

WIMUN NEW
YORK 2026



World Federation of United Nations Associations

STUDY **GUIDE**

Sixth Committee of the General Assembly
Strengthening Rule of Law



General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 July 2024
Original: English

Seventy-ninth session

Item 84 of the provisional agenda*

The rule of law at the national and international levels

Strengthening and coordinating United Nations rule of law activities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 78/112, provides information on efforts to promote and strengthen the rule of law at the national and international levels as well as on the coordination of United Nations rule of law assistance from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024.

* A/79/150.



0 Did You Know That

General Assembly resolution 78/112 asks every UN Member State and UN body to work together more closely to strengthen the rule of law. It calls for integrated action, meaning that governments, courts, and UN agencies should coordinate their efforts instead of working separately. It also calls for cooperative action, meaning that countries should share knowledge and support each other.

Finally, it calls for accountable action, meaning that all actors should be transparent about what they do and take responsibility for their results. These calls for action aim to improve laws, make justice accessible, keep courts independent, and strengthen global cooperation through regular review and training.

0 Definition

The rule of law is a principle of governance where all individuals and institutions, including the government, are accountable to and governed by laws that are public, enforced equally, and judged by independent courts.

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides information on United Nations rule of law activities, in accordance with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 63/128, and addresses, in a balanced manner, the national and international dimensions of the rule of law, as requested in paragraph 17 of Assembly resolution 78/112.

II. United Nations activities to strengthen the rule of law

In focus

The New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law

2. The reporting period saw the start of the implementation of the New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law.¹ The New Vision recommends the Organization to people-centred rule of law initiatives, ensuring that work is informed by and responsive to the needs of individuals. It expands understanding of who benefits from, and is involved in, the efforts of the United Nations in strengthening rule of law and access to justice mechanisms, moving beyond traditional legal actors. The New Vision includes a commitment to gender equality and to supporting Member States to address systemic and persistent barriers for women and girls in accessing justice.

3. By reaffirming that the rule of law lies at the heart of our international system, while addressing the important intersection of the rule of law with several key contemporary issues, including peace and security, technology, the planet, human rights and access to justice, the New Vision gives greater momentum to the efforts of the Organization to strengthen the rule of law in all situations, including in conflict and post-conflict settings.

4. The New Vision also recognizes the key integrator role that the rule of law plays in building and maintaining peaceful societies and accelerates action on the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

The full, equal and equitable participation at all levels in the international legal system

5. In resolution 78/112, the General Assembly invited Member States to focus their comments during the Sixth Committee debate on the rule of law agenda item on the subtopic “The full, equal and equitable participation at all levels in the international legal system”.

6. Capacity-building and technical assistance activities form a cornerstone of the efforts of the Organization to strengthen the role of international law in international relations. In the field of ocean affairs and the law of the sea, the United Nations engages in capacity-building projects, technical assistance, fellowships and outreach activities with States and intergovernmental organizations, aimed primarily at developing States, with a particular focus on the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.² The United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, established by the General Assembly in resolution 2099 (XX), aims to contribute to a better knowledge of international law “as a means for strengthening international peace and security”. Workshops are also organized on

¹ www.un.org/ruleoflaw/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Rule-of-Law-New-Vision-English.pdf.

² *Enhancing Ocean Capacity: Capacity-Building Programmes of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea* (United Nations publication, 2022).

1 Something to Think About

The resolution supports the UN's internal coordination on rule of law efforts, led by the Rule of Law Group and Unit under the Deputy Secretary-General. It requests annual reports from the Secretary-General on their activities, focusing on improving coordination, consistency, and effectiveness, in line with guidance from a previous report.

1 Something to Think About

The rule of law has both national and international dimensions that are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Nationally, it involves ensuring accountability, equality before the law, judicial independence, and access to justice. Internationally, it requires that States and international actors respect and comply with international law, including the UN Charter and human rights obligations.

1 Something to Think About

The New Vision of the Secretary-General positions the rule of law as a transformative tool for building inclusive, just, and resilient societies. It promotes a people-first, prevention-oriented, and globally coordinated approach that connects justice, human dignity, and sustainable development.

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides information on United Nations rule of law activities, in accordance with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 63/128, and addresses, in a balanced manner, the national and international dimensions of the rule of law, as requested in paragraph 17 of Assembly resolution 78/112.

II. United Nations activities to strengthen the rule of law

In focus

The New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law

2. The reporting period saw the start of the implementation of the New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law.¹ The New Vision recommit the Organization to people-centred rule of law initiatives, ensuring that work is informed by and responsive to the needs of individuals. It expands understanding of **who benefits from, and is involved in, the efforts of the United Nations in strengthening rule of law and access to justice mechanisms, moving beyond traditional legal actors.** The New Vision includes a commitment to gender equality and to supporting Member States to address systemic and persistent barriers for women and girls in accessing justice.

3. By **reaffirming that the rule of law lies at the heart of our international system,** while addressing the important intersection of the rule of law with several key contemporary issues, including peace and security, technology, the planet, human rights and access to justice, the New Vision gives greater momentum to the efforts of the Organization to strengthen the rule of law in all situations, including in conflict and post-conflict settings.

4. The New Vision also recognizes the key integrator role that the rule of law plays in building and maintaining peaceful societies and **accelerates action on the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.**

The full, equal and equitable participation at all levels in the international legal system

5. In resolution 78/112, the General Assembly invited Member States to focus their comments during the Sixth Committee debate on the rule of law agenda item on the subtopic “The full, equal and equitable participation at all levels in the international legal system”.

6. Capacity-building and technical assistance activities form a cornerstone of the efforts of the Organization to strengthen the role of international law in international relations. In the field of ocean affairs and the law of the sea, the United Nations engages in capacity-building projects, technical assistance, fellowships and outreach activities with States and intergovernmental organizations, aimed primarily at developing States, with a particular focus on the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.² The United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, established by the General Assembly in resolution 2099 (XX), aims to contribute to a better knowledge of international law “as a means for strengthening international peace and security”. Workshops are also organized on

2 Interesting Facts

The United Nations’ efforts to strengthen the rule of law and access to justice benefit a wide range of people, especially marginalized groups like:

- Women
- Children
- Indigenous peoples
- Refugees

Beyond traditional legal institutions, these efforts involve diverse actors including:

- Civil society organizations
- Community leaders
- Human rights institutions
- Youth and women’s groups
- Religious and cultural bodies,
- Journalists and media, technology providers
- Academia

3 Did You Know That

The rule of law is fundamental for maintaining justice, peace, and stability in any society. It ensures that everyone, individuals, institutions, and governments, is accountable under laws that are fair, transparent, and consistently applied.

4 Did You Know That

The rule of law is central to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable institutions. SDG 16 recognizes that strong legal frameworks and justice systems are essential for reducing violence, combating corruption, protecting human rights, and ensuring transparent governance.

¹ www.un.org/ruleoflaw/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Rule-of-Law-New-Vision-English.pdf.

² *Enhancing Ocean Capacity: Capacity-Building Programmes of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea* (United Nations publication, 2022).

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides information on United Nations rule of law activities, in accordance with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 63/128, and addresses, in a balanced manner, the national and international dimensions of the rule of law, as requested in paragraph 17 of Assembly resolution 78/112.

II. United Nations activities to strengthen the rule of law

In focus

The New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law

2. The reporting period saw the start of the implementation of the New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law.¹ The New Vision recommit the Organization to people-centred rule of law initiatives, ensuring that work is informed by and responsive to the needs of individuals. It expands understanding of who benefits from, and is involved in, the efforts of the United Nations in strengthening rule of law and access to justice mechanisms, moving beyond traditional legal actors. The New Vision includes a commitment to gender equality and to supporting Member States to address systemic and persistent barriers for women and girls in accessing justice.

3. By reaffirming that the rule of law lies at the heart of our international system, while addressing the important intersection of the rule of law with several key contemporary issues, including peace and security, technology, the planet, human rights and access to justice, the New Vision gives greater momentum to the efforts of the Organization to strengthen the rule of law in all situations, including in conflict and post-conflict settings.

4. The New Vision also recognizes the key integrator role that the rule of law plays in building and maintaining peaceful societies and accelerates action on the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

The full, equal and equitable participation at all levels in the international legal system

5. In resolution 78/112, the General Assembly invited Member States to focus their comments during the Sixth Committee debate on the rule of law agenda item on the subtopic “The full, equal and equitable participation at all levels in the international legal system”.

6. Capacity-building and technical assistance activities form a cornerstone of the efforts of the Organization to strengthen the role of international law in international relations. In the field of ocean affairs and the law of the sea, the United Nations engages in capacity-building projects, technical assistance, fellowships and outreach activities with States and intergovernmental organizations, aimed primarily at developing States, with a particular focus on the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.² The United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, established by the General Assembly in resolution 2099 (XX), aims to contribute to a better knowledge of international law “as a means for strengthening international peace and security”. Workshops are also organized on

6

Something to Think About

The United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law is an initiative aimed at promoting understanding and awareness of international law worldwide. Its main objectives are to support Member States, especially developing countries, in building capacity through education and training on international legal principles and practices.

¹ www.un.org/ruleoflaw/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Rule-of-Law-New-Vision-English.pdf.

² *Enhancing Ocean Capacity: Capacity-Building Programmes of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea* (United Nations publication, 2022).

treaty law and practice aiming at fostering participation of Member States in the international treaty framework, an effort that the Assembly encouraged to be organized "as regularly as possible" (resolution 78/236). Efforts are also under way to provide for the full, equal and equitable participation with regard to the expected outcomes of the investor-State dispute settlement reform and the reform process itself being discussed by a **United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) working group**. One element is the establishment of an advisory centre on international investment dispute resolution, which will provide training and assistance to enhance the capacity of States in preventing and handling international investment disputes, in particular the least developed and developing countries.

7. Trust funds also play a pivotal role in mitigating financial obstacles and facilitating access to and participation in the international legal system. In particular, **the United Nations administers several trust funds aimed at assisting States**, in particular developing States, to implement the Convention on the Law of the Sea and participate in ocean-related work of the General Assembly. Moreover, with the aim of promoting the judicial settlement of disputes between States, the United Nations also administers the Secretary-General's trust fund to assist States in the settlement of disputes through the International Court of Justice.

A. Promotion of the rule of law at the national level

1. Advancing security and justice

*Effective, inclusive and **accountable justice and security institutions***

8. The United Nations has invested in advancing justice and security, including by using digital technologies, to improve the accessibility, efficiency, transparency and accountability of justice and security institutions. In its report, **"SDG 16 – Through a digital lens"**,³ the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute examines ways to ensure that digital transformations advance progress towards this Sustainable Development Goal.

9. In Bangladesh, the Organization supported the digitalization of legal aid services, leading to increased access to legal aid by reducing the time and cost of court procedures. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, United Nations initiatives enabled the transition from manual processing of criminal data to digital software in line with international standards and provided digital investigation expertise and training to the military justice system to enhance the investigation of serious crimes.

In Kenya, the United Nations assisted small claims courts to increase visibility and accessibility, as well as reducing case backlog through digitization of the case management system. In Libya, the United Nations supported reform of the country's criminal justice system and prosecutorial services by enhancing digitalization and revising the penal and criminal procedure codes. In Maldives, in partnership with the Attorney General's Office, the United Nations supported the development of the first publicly accessible website serving as a repository for all laws and regulations, with integrated text-to-speech functionality. In Pakistan, with the assistance of the United Nations, virtual courts have been established in an additional 36 district courts.

10. In Burkina Faso, the Niger and Senegal, the United Nations co-supported the improvement of the security management systems through procurement of non-lethal equipment and strengthening capacities of security forces in the three countries.

11. The United Nations developed the Toolkit for Responsible AI Innovation in Law Enforcement in partnership with the International Criminal Police Organization

³ www.sdg16hub.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/SDG%2016%20%20Report_web.pdf.

6

Did You Know That

The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) has six working groups, each focused on a specific area of international trade law. These working groups are responsible for developing and promoting uniform legal standards, including model laws and conventions, to facilitate international trade.

7

Interesting Facts

Here are the names of the UN trust funds that have to do with the rule of law:

- UN Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights
- UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture
- UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery
- UN Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance for the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review
- Peacebuilding Fund
- Trust Fund of United Nations Staff Legal Assistance

1

Definition

Accountable justice and security institutions refer to the government bodies and processes responsible for upholding the law, maintaining public order, and ensuring justice, which operate with transparency, integrity, and are subject to oversight.

8

Something to Think About

The UNICRI report serves as a crucial analysis as the world approaches the halfway mark for the SDGs. It calls for a careful and strategic approach to digitalization, ensuring that its transformative potential is harnessed to strengthen peace, justice, and effective institutions, rather than worsening existing problems or creating new ones.

treaty law and practice aiming at fostering participation of Member States in the international treaty framework, an effort that the Assembly encouraged to be organized "as regularly as possible" (resolution 78/236). Efforts are also under way to provide for the full, equal and equitable participation with regard to the expected outcomes of the investor-State dispute settlement reform and the reform process itself being discussed by a United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) working group. One element is the establishment of an advisory centre on international investment dispute resolution, which will provide training and assistance to enhance the capacity of States in preventing and handling international investment disputes, in particular the least developed and developing countries.

7. Trust funds also play a pivotal role in mitigating financial obstacles and facilitating access to and participation in the international legal system. In particular, the United Nations administers several trust funds aimed at assisting States, in particular developing States, to implement the Convention on the Law of the Sea and participate in ocean-related work of the General Assembly. Moreover, with the aim of promoting the judicial settlement of disputes between States, the United Nations also administers the Secretary-General's trust fund to assist States in the settlement of disputes through the International Court of Justice.

A. Promotion of the rule of law at the national level

1. Advancing security and justice

Effective, inclusive and accountable justice and security institutions

8. The United Nations has invested in advancing justice and security, including by using digital technologies, to improve the accessibility, efficiency, transparency and accountability of justice and security institutions. In its report, "SDG 16 – Through a digital lens",³ the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute examines ways to ensure that digital transformations advance progress towards this Sustainable Development Goal.

9. In Bangladesh, the Organization supported the digitalization of legal aid services, leading to increased access to legal aid by reducing the time and cost of court procedures. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, United Nations initiatives enabled the transition from manual processing of criminal data to digital software in line with international standards and provided digital investigation expertise and training to the military justice system to enhance the investigation of serious crimes. In Kenya, the United Nations assisted small claims courts to increase visibility and accessibility, as well as reducing case backlogs through digitization of the case management system. In Libya, the United Nations supported reform of the country's criminal justice system and prosecutorial services by enhancing digitalization and revising the penal and criminal procedure codes. In Maldives, in partnership with the Attorney General's Office, the United Nations supported the development of the first publicly accessible website serving as a repository for all laws and regulations, with integrated text-to-speech functionality. In Pakistan, with the assistance of the United Nations, virtual courts have been established in an additional 36 district courts.

10. In Burkina Faso, the Niger and Senegal, the United Nations co-supported the improvement of the security management systems through procurement of non-lethal equipment and strengthening capacities of security forces in the three countries.

11. The United Nations developed the **Toolkit for Responsible AI Innovation in Law Enforcement** in partnership with the International Criminal Police Organization

11 Did You Know That

The "Toolkit for Responsible AI Innovation in Law Enforcement" provides the practical, operational framework for a specific set of key institutions to navigate these challenges and opportunities, ensuring that their adoption of advanced digital technologies (AI) is consistently aligned with and strengthens the principles of accountability, transparency, human rights, and legality – the very foundations of the rule of law.

³ www.sdg16hub.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/SDG%2016%20%20Report_web.pdf.

(INTERPOL), which provides guidance to law enforcement agencies worldwide on how to implement responsible practices as they explore the integration of artificial intelligence into their operations.⁴

12. To strengthen prison management and enhance the application of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules),⁵ an e-learning course was institutionalized in Kazakhstan with the assistance of the United Nations and completed by 3,000 officers. In Tajikistan, the United Nations trained 132 prison officers on dynamic security, risk and needs assessment protocols and human rights-compliant interviewing. In the Central African Republic, high security detention wings were added to two prison facilities, and national officers were supported to respond to security incidents, thereby reducing the recurrence of major escapes.

13. To provide guidance to Member States on investigative interviewing centred on human rights and evidence-based approaches, the *United Nations Manual on Investigative Interviewing for Criminal Investigations*⁶ was introduced during the reporting period. It is aimed at ensuring that all interactions with interviewees are conducted in an ethical, rights-based and non-coercive manner.

14. The United Nations Women Command Development Course was focused on the *specific needs of women police officers in peace operations*, with a view to increasing their ranks within the Organization. In Pakistan, 679 law enforcement personnel, including 132 women, were specifically trained on *gender-based violence*.

Security, crime prevention and armed violence reduction

15. The 2023 Global Study on Homicide⁷ showed that, from 2015 to 2021, organized crime-related homicides killed almost as many people as armed conflicts. High rates of lethal violence in some regions are significantly influenced by access to and misuse of firearms, with weak oversight and associated impunity. In response, the Organization supported 43 countries during the reporting period in strengthening their responses to firearms trafficking through enhanced detection, legislative measures, investigative skills and international cooperation.

16. Through the Saving Lives Entry initiative, the United Nations supported holistic small arms control and armed violence reduction activities that are nationally led, people-centred and preventative in nature in Cameroon, Ghana, Honduras, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Panama, Papua New Guinea and South Sudan.

17. The United Nations organized workshops in Algeria, Benin, Mali and Togo aimed at sharing best practices, building knowledge and developing the skills of national policymakers and criminal justice officials to enhance national frameworks and capabilities to better address the nexus between terrorism and organized crime.

18. The United Nations Youth 4 Impact programme in the Middle East and North Africa region engaged more than 950 policymakers, coaches, health professionals, civil society representatives and youth across six countries in capacity-building crime prevention activities.

13 Something to Think About

The United Nations Manual on Investigative Interviewing for Criminal Investigations is a practical guide developed to assist law enforcement and criminal justice officials in conducting interviews that are lawful, effective, ethical, and respectful of human rights.

14 Did You Know That

Needs of Women Police Officers in Peace Operations:

- **Equal Representation** – Ensure fair recruitment, deployment, and promotion to increase women's participation.
- **Gender-Sensitive Conditions** – Provide appropriate facilities, healthcare, and support tailored to women's needs.
- **Protection from Harassment** – Establish clear systems to prevent and address harassment and discrimination.
- **Training and Development** – Offer specialized and leadership training to enhance skills and career growth.
- **Supportive Environment** – Foster inclusive, respectful workplaces with mentorship and flexibility.
- **Operational Safety** – Ensure adequate security measures for women officers in the field.

14 Definition

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in unequal power relations, discrimination, and systemic inequalities between genders, most often targeting women and girls, though it can affect anyone.

⁴ The resources for the Toolkit are available at <https://unscit.it/Publication/Toolkit-for-Responsible-AI-Integration-in-Law-Enforcement/UNSCR-INTERPOL>.

⁵ General Assembly resolution 76/175, annex.
⁶ *United Nations Manual on Investigative Interviewing for Criminal Investigations* (United Nations publication, 2024).
⁷ 2023). Available at www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/global-study-on-homicide.html.

(INTERPOL), which provides guidance to law enforcement agencies worldwide on how to implement responsible practices as they explore the integration of artificial intelligence into their operations.⁴

12. To strengthen prison management and enhance the application of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules),⁵ an e-learning course was institutionalized in Kazakhstan with the assistance of the United Nations and completed by 3,000 officers. In Tajikistan, the United Nations trained 132 prison officers on dynamic security, risk and needs assessment protocols and human rights-compliant interviewing. In the Central African Republic, high security detention wings were added to two prison facilities, and national officers were supported to respond to security incidents, thereby reducing the recurrence of major escapes.

13. To provide guidance to Member States on investigative interviewing centred on human rights and evidence-based approaches, the United Nations Manual on Investigative Interviewing for Criminal Investigations⁶ was introduced during the reporting period. It is aimed at ensuring that all interactions with interviewees are conducted in an ethical, rights-based and non-coercive manner.

14. The United Nations Women Command Development Course was focused on the specific needs of women police officers in peace operations, with a view to increasing their ranks within the Organization. In Pakistan, 679 law enforcement personnel, including 132 women, were specifically trained on gender-based violence.

Security, crime prevention and armed violence reduction

15. The 2023 Global Study on Homicide⁷ showed that, from 2015 to 2021, organized crime-related homicides killed almost as many people as armed conflicts. High rates of lethal violence in some regions are significantly influenced by access to and misuse of firearms, with weak oversight and associated impunity. In response, the Organization supported 43 countries during the reporting period in strengthening their responses to firearms trafficking through enhanced detection, legislative measures, investigative skills and international cooperation.

16. Through the Saving Lives Entity initiative, the United Nations supported holistic small arms control and armed violence reduction activities that are nationally led, people-centred and preventative in nature in Cameroon, Ghana, Honduras, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Panama, Papua New Guinea and South Sudan.

17. The United Nations organized workshops in Algeria, Benin, Mali and Togo aimed at sharing best practices, building knowledge and developing the skills of national policymakers and criminal justice officials to enhance national frameworks and capabilities to better address the nexus between terrorism and organized crime.

18. The United Nations Youth 4 Impact programme in the Middle East and North Africa region engaged more than 950 policymakers, coaches, health professionals, civil society representatives and youth across six countries in capacity-building crime prevention activities.

15 Interesting Facts

Some interesting facts:

- Over 200,000 firearm-related deaths occur globally each year.
- In Latin America, the Caribbean, and parts of Africa, up to 70-90% of homicides involve firearms.
- Women are 5 times more likely to be killed by a partner when a firearm is present.

⁴ The resources for the Toolkit are available at <https://unicti.org/Publication/Toolkit-for-Responsible-AI-Innovation-in-Law-Enforcement-UNICRI-INTERPOL>.

⁵ General Assembly resolution 70/174, 2016.

⁶ General Assembly resolution 76/174, 2021.

⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024).

⁸ Available at www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/global-study-on-homicide.html.

Equal access to justice for all

19. **Access to justice** is a key component of a fair, effective, inclusive and efficient justice system, so that all groups in society can equally enjoy their rights.

20. The efforts of the United Nations to expand access to justice involve supporting Member States in strengthening access to legal aid, human rights-based and gender-sensitive policing, the efficiency, presence and accountability of criminal justice institutions, support for and protection of victims of crime and the responsible use of technology in the criminal justice system. The number of operational courts and mobile court hearings supported by the United Nations continued to increase in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and South Sudan.

21. In Bhutan, the United Nations launched an initiative to promote access to justice for women and people with disabilities, focusing on legal information dissemination, legal aid provision and institutional collaborations with legal aid service providers and justice actors. In Egypt, the United Nations trained 38 judges and 19 staff of the Ministry of Justice on access to justice for persons with disabilities, leading to enhanced provision of legal aid and refurbishment and improvement of the accessibility of courts. In Tanzania, the Organization worked successfully to help provide legal aid to underserved communities and vulnerable groups, including victims of sexual and gender-based violence, youth, women, children and people with disabilities.

22. In Nepal, community legal education programmes established with the Organization's assistance in three provinces enabled marginalized segments of society to receive essential legal information and services. An online course on participatory lawmaking processes aimed at helping standardize the drafting of laws is now mandatory for newly recruited legal and justice officers.

23. In Yemen, the United Nations successfully supported the release of 138 out of 1,296 pretrial detainees indefinitely detained without judicial process owing to conflict-induced court strikes. Community-based mediation, supported by the United Nations and led by women leaders and women lawyers, helped to bridge justice gaps caused by institutional suspensions owing to conflict.

Security and justice for women and girls

24. Discriminatory laws deny women equal human rights and opportunities, contribute to a lack of quality and gender-responsive services and negatively affect women's access to justice. **Eliminating discrimination against women and girls is thus a human rights imperative and remains a key priority for the United Nations.**

¹⁶ 2023, the United Nations supported the adoption or revision of more than 90 national and local laws that advance gender equality and women's empowerment across six regions, including addressing violence against women, political participation and women's economic inclusion. This includes the repeal of a law allowing rapists to avoid prosecution if they married their victim in Bahrain, and the expansion of maternity leave benefits in Georgia. Additional protections for violence against women and girls were also adopted in Jamaica, Jordan, North Macedonia and Kosovo.¹⁸

¹⁶ 2023, the United Nations assisted 22 countries in implementing crime prevention and criminal justice responses to gender-based violence against women, focusing on advisory services to support legal and policy frameworks, capacity-building for criminal justice practitioners and enhancing inter-institutional coordination. In South Sudan, the United Nations trained local police investigators and public

19 Definition

Access to justice means that all individuals, regardless of income, gender, ethnicity, disability, or other status, can:

- Understand and use the law to protect their rights.
- Seek legal remedies through fair and impartial institutions.
- Obtain effective, timely, and affordable solutions to legal problems.

It is a fundamental component of the rule of law and a core principle of democratic governance and human rights protection.

20 Something to Think About

These measures ensure equal access to justice, protect vulnerable groups, enhance trust and accountability, support victims, and improve transparency and efficiency, ultimately reinforcing the rule of law and human rights.

24 Did You Know That

Addressing these barriers empowers women and girls to fully participate in society, strengthens communities, and advances sustainable development globally.

¹⁸ All references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

prosecutors on sexual and gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence and supported the deployment of national rule of law officials to remote areas to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate such crimes with a survivor-centred approach, resulting in more than 43 individuals being tried.

27. The United Nations is also combating gender-based violence in forced displacement situations. In Lebanon, the Organization is working with partners to provide justice and legal services to forcibly displaced and host community survivors of gender-based violence.

28. **Addressing the gender gap in the justice sector is crucial to improving security and achieving justice for women and girls.** In Tajikistan, the United Nations provided targeted legal skills training, mentorship support and tools for young women law students to navigate social and gender barriers in the legal marketplace and, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, promoted increased participation of women in decision-making.

29. The first Meeting of African Women Judges, organized by the United Nations with the Conference of Constitutional Jurisdictions of Africa, took place in May 2023 in Gabon. Approximately 60 women judges from 30 countries participated. The Meeting provided a platform to discuss experiences, including gendered threats to judicial integrity, and produced a declaration with concrete measures to increase the presence of women in judicial institutions.

Security and justice for children

30. The United Nations provides technical assistance to Governments for the **promotion of integrated and multidisciplinary care of children in conflict with the law and victims and witnesses of crimes**, as well as access to child-friendly and gender-responsive justice for children on the move or affected by crises.

During the reporting period, the United Nations supported 113 countries in strengthening specialized justice systems for children. A total of 34 countries reported complying with all six indicators of specialized justice systems during the period (i.e.: minimum age of criminal responsibility above 14; legal aid in law and practice; child-friendly investigation; prosecution and adjudication; specialized training; multisectoral and special measures for child victims and witnesses). Moreover, 48 per cent of the total 278,276 children in conflict with the law were channelled away from the formal justice system and provided non-custodial alternative measures.

32. The 2023–2030 Strategy to End Violence against Children, launched in November 2023, and the accompanying 2023–2024 action plan, outline a collaborative United Nations approach to support Member States in mainstreaming child rights into development, rule of law, humanitarian and security reform efforts.⁹

The Organization provided specialized capacity-building on online child sexual abuse and exploitation investigation and prosecution techniques, including through the Artificial Intelligence for Safer Children initiative.¹⁰ The fourth meeting of the regional task force on online child sexual exploitation, organized with INTERPOL, brought together specialized police units of Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay to use the International Child Sexual Exploitation Database. As a result, 39 victims and 35 alleged suspects were identified.

34. In Egypt, the Organization carried out training workshops for children in conflict with the law and conducted a study to assess the compatibility of the vocational training programmes with the needs of the labour market in five governorates.

⁹ See www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/cndvac_strategy_2023-2030.html.

¹⁰ See <https://uncri.it/topics/AI-for-Safer-Children>.

28 Did You Know That

Globally, women make up only about 30% of judges and less than 20% of senior police leadership positions. This limits their influence on policies and practices affecting women's rights and safety.

30 Did You Know That

Children involved in the justice system require specialized, coordinated support to protect their rights, well-being, and development. Integrated and multidisciplinary care ensures that these children receive holistic assistance that addresses their legal, psychological, social, and health needs in a child-friendly manner.

In Morocco, the United Nations developed standard operating procedures and training materials, benefiting lawyers in delivering legal aid to children in conflict with the law.

35. The United Nations has been promoting **alternatives to criminal and immigration detention for displaced children**, as well as for child-friendly legal proceedings for them. The United Nations task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty produced an advocacy brief on ending the immigration detention of children,¹¹ in which it examined ways in which some States have dealt with the issue and called upon all States to prohibit the detention of children in the context of migration.

36. Recognizing that **children become victims of recruitment, exploitation and gender-based violence, and are exploited by terrorist groups**, the Organization also provided support to Indonesia, Iraq and Nigeria, in enhancing their capacities to prevent and respond to serious forms of violence against children, including by terrorist groups, in conflict and non-conflict settings.

Security and justice for victims

37. The Organization continued to strengthen Member States' capacities for detection of victims of human rights violations, transnational organized crime and terrorism, as well as granting them assistance.

38. In Tanzania, the United Nations support was key to developing a new policy and guidelines on victim and witness protection under which victims and witnesses will be formally recognized, protected and respected as rights holders by criminal justice stakeholders.

39. Recognizing the **difficulties faced by trafficked persons and smuggled migrants**, the United Nations published a policy brief providing key recommendations on how to improve their access to justice.¹²

Access to justice in situations of forced displacement

40. The Organization continued to address a range of protection issues for persons in situation of forced displacement, including matters relating to obtaining and renewing residency permits, birth and other civil registration, non-refoulement, detention and exit visas.

41. The Organization provided capacity-building and legal and technical advice on internal displacement in at least 17 countries, including Cameroon, Honduras, Mexico, Mozambique, the Philippines and Ukraine.

42. The United Nations continued to support initiatives to ensure legal identity of persons. As a result, Brazil adopted constitutional amendments to prevent nationality loss, while steps were taken to safeguard birth registration in Chad, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines renewed a pact between the national human rights institutions to uphold the rights of stateless individuals.

43. At the **2023 Global Refugee Forum**,¹³ a multi-stakeholder pledge was adopted to build an integrated legal community to ensure the meaningful participation of refugees and other displaced people in accessing their rights and finding lasting

¹¹ United Nations task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty, "End immigration detention of children", February 2024. Available at www.unicef.org/media/131371/file/Advocacy%20brief-%20End%20Child%20Immigration%20Detention%20.pdf. UNODC.

¹² "Accessing justice: challenges faced by trafficked persons and smuggled migrants", 2023. Available at www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2023/Accessing%20Justice%20Challenges%20Faced%20By%20Trafficked%20Persons%20And%20Smuggled%20Migrants.pdf.

¹³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Outcomes of the Global Refugee Forum 2023", 2023. Available at www.unhcr.org/media/outcomes-global-refugee-forum-2023.

35 Something to Think About

Detaining displaced children, whether for immigration or criminal reasons, can severely harm their development and violates international child rights standards.

36 Did You Know That

- Over 18,000 children were recruited and used by armed forces or groups globally in 2022.
- 1 in 3 girls in conflict zones experiences some form of sexual violence, according to UNICEF estimates.
- In Nigeria, Boko Haram has forcibly recruited thousands of children, using some, particularly girls, as suicide bombers.
- The Islamic State (ISIS) established training camps for children ("Cubs of the Caliphate") to indoctrinate and militarize them.
- Despite international norms like the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), implementation and accountability remain weak in many conflict zones.

39 Did You Know That

Trafficked persons and smuggled migrants often face abuse, lack legal protection, and fear seeking help. Many remain unidentified, receive little support, and risk re-exploitation. A victim-centered, rights-based approach is essential.

43 Something to Think About

GRF 2023 successfully mobilized actionable pledges to help refugees and host communities, across economic, social, legal, and protection fronts, and showcased inclusive, transformative efforts to implement the Global Compact on Refugees effectively.

solutions to their displacement. The pledge also included commitments by the legal community to provide 1 million pro bono hours to refugees.

2. Supporting efforts to substantially reduce corruption and other financial crimes

44. The United Nations Convention against Corruption is the universal legally binding instrument that provides a legal framework to combat corruption, strengthen global cooperation and promote good governance. The tenth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention, held in Atlanta, Georgia, United States of America, in December 2023, marked the twentieth anniversary of its adoption by the General Assembly. The Conference adopted 12 resolutions on topics, such as measures to address corruption involving organized criminal groups, protection of reporting persons, public procurement, beneficial ownership and measuring corruption and the effectiveness of anti-corruption frameworks.

45. In October and November 2023, respectively, the Organization supported the establishment of regional platforms to fast-track the implementation of the Convention in the Caribbean and Central Asia. The platforms joined those already established in Central America, East Africa, Southern Africa, South America and Mexico, South-East Asia, West Africa and the Sahel region and the Western Balkans. To facilitate the delivery of technical assistance, regional anti-corruption hubs in Kenya, Mexico and Thailand and subregional hubs in Colombia and South Africa were also established. The Organization continued to strengthen the Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (GlobE Network) through the establishment of a regional South-Eastern Europe component to facilitate cooperation on corruption cases.

46. The Organization continued to advance anti-corruption education and youth empowerment under its Global Resource for Anti-Corruption Education and Youth Empowerment (GRACE) initiative. It launched two publications: *Acting for the Rule of Law: Theatre Guide*¹⁴ and *Policy Guide for National Anti-Corruption Authorities on Meaningful Youth Engagement in Anti-Corruption Work*¹⁵ developed with the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

47. Combating corruption in sport and promotion of the role of supreme audit institutions in the fight against corruption were other areas of United Nations work, including through the development of practical guides.¹⁶

48. The United Nations continued to provide tailored technical assistance to national authorities, at their request. In Burkina Faso, the United Nations provided legislative assistance to develop a new whistle-blower protection law planned to be considered in 2024. In Honduras, the United Nations and the Government continued discussions concerning a mechanism against impunity and corruption. In Iraq, the United Nations continued to support the Government towards a transparent, accountable and

44 Did You Know That

This convention fosters international cooperation through mutual legal assistance, extradition, and asset recovery mechanisms. Additionally, it supports technical assistance and information sharing to build capacity worldwide, aiming to combat corruption comprehensively and promote good governance globally.

46 Something to Think About

This guide highlights the importance of involving young people in anti-corruption efforts to drive societal change. It provides strategies for institutions to prepare and adapt for effective youth participation, practical approaches to develop sustainable youth engagement activities, and frameworks to monitor and evaluate their impact. The guide serves as a comprehensive tool to empower authorities and youth organizations to collaborate for a corruption-free future.

¹⁴ UNODC, *Acting for the Rule of Law* (Vienna, 2023). Available at https://grace.unodc.org/grace/uploads/documents/secondary/GRACE_Theatre_Guide_Acting_for_the_rule_of_law.PDF.

¹⁵ Independent Commission against Corruption, UNODC and International Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities, *Policy Guide for National Anti-Corruption Authorities on Meaningful Youth Engagement in Anti-Corruption Work* (2023). Available at www.icac.org.hk/icaa/myaguide/pdf/policy_guide_full.pdf.

¹⁶ UNODC, *Enhancing Collaboration between Supreme Audit Institutions and Anti-Corruption Bodies in Preventing and Fighting Corruption: A Practical Guide* (Vienna, 2022); UNODC, International Criminal Police Organization and International Olympic Committee, *Investigation of Cases of Competition Manipulation: A Practical Guide* (2023); UNODC and International Olympic Committee, "A practical guide to the prosecution of cases of competition manipulation", 2023; and International Partnership against Corruption in Sport, "Legal approaches to tackling bribery in sport", 2023.

corruption-free justice system through the monitoring of 380 corruption cases, review of 226 verdicts and building the capacities of 1,348 police officers, judges and investigators from anti-money-laundering institutions. United Nations assistance to Mozambique has paved the way for its upcoming inaugural public auction of confiscated assets and the launch of an online portal, increasing transparency asset management procedures.

49. The United Nations also supported the development and implementation of corruption risk mitigation plans in Bolivia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, South Africa and Uganda.

3. Strengthening the rule of law in the prevention and countering of terrorism and organized crime

50. The Organization continued to assist Member States in their concerted efforts to strengthen normative and policy responses to counter terrorism, violent extremism, and organized crime, in compliance with international human rights norms and standards.

51. In a joint initiative with INTERPOL, the United Nations supported capacity-building in 31 Member States to counter the use of new technologies for terrorist purposes and utilize technologies in a human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive manner. Through the initiative, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kenya, the Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago and Uzbekistan received tailored support in developing rule of law-based capacities to respond to terrorists' exploitation of technological advancements. The Organization also built the capacities of justice and security institutions to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism. In Mali, 16 Prison Service officers undertook training of trainers on managing security incidents in prisons, including those with detainees convicted of terrorism.

52. To provide guidance on incorporating gender and human rights considerations in policies and legislation aimed at countering transnational crime, the United Nations produced a *Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender and Human Rights in the Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*.¹⁷ The Organization helped develop multisectoral, victim-centred, human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive national and regional strategies against organized crime in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Ghana, Honduras, Jamaica, Montenegro, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Uzbekistan, the Economic Community of West African States and the Pacific Islands Forum.

53. The United Nations provided support to 14 countries and regions to align their domestic legislation to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Trafficking in Persons Protocol) and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, as well as to 21 States regarding the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition. As a result, Malawi launched its national action plans to combat human trafficking in October 2023, while North Macedonia and Montenegro adopted new firearms laws.

54. The United Nations remained committed to responding to child recruitment and exploitation by criminal, armed and terrorist groups. Through the Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE) Juvenile project, in close collaboration with the Governments of Indonesia, Iraq and Nigeria, it supported efforts to end violence against children by terrorist groups and promote justice for and with children. In February 2024, together with partners, the Organization launched a research study, *Targeted by Terrorists: Child Recruitment, Exploitation and Reintegration in Indonesia*.

¹⁷ www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/2_English_updated_2313100E-ebook.pdf.

51 Interesting Facts

Developing rule of law-based capacities to respond to terrorists' exploitation of technological advancements is a crucial priority for global security and justice systems. As terrorist groups increasingly misuse digital technologies, including encrypted communications, online recruitment, digital financing, and cyberattacks, legal systems must evolve to effectively and lawfully counter these threats.

52 Did You Know That

This toolkit offers a practical, intersectional approach to integrating gender equality and human rights into legislation, policies, and strategies addressing transnational organized crime. Its design aligns with UNTOC and its Palermo Protocols.

Iraq and Nigeria,¹⁸ addressing core protection challenges, dispelling misconceptions about voluntary involvement and advocating a paradigm shift towards rehabilitation and reintegration.

Th address challenges related to terrorism and organized crime in detention facilities, the United Nations assisted in the implementation of local crime prevention action plans in Nigeria and the design of a standardized violent extremist offender assessment tool for corrections officials in the Philippines. In Somalia, the Organization is working on the implementation of the Somalia Joint Rule of Law Programme (due to be finalized in December 2024) in support of the Government in achieving peacebuilding and State-building goals.

The Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees has continued to provide expert support on human rights-compliant approaches to the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returned from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. In November 2023, the United Nations facilitated a workshop on cross-border cooperation in the prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters for Governments in Central Asia. In May 2024, the United Nations supported the establishment of the Central Asia Regional Expert Council on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees, aimed at strengthening national and regional efforts in these fields.

Advancing accountability

4.

Accountability for violations of international law and other serious crimes

57. The United Nations continued its support for national efforts to ensure accountability for serious violations of international law and other serious crimes. For more than a decade, the United Nations peacekeeping operation assisted Mali in making significant progress in investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating serious crimes that fuel conflict. Following its closure, the country team will continue its critical rule of law support to minimize any adverse impact on the gains achieved.

58 July and October 2023, the Appeals Chamber of the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic rendered its first judgments, including affirming the 2022 verdict of the Trial Chamber finding three combatants guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity – including sexual violence – for their role in the massacre of at least 46 civilians in 2019. On 5 December 2023, the Trial Chamber commenced its second trial. From October 2018 to February 2023, 22 individuals were indicted by the Court. The United Nations supported ordinary courts, the training of new judges and clerks, the investigation and prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence and broader justice and security sector reform.

59 Guinea, the United Nations continued to assist the domestic authorities in conducting the trials for the massacre and mass rape of 28 September 2009 near the Conakry stadium, including through the training of magistrates on sexual and gender-based violence and of attorneys on protection of victims and witnesses.

60 Ukraine, the Organization continued to support the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence, contributed to a draft law on the legal status of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, securing survivors' right to a remedy and investigation of complex cases.

51. The United Nations provided technical assistance to national prosecutorial authorities investigating human rights violations. In Peru, it conducted capacity-building sessions with prosecutors regarding international human rights standards and

57 Something to Think About

National efforts to ensure accountability for serious violations of international law and other serious crimes focus on strengthening domestic mechanisms to investigate, prosecute, and punish crimes such as genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture, and corruption.

¹⁸ www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/STRIVEreports/Child_recruitment_exploitation_and_reintegration_in_Indonesia_Iraq_and_Nigeria_pp_web.pdf.

complex investigations and trained medical personnel in the application of the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol) for torture victims. In Venezuela, assistance concerned the review of case files and improving victims' access to justice, resulting in draft guidelines for the investigation of crimes related to violations of the right to life and physical integrity based on the Model Protocol for a Legal Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (Minnesota Protocol) and the Istanbul Protocol.

162 Iraq, the United Nations supported the Government's efforts to strengthen policies and practices to keep track of, and ensure accountability for, human rights violations in countering terrorism.

Implementation of Security Council resolution 2589 (2021) on accountability for crimes against peacekeepers

63. In December 2023, the United Nations adopted **a strategic action plan to address crimes against peacekeepers for the period 2023–2026**.

64. The Secretariat continued to encourage efforts by Member States to ensure accountability for crimes against peacekeepers in accordance with Security Council resolution 2589 (2021). Progress was made in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon and Mali, with an increase in the number of alleged perpetrators of crimes committed against United Nations personnel who were identified and detained, along with an increase in the percentage of cases undergoing confirmed national investigations. Since 2020, 97 individuals have been convicted in these countries in relation to the killing of 34 peacekeepers and 2 United Nations experts.

5. Supporting inclusive transitional justice processes

65. In October 2023, the Secretary-General's guidance note on "Transitional Justice – A Strategic Tool for People, Prevention and Peace"¹⁹ was publicly launched with the aim of ensuring that the United Nations transitional justice support is more consistently strategic, integrated, innovative and people-centred.

166 the reporting period, the United Nations supported gender-responsive transitional justice processes in a number of countries and territories, including Colombia, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Mali and South Sudan.

67. In Ethiopia, the Organization assisted human rights-based, victim-centred and gender-sensitive transitional justice processes, which resulted in the adoption and launch on 9 May 2024 of a comprehensive national transitional justice policy as provided for in the 2022 peace agreement.

168 the Gambia, the Organization supported the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters in considering the Reparations Bill, which subsequently passed into the Victims Reparations Act.

169 Libya, the United Nations developed a programme to address the issue of missing persons by supporting victim participation and building responsive security sector institutions. The programme will serve to follow up on the recommendations of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya and complement Human Rights Council resolution 52/41.

¹⁹ www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/transitionaljustice/sp-guidance-note/2023_07_guidance_note_transitional_justice_en.pdf.

63 Did You Know That

The Strategic Action Plan (2023–2026) to address crimes against peacekeepers is vital for reinforcing the rule of law by promoting accountability, strengthening national legal systems, deterring attacks, enhancing cooperation with host states, and improving international legal coordination. It ensures justice for crimes committed against UN personnel and supports legal stability in conflict-affected areas.

65 Something to Think About

The Guidance Note, adopted in mid-2023 after extensive UN-wide consultations, presents transitional justice as a pragmatic, human rights-based policy tool. It is designed to support national stakeholders in responding to legacies of conflict and human rights abuses, with the aim of driving peace, security, accountability, and sustainable development.

70. In South Sudan, the Organization supported the meaningful participation of vulnerable communities in transitional justice processes and helped establish and train five networks of 150 persons with disabilities and 35 victim support groups through which 720 victims and survivors received counselling and psychosocial support. The Organization also hosted a workshop for more than 70 stakeholders to discuss and make concrete recommendations on how to enhance the gender-responsiveness of draft bills establishing a truth commission and a reparations authority.

The United Nations supported the establishment of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic pursuant to General Assembly resolution 77/301, by consulting with families of missing persons and survivors and relevant associations and civil society organizations, including women-led organizations, to inform the drafting of the terms of reference of the Institution (A/78/627) and ensure their full and meaningful participation in the work of the Institution.

In Ukraine, the United Nations provided technical support to the development of a new victims' law, that introduces innovative measures to define and address the needs and rights of different categories of victims affected by the conflict.

73. In the Western Balkans, the Organization worked to support accountability for war crimes, enhance victim support mechanisms and promote cross-boundary cooperation and inter-ethnic and fact-based learning about the conflicts and the crimes committed. This work was done in collaboration with local civil society initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo to enable victims to better access justice and various forms of reparations, to promote dialogue about the past and to generate reconciliation advocates among historians, social scientists, teachers, activists and journalists.

74. **Integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes** constitute **multidimensional approaches that contribute to stabilization and peacebuilding efforts**. To help ensure that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and transitional justice measures are mutually beneficial, in August 2023, the United Nations validated a new module on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and transitional justice that addresses the links between accountability mechanisms and collective demobilizations and voluntary disengagements.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration provides a pathway for former combatants to transition back into society, thus helping to prevent further violations and abuses. National stakeholders – including in Colombia, the Philippines and the Lake Chad Basin – are implementing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration as part of their broader transitional justice frameworks to complement judicial measures, by tackling impunity, addressing lingering grievances and fostering community acceptance of former combatants.

Supporting constitution-making and reform

76. The Organization continued to respond to requests from Member States for support in facilitating inclusive and participatory constitutional reform processes, with the objective of ensuring respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law.

The United Nations advocated for women's political participation in ongoing constitutional review or reform processes, including in Chile, Somalia, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. In India, the United Nations assisted in the adoption of the Women's Reservation Bill, under which one third of seats in national and state parliaments will be reserved for women.

78. Throughout the reporting period, the Organization also provided gender-responsive constitutional support in several countries, including the Central African

74 Definition

Disarmament – The collection, documentation, control, and disposal of weapons from combatants and often the civilian population.

74 Definition

Demobilization – The formal discharge of active combatants from armed groups or military structures, including temporary support (like transit centers).

74 Definition

Reintegration – A long-term process of social and economic support to help ex-combatants find livelihoods and rejoin society as peaceful civilians.

74 Something to Think About

Multidimensional approaches to stabilization and peacebuilding involve coordinated strategies that address the root causes of conflict and promote long-term peace through political, social, security, legal, and economic measures. These approaches recognize that peace and stability cannot be achieved through security efforts alone.

Republic, Chile, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan, leading to tangible outcomes such as the adoption of the South Sudan Women's Charter and the support for the Women's Caucus in the Somali Parliament. Furthermore, the United Nations published the guidebook "Protecting Human Rights in Constitutions",²⁰ offering valuable guidance to constitution makers worldwide.

7. Environmental rule of law

79. In November 2023, the Organization published the report, *Environmental Rule of Law: Tracking Progress and Charting Future Directions*.²¹ The report highlights the most prevalent aspects of environmental rule of law across countries, tracks progress in addressing the triple planetary crisis and is aimed at supporting countries in promoting environmental rule of law by addressing challenges and good practices. In February 2024, the United Nations organized a workshop on the gendered dimensions of crimes affecting the environment.²²

B. Promotion of the rule of law at the international level

1. Codification and development of international instruments, norms, standards and rules

Significant developments occurred regarding multilateral treaties deposited with the Secretary-General, in particular in the area of the law of the sea. The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction was adopted on 19 June 2023, and opened for signature on 20 September 2023. The agreement currently has 91 signatories and 8 ratifications.

An opening for signature ceremony was also organized in Beijing on 5 September 2023 for the United Nations Convention on the International Effects of Judicial Sales of Ships, during which 15 States signed the Convention.²⁴

In addition, amendments to the main text of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network were adopted in Bangkok on 15 September 2023, and the Convention on the Contract for International Carriage of Goods by Rail was adopted in Geneva on 17 November 2023.²⁶

The annual treaty event was held in September on the margins of the high-level debate of the seventy-eighth General Assembly, during which 85 States and one international organization undertook a total of 102 treaty actions in a number of areas, including the law of the sea, human rights and disarmament.

84. The International Law Commission held its seventy-fourth session.²⁷ The Commission adopted the draft conclusions on general principles of law, together with commentaries thereto. The General Assembly considered the reports of the Commission on the work of its seventy-third and seventy-fourth sessions (A/77/10 and A/78/10), as reflected in resolution 78/108, and took note of the draft conclusions

79 Definition

Environmental Rule of Law refers to the application of the rule of law to environmental issues, ensuring that environmental laws are fair, effectively enforced, and contribute to sustainable development. It combines legal frameworks, institutions, and principles that govern human interactions with the environment.

84 Did You Know That

The International Law Commission (ILC) is a UN body established in 1947 tasked with promoting the progressive development and codification of international law. It consists of 34 experts elected by the UN General Assembly who serve in their personal capacity.

²⁰ www.unodp.org/tollr/publications/protecting-human-rights-constitutions.

²¹ www.unep.org/resources/publication/environmental-rule-law-tracking-progress-and-charting-future-directions.

²² See www.unodc.org/unodc/en/gender/events/gendered-dimensions-of-crimes-that-affect-the-environment-2024.html.

²³ See A/CONF.232/2023/4.

²⁴ See General Assembly resolution 77/100.

²⁵ See <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CN/2023/CN.518.2023-Eng.pdf>.

²⁶ See https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/2023/12/20231218%2012-06%20PM/Ch_XI_C_8.pdf.

²⁷ See <https://legal.un.org/ilc/sessions/74/>.

on identification and legal consequences of peremptory norms of general international law (*ius cogens*), as reflected in resolution 78/109.

At its fifty-sixth session, the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) adopted texts concerning access to credit for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, dispute resolution and investor-State dispute settlement reform (including codes of conduct for arbitrators and judges in international investment dispute resolution). There were 34 legislative actions concerning UNCITRAL texts, including one accession to and one ratification of the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation, and two accessions to the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods.

86. The Ad Hoc Committee to **Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes**, established under General Assembly resolutions 74/247 and 75/282, held its sixth and concluding sessions. The Committee reached agreement *ad referendum* on a majority of the provisions of the Convention but decided to suspend the concluding session. In its decision 78/549, the General Assembly decided that the Committee should hold a reconvened concluding session to finalize its work at the seventy-eighth session of the Assembly.

In response to General Assembly resolution 77/232, the United Nations organized the first meeting of the open-ended intergovernmental expert group on model strategies on reducing reoffending through rehabilitation and reintegration in September 2023, which was attended by representatives from 44 Member States and 12 non-governmental stakeholders. The Organization also supported the reconvened session of the group in March 2024.

In February 2024, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union formally endorsed the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa. The Protocol is aimed at eradicating statelessness and ensuring inclusion for millions on the continent, as it introduces mechanisms to prevent generational statelessness, provisions for nomadic and cross-border populations and strong due process protections for the right to a nationality.

2. Promotion of international instruments, norms, standards and rules

89. The United Nations continued to raise awareness of the **importance of adhering to and effectively implementing international instruments and to provide pre-accession support to non-parties.**

During the reporting period, South Sudan became the 192nd party to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Organized Crime Convention). China acceded to the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, the Kingdom of the Netherlands extended the application of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol to Curaçao, and Uganda ratified the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (Smuggling of Migrants Protocol). Barbados became the 190th party to the Convention against Corruption. Albania, Belarus, China, Congo, Hungary, Iraq, Oman, Palau, South Africa, South Sudan, Tunisia and Zimbabwe adhered to international legal instruments against terrorism.

91. The Organization conducted outreach to 50 countries and delivered workshops to some 70 countries to promote adherence to the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. Furthermore, it provided pre-ratification

86 Interesting Facts

The Committee's work to develop an international convention on countering ICT-related crimes is vital for the rule of law. It establishes clear legal norms, enhances global cooperation, promotes accountability with respect for human rights, strengthens national laws, and protects individuals and societies from cybercrime, ensuring justice and legal order in the digital era.

89 Did You Know That

Committing to and effectively implementing international instruments is crucial for promoting global rule of law, peace, and cooperation. It ensures that states align their laws and practices with agreed standards, enhancing legal certainty, accountability, and protection of rights. Providing pre-accession support to non-parties helps these countries understand, prepare for, and meet their obligations, facilitating smoother integration into the international legal framework.

medium-sized enterprises. UNCITRAL Days in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and now Africa contribute to the dissemination of UNCITRAL texts and work among university students, judges and young practitioners.

The United Nations has continued to promote implementation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. On the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Convention, on 9 December 2023, it held a high-level event focusing on lessons learned and key recommendations for the effective implementation of the obligations under the Convention.

3. International and hybrid courts and tribunals

International Court of Justice

98. The **International Court of Justice** maintained a high level of judicial activity, including in the cases of *Armenia v. Azerbaijan*, *Canada and the Netherlands v. Syrian Arab Republic*, *Guyana v. Venezuela*, *South Africa v. Israel*, *Nicaragua v. Germany* and the two cases between Mexico and Ecuador. During the reporting period, the Court issued two judgments on the merits in the cases concerning *Question of the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf Between Nicaragua and Colombia Beyond 200 Nautical Miles from the Nicaraguan Coast (Nicaragua v. Colombia)* and *Application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, and the judgment on the preliminary objections in the case concerning *Allegation of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*.

Pursuant to the Statute of the Court, the Secretariat transmitted to the Court dossiers of documents that are likely to assist with the questions posed by the General Assembly in its requests for advisory opinions on the *Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem* and on the *Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change*.

100. As at 30 June 2024, there were 24 cases pending before the Court.

Law of the sea tribunals

101. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea delivered its Advisory Opinion on the Request for an advisory opinion submitted by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law.

102. Two arbitral tribunals constituted under annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in respect of the *Dispute Concerning Coastal State Rights in the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and Kerch Strait (Ukraine v. the Russian Federation)* and the *Dispute Concerning the Detention of Ukrainian Naval Vessels and Servicemen (Ukraine v. the Russian Federation)*, respectively, considered procedural matters.

International criminal courts and tribunals

103. In December 2023, the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court elected six new judges for a term of 9 years. The United Nations continued to cooperate with the Court in accordance with the relationship agreement between the organizations, including through the sharing of information and evidence, the provision of transportation and security support for the Court's field operations and the facilitation of interviews with and the giving of testimonies by United Nations personnel.

98 Definition

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, established in 1945 by the UN Charter. It plays a central role in upholding the rule of law at the international level by:

Main Functions:

1. Settling Legal Disputes: Between States in accordance with international law, based on their consent.
2. Advisory Opinions: Providing legal advice to UN organs and specialized agencies on international legal questions.

Importance for the Rule of Law:

- Ensures peaceful resolution of disputes between nations.
- Clarifies and develops international legal norms (e.g., sovereignty, treaty obligations, use of force).
- Reinforces legal accountability at the international level.
- Promotes consistency and coherence in the interpretation of international law.

104. The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals continued to carry out the residual functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Following the appeal judgement in the *Stanisic and Simatovic* case in May 2023, and the indefinite stay of proceedings in the *Kabuga* case in September 2023, the Mechanism has concluded its core crime proceedings. On 14 November 2023, the Office of the Prosecutor confirmed the death of Aloys Ndimbatu, and on 15 May 2024, the deaths of Ryandikayo and Charles Sikubwabo, the last remaining fugitives indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. All fugitives indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia have now been accounted for.

105. The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, which began performing its residual functions on 1 January 2023, undertook steps to ensure that information about it is made available to the public and its legacy maintained, including through reclassification of documents of case files and public outreach initiatives.

106. The Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone continued to monitor the enforcement of sentences of persons convicted by the Special Court, **provide support to protected witnesses and address requests for assistance from national authorities.** In February 2024, the Residual Special Court organized a global conference to examine the Special Court's legacy, share experiences and discuss the future of international justice.

107. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon completed its non-judicial residual functions and closed on 31 December 2023. The Tribunal is the first of the United Nations-assisted tribunals to fully close.

Other international accountability mechanisms

108. The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 continued its efforts to contribute to the accountability process, as reflected in its annual report to the General Assembly (A/78/772). Demand for the Mechanism's support for the work of jurisdictions investigating and prosecuting crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic reached an unprecedented level, with 166 national investigations assisted by the Mechanism to date.

109. In resolution 2697 (2023), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) until 17 September 2024 only. The Council also took note of the request from the Government of Iraq for UNITAD to promote national accountability in Iraq for members of ISIL (Da'esh) and those who provided assistance and financing to this terrorist organization by providing the evidence that it has to the Government of Iraq within the next year and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report setting out recommendations for implementing this request with full respect for the sovereignty of Iraq. The Secretary-General submitted the requested report on 15 January 2024 (S/2024/20). On 14 March, UNITAD submitted a road map for the completion of its mandate (S/2024/238) and, on 24 May, its twelfth report to the Security Council (S/2024/408).

110. The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar expanded its collection of information and evidence, including witness testimonies, and significantly advanced its analytical work. As reflected in its fifth annual report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/54/19), the Mechanism continued to cooperate with the International Criminal Court, national investigative authorities and the parties in the case of *The Gambia v. Myanmar* before the International Court of Justice.

106 Did You Know That

To support protected witnesses and respond to assistance requests from national authorities, it is essential to ensure their physical and psychological safety, maintain confidentiality, and establish specialized witness protection programs. International cooperation plays a key role through training, technical support, and adherence to legal instruments like the UNTOC and Rome Statute.

111. The United Nations is supporting 12 investigative mechanisms.³² The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan was established during the reporting period, following the deteriorating situation of human rights in the country. Several investigative bodies have reported to the Human Rights Council, and some to the General Assembly, on the human rights situation in the countries under examination during the reporting period.

C. Strengthening the administration of justice within the Organization

112. The internal system of administration of justice is built to guarantee the observance of the rule of law within the Organization and for its staff members. As at 30 June 2024, the United Nations Dispute Tribunal had issued 2,417 judgments, and the United Nations Appeals Tribunal 1,444 judgments.

III. Coordination and cohesiveness in United Nations rule of law assistance

Rule of Law Coordination and Resource Group

113. The Rule of Law Coordination and Resource Group, established by the Secretary-General in 2006 pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 60/1 and 61/39.33 is the highest-level coordination mechanism that determines strategic direction of the rule of law initiatives of the Organization. The Group is chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and was tasked to implement the New Vision for the Rule of Law upon its adoption in 2023. In the reporting period, the Group revised its terms of reference and composition in line with the new task, adopted a communications strategy and commenced a mapping exercise of existing rule of law mandates of United Nations departments and offices.

Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law

114. On the operational level, the **Global Focal Point** continued to provide expertise and seed funding for joint initiatives and to ensure integration of rule of law assistance across the United Nations. Since 2012, the Global Focal Point has extended joint rule of law support to more than 38 countries and territories. Collaborating with the Standing Police Capacity and the Justice and Corrections Standing Capacity, it has deployed more than 175 experts to foster transparent, accountable and inclusive justice and security institutions, including to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, in a transition context, as well as to the Central African Republic. To increase and improve the participation of women in peacekeeping, the Global Focal Point supported a gender parity initiative to strengthen the deployment of women corrections officers to United Nations peace operations as government-provided personnel. In addition, the Global Focal Point established a working group on gender justice to ensure that the Organization continues to deepen its efforts to advance gender equality through its technical support on the rule of law.

Inter-agency coordination and cooperation in subject-matter areas

115. The Inter-Agency Task Force on Policing held its second principals level meeting in June 2023 and planned and organized the first International Day of Police

³² See www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-in.

³³ See A/61/636-S/2006/980.

112 Something to Think About

Supported by legal assistance and ethical oversight bodies, this system upholds fairness, accountability, and legal compliance within the UN, reinforcing the Organization's credibility and internal integrity.

114 Definition

The Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law (GFP) is a United Nations arrangement that coordinates UN support to rule of law efforts in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries. Established in 2012, it brings together key UN actors—including UNDP, DPO, UNHCR, OHCHR, UN Women, and others—to provide coherent, rapid, and demand-driven assistance in areas like justice, police, corrections, and legal reform.

114 Did You Know That

Expanding access to justice for marginalized groups, promoting gender equality, enhancing transparency through data and public participation, responsibly using technology, and fostering partnerships with civil society and international actors are also key. These combined efforts help create fair, effective, and trusted institutions

Cooperation, focusing on women in policing. The Task Force also reviewed the United Nations Manual on Investigative Interviewing, which was launched in early 2024.

116. The Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact remains the cornerstone for aligning United Nations efforts in counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism. In 2024, its Coordination Committee met to outline the strategic direction for its 2024–2026 joint programme of work, focusing on the increasing threat posed by terrorism in parts of Africa. The Working Group on Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and the Rule of Law while Countering Terrorism and Supporting Victims of Terrorism continued to support Member States and the other thematic working groups on ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law in their counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism activities. The Compact platform supported coordination, engagement and exchanges among 137 Member States, 14 regional organizations and all 47 Compact entities.

117. In November 2023, the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons called upon States to accelerate action by 2025 to prevent and end child trafficking through a 10-point plan.¹⁴ The Coordination Group emphasized the urgent need for prioritized and comprehensive action to strengthen child protection and the importance of implementing existing international laws, standards and commitments. It also highlighted the importance of using evidence accumulated over two decades of experience to improve responses to counter child trafficking globally.

118. The United Nations Network on Migration continued its multi-stakeholder work on the smuggling of migrants. Key outputs were produced by the United Nations system for the first time on this issue, including a policy brief on identifying common criteria in national legislation to facilitate the collection of comparable data and a policy paper on mapping the landscape of smuggling of migrants.

119. The Global Task Force on Corruption has continued to serve as a platform for the exchange of information and best practices, as well as for the coordination of United Nations anti-corruption activities. The Task Force continued the implementation of the common United Nations position on corruption and coordinated the implementation of corruption-related recommendations in Our Common Agenda and of the political declaration on corruption adopted in General Assembly resolution S-32/1.

IV. Concluding observations

120. As underlined in my New Vision for the Rule of Law, the steps taken by Member States to strengthen the rule of law serve as the foundation upon which all our efforts to address today's challenges are based. The present report illustrates areas of assistance that the United Nations is ready to provide in that regard: from measures to combat illicit financial flows, addressing displacement and statelessness, empowering women, supporting mechanisms for ensuring accountability, to providing forums for peaceful resolution of disputes through judicial institutions. I call upon Member States to promote, and adhere to, the rule of law within their own borders and internationally. This is foundational to the United Nations, and to our mission of peace, unfettered respect for human rights and prosperity for all.

¹⁴ Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, "Call for accelerated action by 2025 to prevent and end child trafficking", November 2023. Available at https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmrbdi461/files/publications/call_to_action_on_child_trafficking.pdf.

117 Interesting Facts

10-point plan summarizes in:

- Strengthening legal frameworks to criminalize all forms of child trafficking and ensure child-sensitive justice.
- Enhancing prevention by addressing root causes such as poverty, lack of education, and social exclusion.
- Improving identification of trafficked children, ensuring early intervention and protection.
- Providing comprehensive care and support services tailored to the needs of child victims.
- Strengthening data collection and research to better understand child trafficking dynamics.
- Enhancing cross-border and inter-agency cooperation for effective investigation and prosecution.
- Increasing awareness and education among communities, families, and children about trafficking risks.
- Supporting child participation in policy-making and program development affecting them.
- Ensuring accountability by prosecuting traffickers and protecting victims' rights.
- Mobilizing resources and political will to implement child-specific anti-trafficking measures urgently.

118 Something to Think About

Common criteria in national legislation to facilitate comparable data collection include:

1. Standardized definitions and terminology aligned with international norms.
2. Harmonized data categories and indicators to ensure consistency in what is measured.
3. Uniform data collection methods and reporting schedules.
4. Clear confidentiality and data protection rules to safeguard personal information.
5. Mandatory reporting obligations for relevant institutions.