



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, Ms JAN BEAGLE

**In support of the United Nations Human Rights Council Forum
on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law**

Zoom webinar

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Good morning, good afternoon, good evening.

A warm welcome to this discussion. I am Jan Beagle, the Director-General of the International Development Law Organization (IDLO).

For those who may not know us, IDLO is the only global intergovernmental organisation exclusively devoted to promoting the rule of law and access to justice to advance peace, human rights, and sustainable development.

I would like to extend our thanks to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights which is cooperating with IDLO in bringing you this event, and also to our cosponsors, the Human Rights Council Core Group on the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law – Morocco, Norway, Peru, the Republic of Korea, Romania and Tunisia.

The next edition of the Forum will take place on the 16th and 17th of November on the theme of “Equal access to justice for all: a necessary element of democracy, rule of law and human rights protection.

This marks the first time that the Council will focus the Forum directly and specifically on justice and the rule of law.

I am delighted to be here with such an experienced and distinguished group of panellists.

Our keynote speaker is the Honourable Michael Kirby, President of the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute and former Justice of the High Court of Australia. Justice Kirby will speak via pre-recorded video as he is in Sydney, and it is very late there. Justice Kirby asked me to convey to you his sincere regrets that he cannot join us in person.

Before sharing a few thoughts of my own to get us started, let me welcome our panellists (in the order in which they will speak):

- Mona Rishmawi, Chief of the Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,
- Åsa Regnér, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women,
- Diahann Gordon Harrison, Attorney-at-Law and Children’s Advocate of Jamaica,
- Gerald Abila, the Founder of Barefoot Law, Uganda, and

- Diego García Sayán, the Special Rapporteur of both the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers.

Now let me turn briefly to the theme of today's discussion.

As the Secretary-General said in opening the 46th Session of the Human Rights Council just last month, his "Call to Action on Human Rights has a specific emphasis on repealing all discriminatory laws globally."

Ensuring equality before the law, and ending discrimination under the law, is as good a starting place as any for our discussion on the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, and its theme this year of "access to justice for all".

Indeed, working with governments, the United Nations system, and civil society partners, the reform of constitutional, legal, and regulatory frameworks is a central pillar of IDLO's work.

We are very pleased, for example, to be partnering with UN Women on a joint initiative to identify and repeal the hundreds of laws discriminating against women and girls that are still on the books in countries in every region of the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused untold suffering across the globe, has also had an impact on the justice sector and made the lives of justice seekers more difficult -- whether they are seeking a remedy for disproportionate and overly broad lockdowns and restrictive measures, or the right to a speedy criminal trial, or protection from gender-based violence, or the right to benefit from scientific progress through equitable access to a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine.

The political, economic, and social crisis generated by the pandemic, and the exacerbation of inequalities, has made good governance and the rule of law all the more important.

As I said at the High-Level Segment of the Human Rights Council in February, even before most of us had ever heard of the coronavirus, we had been living in a distressed and unstable world: with increasing numbers of countries looking to go their own way, multilateralism dismissed in favour of nationalistic populism, human rights under pressure, and long-standing traditions of the rule of law under attack and weakened for short-term, narrow political gains.

In such circumstances, the decision of the Human Rights Council to dedicate this year's Forum to Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law could not be more timely.

Access to justice is a human right in itself and, together with the rule of law, offers a concrete pathway to peace, good governance, human rights, democracy, and sustainable development.

Thus, Sustainable Development Goal 16 -- on access to justice and strong and accountable institutions -- is not only an end in itself, but a cross-cutting enabler of the entire 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

By nurturing a culture of the rule of law, countries and communities everywhere can construct the essential infrastructure to narrow the gap between human rights in word, and human rights in action.

An objective of the Human Rights Council Forum, and of this virtual discussion to assist in its planning, is ultimately to help make "access to justice" a lived reality for all.

Because “access to justice for all” is not only a clear moral imperative. It is also a necessary condition for sustaining human development as we recover from the pandemic and seek to build a better future for the generations to come.

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