



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION
STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MS JAN BEAGLE
TASHKENT LAW SPRING
22 April 2021

Minister Davletov,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues and Friends,

As Director-General of the International Development Law Organization, the only global intergovernmental organisation exclusively devoted to promoting peace and sustainable development through the rule of law, it is a pleasure to address the Tashkent Law Spring.

This year's theme is both timely and relevant to the extraordinary period of transformative change we are all currently living through.

COVID-19 has shattered the status quo and is transforming the way we live and work.

Social and technological change often outpaces legal reform. We are seeing this play out in real time with the ongoing digital revolution, and the law must of course catch up.

Even more fundamental in my view is the emphasis on the "vision of the law." It reflects the stark choices we face, as individuals, as societies, and collectively as one human family, about the kind of future we want to build as we recover from this crisis.

Because ultimately, the law is an instrument that expresses and seeks to advance society's fundamental values and aspirations.

It can be an engine of empowerment and progress but, as we have seen many times in history, when misused, the law can also be a tool of oppression.

The concept of justice, and in particular the elements of due process, equality and non-discrimination, good governance and respect for human rights, is what distinguishes the rule of law from rule by law.

It is this vision of the law that IDLO works to advance in over thirty countries in all regions of the world.

We have been active in Central Asia since the early 1990s, initially supporting the transition to market economies with legal frameworks and capacity building.

Today, IDLO implements nationally owned programmes to advance justice reforms, promote greater access to justice and support sustainable economic development.

Our partnership with Uzbekistan started in 2018 and I was pleased to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Minister Davletov recently.

IDLO looks forward to further strengthening this partnership and contributing to the ongoing legal reform process.

The COVID-19 pandemic has wrought huge suffering, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and fault lines in societies around the world.

Over the past year, IDLO has been working with our partners to put the rule of law at the heart of the global response to the pandemic and to promote a more just, equitable and sustainable recovery.

Allow me to share four insights from these efforts.

First, innovation and technology have tremendous potential for ensuring justice for all, not just a few.

Even before COVID-19, more than 1.5-billion people had a justice problem they could not resolve. For many, barriers include lack of their awareness of rights, not being able to physically access a court, or pay for legal services.

While COVID-19 laid bare the consequences of years of underinvestment in justice systems and widened the justice gap, it also challenged us to innovate, reimagine and explore alternative approaches.

It is an opportunity to reimagine more “people centred justice systems” based on a clear understanding of justice seekers’ needs.

Digital innovations, including emerging technologies such as blockchain and Artificial Intelligence can be a great equalizer. They have tremendous potential to radically expand access while also increasing cost-effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, and accountability, as well as providing greater legal clarity and certainty.

IDLO works with justice institutions around the world to develop context-specific and nationally owned approaches to integrating digital innovation and tools in their work.

Just today, we were honoured to receive the first USAID Digi Award for our work to support the Kyrgyz judiciary to implement a holistic e-justice system and make judicial decisions publicly available.

Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms can also play an important role in expediting dispute resolution and reducing the burden on courts at a time of increased case backlogs.

On this note, I am pleased to share that, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice of Uzbekistan, we are launching a new project to support commercial mediation for dispute resolution during the pandemic.

We must ensure that the implementation of these approaches is equitable and inclusive and does not create new forms of discrimination.

This brings me to my second point, which is that the law must prioritize the needs of those who have been worst hit by the pandemic, particularly women and girls.

IDLO's report Justice for Women Amidst Covid-19 developed with partners including UN Women, UNODC, UNDP, the World Bank, shows how despite women's enormous contributions to mitigating the impact of the pandemic, the crisis is threatening to roll back decades of hard won gains on gender equality.

The dramatic rise in intimate partner violence during times of lockdown is a clear example. Over the course of 2020, IDLO adapted its work on combatting gender-based violence to address the increased demand for support and services for survivors.

In Afghanistan, for instance we have been supporting women's shelters which saw numbers of survivors seeking refuge double in some cities.

Third, the law can help rebuild trust in governments and public institutions.

Rebuilding peoples' confidence in government was highlighted as a major challenge by global leaders in the UN 75th Anniversary Declaration last year.

A major source of lack of trust is corruption, which diverts funds from essential services and initiatives, undermines confidence in public institutions and is a major impediment to sustainable development.

COVID-19 has dramatically aggravated both the scale and impact of corruption, as countries mobilize and disburse significant emergency relief and recovery funding.

The law can be a powerful tool in the fight against corruption.

IDLO is working in countries as diverse as Armenia, the Bahamas, the Philippines and Ukraine to strengthen the ability to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate offences related to corruption.

We have also engaged with the preparatory process for the General Assembly's Special Session on Anti-Corruption and the G-20's Anti-Corruption Working Group to support a multilateral approach to address this global problem.

Fourth and finally, we must build a legal infrastructure to tackle our shared challenges.

As recent events have shown, we really are all in this together. The pandemic itself and longer term threats like climate change do not respect national boundaries.

Today, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents both humanity's highest aspirations and an effective roadmap for recovery.

The law is critical to accelerating progress on peace and development.

Many SDGs implicitly draw on the principles of inclusivity, equity and non-discrimination and require the creation of new legal frameworks and institutional capacity for their implementation.

Effective laws and institutions can promote inclusive economic recovery, strengthen pandemic preparedness and response, and help us transition to a greener and more climate resilient development model.

To conclude, there is tremendous scope to learn from experiences and expertise across the world and to use this knowledge to realise the vision of a world where everyone lives with dignity and equality under the rule of law.

It is in this spirit of both urgency and optimism that I look forward to the discussions at the Law Spring.

I also invite you to continue this discussion at the SDG 16 Conference IDLO is co-hosting with DESA and Italy next week.

It will be an opportunity to take stock of how goals related to peace, justice and inclusion have been affected by COVID-19 and to explore ways to accelerate progress on SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda.

I hope to see you there and wish you all the best in your deliberations.