The Hague

2:30 – 4:30 pm
Registration from 2:00pm

In recent years remarkable progress has been made in many aspects of girls' and women's lives. But despite the changes, deep-seated gender inequalities endure.

More girls are going to school, but forced and early marriages stop many of them from completing their education. There is much greater awareness and action to combat gender based violence, and yet it continues at shockingly high levels. More women than ever are now in paid employment, but the wage gaps persist and women often find themselves in the informal work sector, with low pay and no social security. Women have the right to vote but they are grossly under-represented in parliaments, governments and political parties. Gender equality is firmly enshrined in international human rights treaties and development strategies but is sidelined as a "women's issue" and left outside the mainstream political agenda.

Twenty years after the Beijing World Conference adopted an agenda for women's equality and empowerment, and fifteen years after the UN Security Council called for women's full participation in the promotion of peace and security and an end to gender based violence in conflict, gender injustices continue to fester, affecting the lives of millions of women and girls.

In many countries of the world, laws and institutions, instead of protecting and empowering women, restrict their rights and freedoms and deny them equal opportunity and fair treatment. Even where the laws provide rights, women may be denied them for various reasons and are unable to find justice, because the courts are too expensive, remote or complicated, or do not provide effective remedies. In many developing countries women turn to informal or traditional systems of justice, where they encounter prejudice, or worse still, risk further violence. The outcomes often fail to meet international standards or constitutional guarantees of equality.

In September 2015 the UN General Assembly will adopt a new development agenda which is expected to include specific goals on gender equality and access to justice. By linking the rule of law with development, the agenda will open up an important pathway for achieving gender equality.

The rule of law, properly understood, is based on fundamental principles of equality, equal protection and human rights. It is crucial for the fight against gender discrimination and gender based violence. As the only inter-governmental organization exclusively devoted to advancing the rule of law, the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) is committed to making laws and institutions work effectively for women.

To mark International Women's Day, IDLO is convening a roundtable of practitioners, policy makers and experts to discuss the impediments to women's access to justice and how they can be overcome.

Facilitated by the Director-General of IDLO, the roundtable will engage practitioners from the field with policy makers, experts from Dutch institutions, representatives of The Hague-based international organizations and the diplomatic community.

A leading lawyer from India, a women's rights activist from Zimbabwe, an award-winning photographer from Bangladesh, and a gender expert from IDLO's field operation in Afghanistan are among the key speakers who will share their understanding of the tough realities facing women who seek justice, how obstacles are being overcome and what the international community can do to support change.

In a free and frank discussion, the participants will be challenged to consider:

- Are the threats to gender equality and women's access to justice becoming fewer or more?
- Are legal and judicial reforms making any difference to women's fight for justice and equality?
- Can the gender blind spots of justice institutions be removed?
- How effective are legal empowerment strategies for women?
- What scope is there for gender-friendly reform of informal justice systems?
- Is the international community part of the solution or part of the problem?
- Where should resources be focused to achieve equality, security and agency for women?

The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) enables governments and empowers people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity.