



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, Ms JAN BEAGLE

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Madam President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues and Friends,

As the Director-General of the International Development Law Organization, the only global intergovernmental organization devoted solely to advancing the rule of law and access to justice, it is an honour to address the Council at this critical moment.

IDLO works in every region of the world, including in some of the most fragile contexts, where justice and the rule of law are most at risk, where rights are under threat, serving the most vulnerable among justice seekers.

We have witnessed the tremendous damage in human suffering wrought by COVID-19, particularly for those already living in conditions of inequality, insecurity and injustice, and the long-term implications this has for human rights and the rule of law.

The world was ill-prepared for the pandemic.

Even before most of us had heard of the coronavirus, we were living in a state of profound fragility and inequality. There was a growing backlash against human rights and the internationally accepted norms of the rule of law. Increasing numbers of countries were looking to go their own way, shifting away from the principles of multilateralism and solidarity.

The Secretary-General highlighted these troubling trends only last month, when he said: *“Human rights are the object of a concerted attack... Well before the pandemic, human rights were facing growing pressures. The rule of law was being challenged by weak justice systems.”*

The crisis is exploiting and exacerbating these pre-existing structural inequalities and fault lines in societies around the globe.

The Human Development Report and many other sources have documented the worrying reversals in progress across many different dimensions of development.

Yet this need not be the case.

The crisis can be a “moment of truth”: a once-in-a-generation opportunity to confront the gaping inequalities that shape the lives of too many; to strengthen the constitutional and legal architecture

of government institutions; and to reaffirm states' commitment towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies, based on human rights and the rule of law.

Now more than ever, governments and the international community must work together to strengthen the rule of law as the fundamental means by which to protect and promote human rights.

I would like to thank High Commissioner Bachelet for her steady hand through these extraordinary times and for her strong voice for a human-rights based approach to tackling the pandemic.

I also congratulate Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan as she begins her term as President of the Human Rights Council. Her extensive experience in the justice sector, including as the first female High Court Judge in her country, will be invaluable in guiding the work of the Council at this critical juncture. It is also a pleasure to see a woman from the Pacific in this important role.

IDLO is committed to doing its part.

Around the world, we are supporting our partners to respond to their emerging justice challenges and laying the groundwork for a more just and sustainable recovery.

IDLO is focussing on three priority areas where we see the greatest need, and where we can contribute most effectively to the global response to Covid-19.

First, we are helping countries to strengthen their legal and policy frameworks, so they can better manage the pandemic, while respecting the rule of law and protecting human rights.

In cooperation with WHO, IDLO is carrying out programmes in Africa to support governments in *Pandemic Preparedness and Response* and specifically to help strengthen legal frameworks related to the International Health Regulations.

The second priority area is mitigating the impact of the pandemic on justice systems and justice seekers.

Lockdowns and restrictions have meant that many people were unable to seek the protection of the law or seek redress when their human rights have been violated.

For instance, in Kenya we supported the development and delivery of e-justice tools for filing, case management and issuing judgements. This has played a critical role in making sure courts continue to function during lockdown, ensuring the rule of law is maintained and that access to justice is not denied.

IDLO also has drawn on its work to combat gender-based violence and adjusted it to address the global rise in intimate partner violence.

In Mongolia, for example, we are supporting shelters for victims and helping strengthen the capacity of national partners to provide information and support on domestic violence, through webchats and hotlines.

Thirdly, we continue to advocate for the urgent need for continued adherence to the rule of law, amid a trend of rising authoritarianism and diminishing civic space.

In this context, we are organising in April, together with Italy and UN DESA, a multi-stakeholder conference to help catalyse progress on SDG 16 and the entire 2030 Agenda. I would welcome you all to participate.

Madame President,

The link between the rule of law and human rights, good governance, and sustainable development is incontrovertible.

IDLO's new Strategic Plan strengthens our commitment to the human rights-based approach, with renewed emphasis on promoting people-centred justice.

We welcome the Council's increasing focus on the rule of law and look forward to further expanding our cooperation with you in its implementation.

An opportunity to do so will be at the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law. IDLO is working with OHCHR to convene thought leaders and experts in March to help generate ideas for the Forum's theme of *Equal access to justice for all: a necessary element of democracy, rule of law and human rights protection.*"

IDLO is committed to working with you to help narrow the gap between aspiration and action on human rights and to help them make a reality for all.

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