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STUDY GUIDE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY SIXTH COMMITTEE

Strengthening the Rule of Law

United Nations A/81/184

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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 80/167, 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 2025 to 30 June 2026.

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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 18 of Assembly resolution 80/167.

II. United Nations activities to strengthen the rule of law

In focus

The rule of law at the core of the Charter of the United Nations

2. The rule of law lies at the heart of the Charter of the United Nations and the international legal order. Its substance permeates the Charter's purposes and principles by subjecting the exercise of power to the law and promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes, sovereign equality and human rights, among others. The Charter establishes a framework for international relations governed by law rather than force. It requires Member States to act in accordance with international law and to fulfil their obligations in good faith. The rule of law is thus central to the three pillars of the United Nations: international peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.

3. The Charter enshrines the prohibition of the threat or use of force and provides that international peace and security are to be maintained through the peaceful settlement of international disputes in conformity with the principles of justice and international law. It further links the rule of law intrinsically to human rights, committing the United Nations and its Member States to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms. This commitment has provided the foundation for the development of the international human rights framework and requires States to give effect to these obligations at the national level through laws and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. In line with the Charter's commitment to promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, the rule of law further provides the institutional and legal foundation for sustained economic growth, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger. In this regard, stable and secure environments grounded in the rule of law are essential for individuals and societies to flourish.

Enhancing the rule of law by strengthening the cooperation between the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly and the International Law Commission

4. The dialogue between the International Law Commission and the Sixth Committee (Legal Committee) plays a central role in strengthening the rule of law at the international level. States have often emphasized the importance of this dialogue to ensure that the Commission bases its work on the practice of States and *opinio juris* from all regions of the world, and reflects the views of Governments, while preserving the independence necessary for the Commission to fulfil its mandate. For example, through its report, the Commission presents specific issues on which Government comments would be of particular interest. Moreover, at the end of the first reading of a topic, in accordance with its statute, the Commission decides to transmit the draft provisions, through the Secretary-General, to Governments for comments and observations.

5. The secretariat of the International Law Commission regularly organizes briefings for Sixth Committee delegates regarding the work of the Commission. During these briefings, Special Rapporteurs and Chairs of study groups or working

Definition **02**

The rule of law means that public officials must follow legal rules when using their powers. For example, police cannot lawfully imprison someone simply because an official dislikes that person: they need a legal basis for arrest, and the person must have a way to challenge unlawful detention. It also means that governments must comply with the international legal obligations that apply to them.

Something to Think About **03**

Two countries dispute their border. They could negotiate directly, ask another country to help them reach agreement, or—where the necessary consent or jurisdiction exists—submit the dispute to an international court. What might make each option attractive or difficult? How could the countries prevent the dispute from escalating while they seek a solution?

Definition **04**

Customary international law develops from two elements: State practice (how countries actually behave) and opinio juris (evidence that countries follow a practice because they believe international law requires it). In 1969, the International Court of Justice considered whether countries were legally required to use a method that draws maritime boundaries at equal distances from their coastlines. Although several countries had used this method, the Court found that the examples were insufficient to establish a general rule and that there was no convincing evidence that countries used it because they believed international law required them to do so. By contrast, in a 1986 case involving Nicaragua and the United States, the Court confirmed that the prohibition against the unlawful use of force was part of customary international law. It examined State conduct and evidence that governments recognized the prohibition as legally binding, including their support for UN declarations and their statements about international law. These cases illustrate why the International Law Commission examines both how widely countries follow a practice and whether they consider themselves legally obligated to follow it when identifying rules of customary international law. These two cases illustrate that State practice alone, even when followed by several countries, is not sufficient to establish a rule of customary international law. There must also be evidence that countries follow the practice because they believe international law requires it.

Interesting Facts **04**

The International Law Commission studies legal questions and drafts possible rules. Before completing a topic, it can send draft provisions to governments for comments. This gives States a chance to explain how the proposed rules relate to their laws and practices. The Commission's draft is not automatically a treaty or a binding rule.

groups, where applicable, provide information on the work accomplished and exchange views with delegates. In addition, the Chair of the Commission introduces the annual report of the Commission to the Sixth Committee. This practice gives an overview of the session and provides explanations on adopted texts before the debate commences.

6. With respect to the General Assembly resolutions on the rule of law at the national and international levels, the International Law Commission responds to the invitation of the Assembly to comment on the resolution through a dedicated section in its report. In its latest report (A/80/10), the Commission recalled that the rule of law is essential in its work to promote the progressive development and codification of international law. Under the agenda item "Crimes against humanity", the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to arrange for the attendance of the Special Rapporteur of the International Law Commission on crimes against humanity as an expert at the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Humanity and the first session of its Preparatory Committee. The Preparatory Committee held its first session in January 2026, and the participation of the Special Rapporteur proved to be invaluable in responding to questions from delegations and providing clarifications when requested.

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

1. Advancing security and justice

Effective, inclusive and accountable justice and security institutions

7. During the reporting period, the United Nations advanced efforts to improve the effectiveness, inclusiveness and accountability of justice and security institutions, including by strengthening trust between law enforcement institutions and communities, as well as victim-centred and rights-based approaches within the criminal justice system.

8. In 2025, the Organization operationalized the conflict-related sexual violence prosecution network, a first-of-its-kind platform for domestic prosecutors to strengthen cooperation, exchange jurisprudence and best practices, and strengthen capacities to investigate and prosecute conflict-related sexual violence.

9. The Organization supported the African Union in strengthening the rule of law within African Union peace support operations through the advancement of standby police rostering capabilities, the development of police training curricula and the promotion of women's participation in police forces.

10. In Bangladesh, the Organization supported the issuance of a law on the prevention and suppression of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants – the first time the country has formally criminalized the offence of smuggling of migrants – and provided practical guidance to judges to ensure fair, consistent and victim-centred adjudication within the criminal justice system.

11. In the Central African Republic, 16 prison facilities and 14 new courts are now operational with United Nations assistance, and 295 new civilian prison officers who have been vetted and trained have been deployed to ensure prison security. The United Nations-supported Special Criminal Court has completed four complex war crimes trials, leading to 20 convictions and 1 acquittal, with sentences ranging from 15 to 30 years' imprisonment. A total of 18 cases are currently under investigation and 3 are before the Trial Chamber.

12. To reduce prison overcrowding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations facilitated the provision of legal aid to 480 detainees held beyond the

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Definition **04**

The International Law Commission (ILC) is a subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly established to promote the progressive development of international law and its codification. Codification means putting existing rules of international law into a clearer written form. Progressive development means proposing new rules or developing international law in areas where the rules are not yet settled. For example, the International Law Commission helped prepare the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which sets out rules governing agreements between countries. Some of these rules already existed under customary international law, while others were clarified or developed through the drafting process. This illustrates how the Commission's work can both record existing international law and contribute to its further development.

Did You Know That... **11**

The report states that 14 new courts and 16 prison facilities became operational with UN assistance in the Central African Republic. It also reports that the UN-supported Special Criminal Court completed four war crimes trials, resulting in 20 convictions and one acquittal. These achievements represent two different kinds of progress: establishing the courts and prison facilities needed for a functioning justice system, and demonstrating that courts can investigate serious crimes, conduct trials and reach judgments. Both are important because building a court does not, by itself, ensure that cases will be heard and decided.

Definition **12**

Pretrial detention means keeping someone in custody before a court has decided whether they are guilty. Countries set legal limits and safeguards for this detention. If someone remains jailed beyond the lawful period without the required judicial decision, legal aid can help them ask a court to review their detention and order release where appropriate.

lawful pretrial detention period and supported the secure detention of high-risk detainees in a highly volatile context.

13. In Kenya, the Organization supported digital case management in small claims courts, leading to expanded access to simplified dispute resolution for small businesses and traders, with over 2,456 cases filed online and 4,518 judgments digitally verified, improving user trust in court processes.

14. In Mauritania, the United Nations supported national judicial system reform. By the end of 2025, three new courts had been built to provide an inclusive and modern justice infrastructure and strengthen confidence between communities and institutions.

15. In the Niger, the Organization conducted 26 visits to detention facilities across four regions to assess conditions related to infrastructure, hygiene, access to health care and food, and compliance with procedural safeguards. As a result, at least eight detention centres registered improvements, including enhanced access to water and sanitation, rehabilitated health units and strengthened hygiene practices through awareness-raising sessions for staff and detainees.

16. In Sierra Leone, the Organization supported judicial review inside correctional facilities, resulting in the discharge of over 600 individuals held in prolonged pretrial detention, contributing to reduced overcrowding and strengthened due process safeguards.

17. In South Africa, the United Nations supported the launch of the Nelson Mandela Rules Training Academy to promote and strengthen compliance of prison management with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and related international standards.

18. In South Sudan, the Organization supported the national judiciary to deploy mobile courts to remote areas and conflict hotspots, where over 200 cases were adjudicated, including over 35 cases of sexual and gender-based violence.

Security, crime prevention and armed violence reduction

19. In West and Central Africa, a law enforcement operation supported by the United Nations and other partners across Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, the Niger and Togo led to the seizure of more than 1,100 firearms, over 80,000 rounds of ammunition and more than 20,000 explosives. The operation strengthened a coordinated regional response to the illicit trafficking of firearms and explosives, as well as related crimes.

20. The Organization supported Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia in the development and adoption of national small arms and light weapons control strategies and action plans. These frameworks strengthen institutional coordination and establish measurable priorities to prevent illicit arms trafficking and misuse.

21. In Jamaica, Honduras and Panama, the Organization's Saving Lives Entity links arms control, violence prevention and community-based approaches to address citizen security in fragile and high-risk contexts. In parallel, through a regional cooperation framework with Latin American and Caribbean States, the United Nations is advancing innovative solutions on security and crime, combining data, policy experimentation and collective learning to inform public policy and scale effective prevention and response strategies.

22. The United Nations led capacity-building efforts, strengthened investigative and prosecutorial capacities and enhanced cross-border legal cooperation among

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Something to Think About **13**

In Kenya, UN-supported digital case management allowed people to file small-claims cases online and verify judgments electronically. This can reduce trips to court and help users check that a judgment is genuine. But an online service may be less useful to people without reliable internet, devices or help using the system. Should governments retain in-person services alongside digital options, fund public access points or provide assisted filing? And who should be responsible for protecting the confidentiality of information submitted online?

Something to Think About **18**

South Sudan used mobile courts to hear more than 200 cases in remote or conflict-affected areas. A mobile court brings judges and court staff to places where residents might otherwise travel long distances or face unsafe roads. Should governments expand mobile courts, build permanent courts, or combine both?

Did You Know That... **19**

A UN-supported operation involving Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, the Niger and Togo seized firearms, ammunition and explosives. The example shows why trafficking across borders cannot always be addressed by one police force alone: authorities may need to share information and coordinate searches. Seizure totals alone do not show how much trafficking was prevented overall.

authorities in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ecuador and Peru in response to cyber-enabled and transnational organized crime by improving evidence collection, mutual legal assistance practices and institutional coordination.

23. In Haiti, the United Nations provided advisory support and capacity-building for national efforts to reduce gang violence and address insecurity. This included support to the Haitian National Police, judicial authorities, the penitentiary administration and the National Commission for Disarmament, Dismantlement and Reintegration. The United Nations also backed efforts to strengthen the management and control of weapons and ammunition, enhance border management capacities and anti-corruption efforts and operationalize specialized judicial units on mass crimes and financial crimes.

24. In Somalia, the United Nations enhanced police capacities in the management of explosive hazards, including improvised explosive devices, and reinforced essential police, justice and corrections capacities, infrastructure and facilities.

Equal access to justice for all

25. In Colombia, the United Nations monitored the implementation of one of the core commitments of the Final Peace Agreement, the Agrarian Jurisdiction, and supported preparations for its effective establishment by bringing together justice officials and rural communities, strengthening access to justice for peasant populations and advancing territorial peace.

26. In Guinea, the Organization supported the processing of 76 criminal cases involving 80 detainees. This intervention contributed to faster proceedings, reduced judicial backlogs and pretrial detention, and strengthened judicial accountability.

27. In Malawi, with help from the United Nations, mobile courts operating in rural districts reduced the average case resolution time to 28 days and brought formal justice services closer to communities with limited institutional presence.

28. In Sierra Leone, the Organization helped to establish mobile legal clinics, which resolved 66 per cent of recorded disputes through alternative dispute resolution and enabled early resolution of grievances. To reduce prolonged pretrial detention and ease overcrowding in prisons, court hearings were held inside prison facilities.

Security and justice for women and girls

29. In 2025, the United Nations supported the provision of legal aid services for more than 500,000 women and girls, enhancing gender-responsive justice and addressing legal barriers that disproportionately affect women.

30. The United Nations supported the adoption or revision of 69 national and local laws that advance gender equality and women's empowerment, covering such areas as ending violence against women, political participation, and women's economic inclusion. This included a revised gender equality law in Albania and legislation addressing violence against women in politics in Colombia.

31. The Organization advanced a regional framework for justice and gender in Latin America, to help strengthen political commitment and operational coherence across justice systems. In partnership with the Ibero-American Alliance for Access to Justice, the United Nations produced a report on women's access to justice, providing evidence-based analysis to inform policy reform and survivor-centred justice responses. At the institutional level, the Organization expanded the implementation of the gender equality seal for justice institutions in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

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Definition 22

Mutual legal assistance allows authorities in one country to request evidence or other help from authorities in another country during a criminal investigation or prosecution. For example, prosecutors investigating online fraud may request bank records or emails held in another country. However, sharing this information can raise human rights concerns. What if the requesting country might use the evidence to prosecute someone for peacefully criticizing the government, or the person under investigation could face torture or an unfair trial? Countries receiving such requests must consider their legal obligations, including applicable human rights protections, before deciding whether and how to share evidence.

Something to Think About 27

The report says mobile courts in rural Malawi reduced the average time needed to resolve cases to 28 days. Shorter delays can help people obtain decisions sooner. However, information regarding whether people had legal representation, understood the proceedings, could present evidence and could appeal—would be needed to judge whether access to justice truly improved?

Did You Know That... 29

The UN reports supporting legal aid for more than 500,000 women and girls in 2025. Legal aid can mean help understanding legal rights, preparing documents or being represented by a lawyer. The number shows the scale of assistance provided, but not how many cases were won or whether all applicants received the help they needed.

32. In Egypt, the United Nations supported the continued establishment of secured areas in courts to provide victims and witnesses, including women and children, with a protected environment throughout judicial proceedings and to prevent secondary victimization. Communication technology and CCTV systems connected to courtrooms enable testimony without direct contact with perpetrators and safeguard the integrity of statements.

33. In Guatemala, the Organization facilitated intercultural dialogue between Maya informal justice authorities and formal justice actors, strengthening coordination and referral pathways and expanding Indigenous women's and girls' access to justice.

34. In the Sudan, the Organization supported legal practitioners assisting women and girls affected by the conflict and documenting gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence, and provided real-time analysis that strengthened early warning, informed humanitarian responses and contributed to accountability efforts.

Security and justice for children

35. In 2025, 113 countries provided children with access to justice and to legal aid both by law and in practice and had specialized trained professionals, including for interviewing; 111 conducted child-friendly investigation, police and court procedures; and 104 had special measures for child victims and witnesses of crime. A total of 41 countries reported having met all six elements of a specialized justice system for children (access to legal aid, specialized professionals, minimum age of criminal responsibility set above 14 years, use of a multidisciplinary approach, special measures for victims and child-friendly procedures), up from 38 in 2025 and 24 in 2021.

36. The United Nations supported the advancement of evidence-based and cross-regional learning on ending violence against children through targeted advocacy and structured peer-learning exchanges convened under the auspices of the Pathfinding Global Alliance on Ending Violence against Children, consisting of 54 States. The meeting of the Pathfinding Global Alliance held in June 2026 in Turin, Italy, provided a platform to further strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation and reinforce political commitment and collective action to advance child-centred justice worldwide. The United Nations task force on children deprived of liberty continued documenting and disseminating effective alternatives to the deprivation of liberty of children, supporting Member States in their national reforms.

37. While the United Nations advocates for non-custodial measures for children, for humanitarian reasons it contributed to juvenile justice and prison reform efforts in Haiti. This included the inauguration of new classrooms in the country's only juvenile facility and the provision of technical support to uphold child protection standards.

38. In Indonesia, the United Nations assisted the Government in advancing legal protections for children and young people online. In Iraq, the Organization strengthened capacities on management of foreign terrorist fighters in detention and supported the endorsement and operationalization of the national road map to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of child and juvenile detainees formerly associated with terrorist groups, strengthening inter-agency coordination through targeted capacity-building.

39. In the State of Palestine, the Organization continued to strengthen a child-sensitive justice and protection framework, ensuring that all interventions were grounded in the best interests of the child and aligned with international standards and national legislation. In Gaza, United Nations assistance facilitated the issuance of 1,492 birth certificates, ensuring legal identity and reducing the risk of children's exclusion from essential services amid displacement and administrative disruptions.

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Definition **32**

Secondary victimization occurs when the way authorities handle a case causes additional distress or harm. For example, requiring a survivor of violence to describe an assault repeatedly in front of the accused may be frightening. The report describes protected areas and technology in Egyptian courts that can allow testimony without direct contact with the alleged perpetrator while preserving procedures for testing evidence.

Definition **33**

Informal justice systems are ways of resolving disputes outside the regular court system. For example, members of an Indigenous Maya community may ask respected community authorities to help resolve a disagreement over land or family responsibilities according to local traditions. Formal justice systems use courts and procedures established under national law. Both may play important roles, but problems can arise if a traditional decision conflicts with rights protected by national law. The UN-supported dialogue in Guatemala aims to improve cooperation between these state courts and traditional Maya authorities, making it easier for Indigenous Maya women and girls to obtain justice.

Interesting Facts **35**

The report identifies six elements of specialized justice for children, including legal aid, trained professionals and procedures adapted to children. A child witness, for example, may need an interviewer trained to ask understandable questions without pressuring them. The reported figure of 41 countries concerns all six elements, not simply whether a country has juvenile courts.

Something to Think About **37**

The report says the UN generally supports responses that do not keep children in custody, while also describing improvements to a juvenile facility in Haiti. For a child who committed a nonviolent offence, should a court prioritize supervised community service, counselling or detention? What should influence the decision, and what protections are still needed when detention cannot be avoided?

Security and justice for victims

40. It is imperative that there be national ownership of justice processes, to reinforce the credibility and independence of justice institutions and advance the rule of law as a foundation for peace, social cohesion and long-term stability.

41. In Egypt, the United Nations supported a national mapping of protection and assistance services available to refugees and migrants, resulting in a directory that enables practitioners to refer victims of trafficking and smuggled refugees and migrants to appropriate assistance.

42. In Guinea, the United Nations supported the monitoring and follow-up of the compensation process stemming from the first-instance judgment on the events of 28 September 2009, engaging consistently with the Ministry of Justice and the national compensation commission to promote transparent and effective implementation. To date, 185 victims, including 65 women, have been compensated.

43. In Iraq, the Organization supported the strengthening of referral mechanisms for victims of trafficking by facilitating coordination between civil society organizations and the Government.

44. In Pakistan, the United Nations developed a centralized database of victims of terrorism, in consultation with victim support officers, as a secure and comprehensive national platform to record, manage and track victim-related data nationwide.

Access to justice in situations of forced displacement

45. Across multiple contexts, the United Nations strengthened access to justice for forcibly displaced persons through legal assistance, partnerships with national institutions and capacity-building.

46. The Global Refugee Forum legal community pledge played an important role in expanding access to justice for forcibly displaced and stateless people by deepening coordination, scaling up pro bono partnerships and strengthening community-led legal support. Capacity-building efforts expanded in 2025, including training on meaningful refugee participation for 50 pledge members and strengthened legal health check programmes for refugee-led organizations, reinforcing their ability to navigate legal risks. Collectively, these advances helped to solidify a more inclusive, better-connected legal ecosystem, improving displaced people's ability to secure documentation, challenge rights violations and pursue durable solutions.

47. In Colombia, cooperation with the Ombudsperson's Office enhanced early warning and access to services for 2,743 refugees and 2,971 internally displaced persons. In Ethiopia, partnerships with universities and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission enabled thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons to access legal aid and protection against arbitrary detention. In South Sudan, improved documentation and legal awareness contributed to a reduction in immigration-related detentions of refugees and asylum-seekers from 335 cases in 2024 to 81 in 2025. In Tajikistan and Uganda, judicial training and legal aid programmes expanded access to legal assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers.

48. In the Republic of Moldova, joint programmes enabled more than 3,600 refugees to access legal counselling and assistance to secure legal status and documentation. In Mozambique, support to legal aid institutions assisted over 1,500 displaced persons and facilitated the issuance of nearly 10,000 civil documents, improving access to services and legal remedies through national systems.

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Definition **46**

Pro bono legal work is professional legal help provided without charging the person who receives it. For a refugee who cannot afford a lawyer, this might mean help replacing identity documents or challenging an unlawful detention. The lawyer can provide all types of legal services and legal advice that a paralegal or other community-based justice workers are not allowed to provide.

Safety and security for justice system practitioners

49. Ensuring the safety and security of justice system practitioners is essential to a strong and effective judicial framework.

50. In Burkina Faso, the Organization monitored the arrests, detentions and trials of more than 10 judicial actors, including judges, prosecutors and lawyers, amid a sharp deterioration in the administration of justice in the country. In the Sudan, it continued to document and report attacks and threats against judges, prosecutors, lawyers and paralegal volunteers linked to their professional duties, and engaged in protection advocacy with national authorities and relevant United Nations human rights mechanisms.

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

51. Corruption continues to pose a significant threat to governance, economic development and the rule of law worldwide. The United Nations supported Member States in strengthening capacities to prevent and combat corruption and economic crime, in line with the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

52. In October 2025, the United Nations facilitated the launch of the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network for the Middle East and North Africa, a practitioner-to-practitioner cooperation platform linking prosecutors, financial investigators and anti-corruption authorities. The platform enables direct information exchange and operational coordination for tracing, freezing and confiscating proceeds of crime across jurisdictions.

53. With technical support from the United Nations, the Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf endorsed its first security strategy to combat money-laundering (2026–2030), establishing a regional framework for coordinated action among Member States to address financial crime risks through aligned policies, information-sharing and joint implementation measures.

54. To improve prosecutorial and investigative responses to illicit trade and financial crime, capacity-building initiatives implemented in Italy and Peru reinforced coordinated approaches among law enforcement and judicial authorities.

55. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United Nations supported the operationalization of the newly established Special Department of the Office of the Prosecutor for Combating Organized Crime, Corruption and Inter-Cantonal Crime, which has taken on more than 1,100 complex cases from the offices of the cantonal prosecutors.

56. In Kenya, the United Nations supported the launch of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions' strategic plan and guidelines on the prosecution of corruption. Training to address gaps in financial crime investigations and recovery of assets led the Directorate of Criminal Investigations to initiate four new investigations into proceeds of crime worth approximately $800,000.

57. The Organization provided technical assistance to authorities in Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Botswana, Cambodia, Georgia, Jordan, Lebanon, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Libya, Morocco, the Republic of Moldova, Timor-Leste, Tunisia and Ukraine, contributing to the development of national anti-corruption strategies or improving the seizure, confiscation and transparent management of illicit assets, including guidance on their socially beneficial reuse.[1]

58. The United Nations supported Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Kenya in the piloting of the statistical framework to measure corruption, fostering

[1] United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, *The Social Re-Use of Seized and Confiscated Assets: Good Policies and Practices* (United Nations, 2025).

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Something to Think About 49

Imagine a judge is hearing a politically sensitive case, such as a corruption trial involving a senior government official. The judge may face intense political pressure to rule in the official's favor, as well as direct physical threats or risk of arrest. What protections and security measures could help judges, prosecutors, and lawyers make decisions based strictly on the law and evidence rather than fear or outside pressure? Consider how authorities can provide secure court facilities, protection for lawyers and witnesses, and independent investigations of threats without giving the government control over the court's final decision. Additionally, should judges have official rules that protect their jobs—such as guaranteed tenure until a mandatory retirement age, fixed salaries that cannot be cut, and independent systems for hiring and firing—to prevent them from being dismissed for making unpopular decisions? If they have these job protections, how can they still be held accountable if they accept bribes or deliberately violate the law?

Something to Think About 51

A government employee discovers that a supervisor has accepted payments from a company in exchange for awarding it a public contract. The employee may be afraid to report the wrongdoing because the supervisor could dismiss or threaten them. Should governments allow employees to report suspected corruption confidentially, prohibit retaliation against them, or establish independent offices to investigate complaints? How could authorities protect people who report wrongdoing while also investigating accusations fairly?

Definition 52

Tracing means finding money or property suspected of coming from criminal activity. For example, investigators may discover that a government official accused of corruption transferred stolen public funds to a bank account in another country. Authorities may then freeze the account to prevent the money from being withdrawn or transferred while they investigate. To confiscate the money permanently, authorities generally must obtain a court order or follow another legally authorized procedure establishing that the funds can lawfully be taken because of their connection to criminal activity.

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Interesting Facts **55**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, prosecutors working in different administrative regions, called cantons, previously handled many cases involving corruption and organized crime. More than 1,100 complex cases were transferred to a new specialized prosecution department. Bringing these cases together in one office may allow prosecutors with experience investigating complex crimes to work more effectively. However, transferring cases does not necessarily mean they will be resolved more quickly. Information about the number of prosecutors assigned to these cases, how long investigations and prosecutions take, and how many cases are completed would help determine whether this change has improved the efficiency of the justice system.

Something to Think About **57**

Socially beneficial reuse means using property confiscated from criminal activity to benefit the public. In Italy, buildings confiscated from organized crime have been converted into shelters for homeless people and facilities offering community services. One example documented by the United Nations is the Gym of Legality in Rome, where a confiscated property was transformed into a sports centre providing activities for local residents. These examples show how property once used or purchased by criminals can be turned into a resource for the community. If a government confiscates a building purchased with money obtained through corruption, should it sell the property and use the proceeds to fund public services, convert it into a community clinic, or use its value to compensate victims? What factors should determine which option would provide the greatest benefit?

collaboration between national entities and enabling the evaluation of the impact of anti-corruption measures and reforms.

59. In Liberia, the United Nations supported the drafting of statutes for the proposed national anti-corruption court, in line with international standards, through the convening of an expert meeting and a peer-learning mission to Sierra Leone for members of the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission. The draft statutes were presented to the Government on 6 January 2026.

60. In Montenegro, the Organization helped to strengthen corruption prevention in the healthcare sector by assessing the level of integrity in 30 health institutions, identifying key gaps and issuing recommendations that led to the implementation of 53 corrective measures during the assessment process itself.

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

61. The Organization continued to assist Member States in their concerted efforts to strengthen responses to counter organized crime and terrorism. The United Nations provided technical assistance across 109 countries to enhance the detection, investigation, prosecution and adjudication of maritime crime in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, as well as the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Red and Black Seas.

62. The United Nations-coordinated Operation Azure II engaged law enforcement officials from 14 countries across Latin America, the Caribbean and West Africa to counter synthetic drug trafficking via postal and courier services. The operation resulted in 161 seizures totalling 292.57 kg of controlled substances, 42 arrests and three controlled deliveries.

63. In Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, as well as in Kosovo,[2] the United Nations co-supported inter-agency crossing control units at strategic airports, seaports and land crossings, strengthening their operational capacities and enabling coordinated risk profiling, joint inspections and real-time information exchange among police, customs and other control authorities. In 2025, these strengthened operational capacities translated into at least 461 seizure events involving drugs, firearms and components, as well as contraband goods with a total value of over €4 million.

64. The United Nations visited Austria, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Tajikistan and Togo to assess implementation of Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism and prepared recommendations for improving their counter-terrorism responses while upholding international human rights norms and standards.

65. In Brazil, the Organization provided technical assistance to the authorities regarding timber fraud detection and gold smuggling, contributing to the seizure of 7,020 m^3 of timber and an unprecedented forensic analysis of 200 kg of gold in 2025.

66. In Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, United Nations technical assistance strengthened law enforcement capacities to conduct risk profiling and inspections at key entry and transit points, leading to over 1,350 seizures in 2025, including 593 tons of narcotics valued at nearly $900 million, 100 tons of precursors and other illicit goods.

67. In Mexico, United Nations-supported port control units enhanced risk profiling and inspection procedures, leading to the seizure of over 15,000 kg of drugs. Overall,

[2] References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

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Did You Know That... **62**

Operation Azure II brought together law enforcement officials from 14 countries to target synthetic drugs moved through postal and courier services. The report records seizures and arrests. The example shows why customs officials, postal operators and investigators may need to cooperate.

the United Nations network of 195 passenger and cargo control units in 90 countries made 4,726 seizures and intercepted 673 high-risk passengers in 2025.

68. In Indonesia, the Organization supported revisions to the country's wildlife protection policies and regulations, increasing coverage for endangered species and compliance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

69. In Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru, the United Nations supported the establishment of a joint investigation team, a formal mechanism to investigate a high-impact case involving human trafficking, money-laundering, environmental crimes and smuggling. The joint investigation team enables coordinated investigations, evidence-sharing and synchronized prosecutorial actions, enhancing regional operational responses to organized crime.

70. The Organization supported the development and review of national counter-terrorism strategies in Ghana, Iraq, Malawi, Malaysia, Nigeria, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, and of national organized crime strategies in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, and of a regional Arab strategy.

71. With the support of the Organization, the digital forensics laboratory of the Ministry of Justice of Kyrgyzstan became fully operational, contributing to a 40 per cent reduction in case processing times and improving admissibility of digital evidence in terrorism-related criminal cases. Similar support was initiated for the Ministry of Justice of Tajikistan.

72. Through a joint initiative with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the United Nations supported Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Iraq, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in strengthening law enforcement capacities and policy responses to the increasing misuse of new technologies for terrorist purposes, grounded in the rule of law and human rights, and in applying gender-responsive approaches.

4. Advancing accountability

Accountability for violations of international law and other serious crimes

73. Work to ensure accountability for violations of international law and other serious crimes continued globally.

74. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations assisted two joint investigation missions in Kasai and Ituri, including exhumations and mass-grave identification, and supported military prosecutors in Haut-Katanga. The Organization assisted six mobile court hearings in five provinces, resulting in 273 convictions, with sentences ranging from 5 to 20 years for sexual violence. It also supported the High Military Court in the establishment of a new national coordination mechanism for international crimes to strengthen coordination and advance accountability.

75. The United Nations helped to rebuild trust in the justice system in Peru among victims of the 2022–2023 protests by strengthening the capacities of 605 justice officials and supporting victims' associations.

76. In Ukraine, the Organization helped to strengthen the capacities of the national justice institutions to investigate war crimes and other violations of international criminal and humanitarian law through the introduction of harmonized, victim-centred investigative standards and enhanced forensic readiness. This support included professional training for 675 prosecutors, investigators and justice professionals on trauma-informed interviewing and documentation of war crimes,

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Definition **69**

A joint investigation team brings together police officers, prosecutors or other investigators from two or more countries to investigate crimes that cross national borders, such as human trafficking or drug smuggling. Team members must follow the laws of the country where they conduct investigative activities. However, countries may have different rules about collecting evidence. For example, evidence obtained through a police search that is legal in one country might not be accepted in another country's courts. To avoid this problem, participating countries agree on how evidence will be collected, recorded and shared, taking into account the legal requirements of each country. The court where a case is prosecuted ultimately determines whether the evidence can be used at trial.

including conflict-related sexual violence, as well as reparations. United Nations assistance contributed to the filing of the first criminal case identifying conflict-related sexual violence as policy driven and invoking command responsibility, as well as 112 notices of suspicion, 77 indictments and 18 verdicts in absentia.

77. In Yemen, United Nations support enabled the National Commission for the Investigation of Alleged Human Rights Violations to improve documentation, analysis and the transfer of substantiated case files to prosecutorial authorities.

78. In the Sudan, the Organization strengthened the capacities of lawyers and legal aid providers on due process, fair trial standards and international humanitarian law through training, and convened a consultation with civil society to develop a 2026 programme on documenting violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

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

79. Efforts continued to hold accountable perpetrators of crimes against peacekeepers. Since 2020, 103 individuals have been convicted for a range of offences concerning the killing of 35 peacekeepers and two United Nations experts in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon and Mali. Six individuals were convicted in Lebanon in 2025 for an attack that resulted in the killing of one United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) peacekeeper in 2022.

5. Supporting inclusive transitional justice processes

80. The United Nations continued to support transitional justice efforts in countries emerging from conflict.

81. In December, United Nation system efforts on transitional justice included the convening of a strategic exchange in Geneva with more than 40 practitioners from 12 United Nations entities and 15 duty stations, with a view to strengthening alignment and fostering innovation, including on the use of artificial intelligence in transitional justice. The meeting also launched a United Nations-wide community of practice on transitional justice.

82. In Colombia, in an important milestone in the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace issued the first restorative sentences in September 2025. The United Nations supported this process through multiple expert deployments that helped to strengthen investigative methodologies and evidence management, and enabled meaningful, gender- and ethnicity-sensitive victim participation. The Organization also helped to improve search and identification processes for victims of enforced disappearance and facilitated coordination for dignified returns.

83. The United Nations supported transitional justice efforts in Guatemala by monitoring 17 judicial cases linked to the internal armed conflict and providing technical assistance for the implementation of the Human Rights Committee's decision on the forced displacement of 10 Indigenous communities.

84. In Guinea, the United Nations supported the Government in drafting and adopting the country's transitional justice road map. The United Nations also organized a national seminar, chaired by the Prime Minister, to strengthen 119 stakeholders' understanding of the transitional justice and reconciliation agenda and their roles within it.

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Interesting Facts 76

A verdict in absentia is a court decision issued after a trial in which the accused person was not present. The report records 18 such verdicts in criminal proceedings concerning crimes committed during the war in Ukraine. Countries have different rules about conducting these trials. Some allow a trial to proceed if the accused has been informed of the charges but refuses to appear. Others permit trials when the accused cannot be located or is outside the country, provided certain safeguards are followed. These may include appointing a defence lawyer to represent the accused and allowing the person to request a new trial if they later appear before the court. Such safeguards are intended to balance the need to prosecute serious crimes with the accused person's right to a fair trial.

Definition 80

Transitional justice refers to the ways a society addresses serious human rights abuses after conflict or authoritarian rule. It can include criminal trials to hold those responsible for abuses accountable, investigations to determine what happened to people who disappeared, compensation to help victims rebuild their lives, and reforms to prevent the same abuses from happening again. For example, a family whose relative disappeared during a conflict may want to know what happened to that person and, if they died, where their remains are buried. A person who was tortured may need medical treatment, financial compensation and recognition of the harm they suffered. Criminal trials can punish those responsible, but transitional justice also seeks to uncover the truth, repair harm suffered by victims and prevent future abuses.

Did You Know That... 82

In September 2025, Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace, a special court established under the country's 2016 peace agreement, issued its first sentences for serious crimes committed during decades of armed conflict. Seven former leaders of the FARC rebel group were sentenced for their responsibility for thousands of kidnappings and other abuses. Two days later, 12 former military personnel were sentenced for killing civilians and falsely presenting them as enemy fighters killed in combat. These landmark rulings demonstrated that the same court could hold senior figures from both a rebel organization and government security forces accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Instead of conventional prison sentences, the court imposed eight-year sanctions restricting offenders' freedom and requiring activities intended to repair harm to victims and communities. By July 2026, the Colombian government had allocated funding to begin implementing these activities. The tribunal's work continues. In October 2026, it brought new charges against ten former FARC commanders for alleged crimes against five Indigenous communities, including killings, forced displacement, the use of landmines and environmental destruction. These charges have not yet resulted in convictions. The developments demonstrate that Colombia's efforts to establish accountability for crimes committed during its armed conflict are far from over.

85. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Nations supported the National Commission for Transitional Justice and relevant ministries by reviewing the draft transitional justice law, advising on guarantees of non-recurrence and engaging with the National Commission for Missing Persons.

86. In Montenegro, with United Nations support, a landmark transitional justice case in July 2025 resulted in the country's first conviction for conflict-related sexual violence, with a 20-year prison sentence. Institutional capacities were further strengthened through the development of guidelines for the search for missing persons, specialized training for judges and professionals across relevant sectors, and the development of a curriculum on the rights of missing persons for the Judicial Training Centre.

87. In Yemen, the Organization convened a seminar in November on the role of media and journalists in transitional justice, with a view to strengthening cooperation between media, civil society and the authorities.

6. Supporting constitution-making

88. The Organization continued to respond to requests from Member States for support in facilitating inclusive and participatory constitutional reform processes.

89. In Nigeria, the Organization provided technical support to draft constitutional amendments to create additional seats reserved for women in the National Assembly and the state houses of assembly.

90. In South Sudan, citizens in eight states were able to voice their opinions on constitutional reform issues, including term limits, separation of powers and federalism, through public consultations conducted by the authorities and supported by the United Nations and partners. This support also led to the training of 217 members of the national constitutional authorities, enhancing knowledge of gender-responsive public participation and constitutional gender mainstreaming.

7. Environmental rule of law

91. With regard to the implementation of environmental rule of law, the United Nations published reports entitled *Climate Change in the Courtroom*[3] and *The Right to a Healthy Environment in Practice*,[4] documenting emerging trends in climate and environmental jurisprudence and their role in accelerating environmental action. A landmark study on the interlinkages between climate, peace and security and the rule of law in the context of West Africa and the Sahel emphasized the importance of using the rule of law as a strategic entry point to strengthen climate resilience and address climate insecurity.[5]

92. The Organization provided technical, legal and capacity-building assistance to a number of countries, including Argentina, Cabo Verde, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Gabon, Guatemala, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Seychelles, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe, to strengthen their legislative frameworks on climate change, air quality, forests, biodiversity and the protection of human health.

[3] See https://wedocs.unep.org/items/d24911d5-d873-42f8-9e41-d5921264a66d.
[4] See www.unep.org/resources/report/right-healthy-environment-practice-decade-courts-2015-2025.
[5] See https://unowas.unmissions.org/en/news/new-unowas-study-rule-law-key-link-west-africas-climate-resilience.

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Something to Think About **85**

After a conflict, prosecuting people responsible for serious crimes is important, but trials alone may not prevent similar abuses from happening again. For example, if security forces previously arrested and tortured people without proper supervision, a government might introduce independent investigations of complaints, train officers on lawful arrest procedures and ensure that courts can review detention decisions. Which changes would be most important for preventing future abuses? How could governments determine whether these measures are working?

Interesting Facts **90**

A verdict in absentia is a court decision issued after a trial in which the accused person was not present. The report records 18 such verdicts in criminal proceedings concerning crimes committed during the war in Ukraine. Countries have different rules about conducting these trials. Some allow a trial to proceed if the accused has been informed of the charges but refuses to appear. Others permit trials when the accused cannot be located or is outside the country, provided certain safeguards are followed. These may include appointing a defence lawyer to represent the accused and allowing the person to request a new trial if they later appear before the court. Such safeguards are intended to balance the need to prosecute serious crimes with the accused person's right to a fair trial.

Something to Think About **92**

A country adopts a law limiting industrial air pollution. What must happen next for residents to benefit? Authorities may need to issue permits, measure emissions, inspect factories and impose lawful penalties for violations. Should countries with limited inspection staff prioritize the highest-polluting facilities, publish pollution data or seek technical assistance first?

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

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

93. The International Law Commission held its seventy-sixth session.[6] The General Assembly considered the report of the Commission on the work of its seventy-sixth session (A/80/10), as reflected in resolution 80/164. During the Sixth Committee discussion, States emphasized the importance of enhancing the dialogue between the Commission and the Committee. The Commission was urged to base its work on the practice of States and *opinio juris* from all regions of the world and to consider the diversity of legal traditions. States requested the Commission to continue to take their views and concerns into account in its work and to clearly distinguish in the outcomes of its work between provisions reflecting the codification of international law and those reflecting its progressive development.

94. The General Assembly adopted the United Nations Convention on Negotiable Cargo Documents on 15 December 2025 (resolution 80/162). The Convention establishes a uniform legal framework governing the issuance and use of negotiable cargo documents, a new type of document of title, in paper or electronic form, that represents goods in transit, regardless of transport mode. It will open for signature in Accra on 26 October 2026.

95. Kyrgyzstan and Cambodia became Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and to the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the Convention, bringing the total number of Parties to 172 and 155, respectively. The number of Parties to the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks increased to 96, following the accession of Albania and Sierra Leone. In a major development, on 17 January 2026, the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction entered into force. The number of signatories and Parties to the Agreement increased to 145 and 90, respectively.

96. At its fifty-eighth session, the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) finalized texts concerning negotiable cargo documents, asset tracing and recovery in insolvency proceedings, as well as prevention and mitigation of international investment disputes (see A/80/17). There were eight legislative actions concerning UNCITRAL texts. In addition, the United Nations Convention on the International Effects of Judicial Sales of Ships entered into force on 17 February 2026.

97. The United Nations Convention against Cybercrime; Strengthening International Cooperation for Combating Certain Crimes Committed by Means of Information and Communications Technology Systems and for the Sharing of Evidence in Electronic Form of Serious Crimes was opened for signature at a ceremony held in Hanoi on 25 and 26 October 2025. As at 18 June 2026, 76 States and one regional economic integration organization had signed the Convention, and 3 States had ratified it.

98. On 18 December 2025, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Model Strategies on Reducing Reoffending (the Kyoto Model Strategies), marking a global commitment to addressing the challenge of recidivism through rehabilitation and social reintegration.

[6] See https://legal.un.org/ilc/sessions/76.

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Interesting Facts **93**

The International Law Commission (ILC) is a body of independent legal experts elected by the General Assembly to help clarify existing international law and develop proposals for new international legal rules. Its members study how international law is applied, examine legal questions and prepare draft rules and explanations that governments can consider. The Sixth Committee, where all UN Member States can participate, discusses the Commission's annual report and provides governments with an opportunity to express their views on its work. This dialogue matters because the Commission's conclusions should not reflect only the legal traditions or practices of a few countries. For example, when examining whether a rule has become part of customary international law, the Commission must consider relevant evidence of how States from different regions behave and whether they believe international law requires that behaviour. Member States can also identify concerns about proposed rules before the Commission completes its work. The exchange helps ensure that the Commission's work reflects a broad range of national perspectives and distinguishes rules that already exist from proposals for developing international law further.

Did You Know That... **97**

As of 18 June 2026, 76 States had signed the UN Convention against Cybercrime, but only three had ratified it. Signing a treaty generally signals a country's intention to consider becoming legally bound by it, while ratification is the formal step through which a country agrees to be bound. Under Article 65, the Convention will enter into force 90 days after at least 40 States have ratified, accepted, approved or acceded to it. With only three ratifications reported, another 37 were needed to reach that threshold. The large difference between signatures and ratifications illustrates why signing a treaty does not necessarily mean that it has become legally binding or entered into force.

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

99. The United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, including the United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law, a free online educational resource, continued to ensure access to high-quality training. Four training programmes for developing countries or countries with emerging economies were conducted: the International Law Fellowship Programme and the United Nations Regional Courses in International Law for Africa, for Asia-Pacific and for Latin America and the Caribbean.

100. The annual treaty event was held in September on the margins of the high-level week of the eightieth session of the General Assembly, during which 21 States undertook a total of 30 treaty actions covering a range of areas, including the law of treaties, the environment, disarmament, the law of the sea, penal matters and outer space.

101. In the field of ocean affairs and the law of the sea, the United Nations engaged in capacity-building, technical assistance and other activities with States and intergovernmental organizations, including to promote uniform and consistent application and better understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and related instruments.[7] The Organization administers several trust funds that assist developing States in the development and implementation of the legal order for the oceans.[8]

102. The United Nations continued to assist States and other stakeholders, upon request, in implementing reforms based on UNCITRAL texts. Emphasis was placed on judicial capacity-building to promote the consistent interpretation and application of UNCITRAL instruments, in particular in the areas of insolvency and dispute settlement. Efforts to support developing States in investor-State dispute settlement, including through the establishment of an advisory centre on international investment dispute resolution, were acknowledged in the Sevilla Commitment.

103. The Organization has been supporting the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and its 12 member States to implement and operationalize the Protocol for the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination, including in the development of its action plan for the period 2026–2028, which is under implementation.

104. The United Nations continued to produce guidance and analytical reports to assist Member States in implementing their international counter-terrorism obligations in line with human rights and rule of law approaches.[9]

3. International and hybrid courts and tribunals

International Court of Justice

105. The International Court of Justice, which held a solemn sitting on 17 April 2026 to commemorate its eightieth anniversary, continued to maintain a high level of

[7] See www.un.org/oceancapacity; www.un.org/oceancapacity/UNFSAProject; www.un.org/oceancapacity/UNNF; and www.un.org/bbnjagreement/en/capacity-building-and-technical-assistance/overview.

[8] See www.un.org/oceancapacity/tf.

[9] See www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/default/files/2025-12/HR_CFT_guidance_November_2025.pdf; www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/cted-osce_trends_report_online_fin.pdf; www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/trends_alert_-_children_youth_exploitation_-_2025.pdf; www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/op_35_report_2025.pdf; and www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/final_maritime_security_and_api_pnr.pdf.

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Something to Think About **101**

Negotiating international agreements on ocean protection requires lawyers and other specialists who understand the proposed rules. Some developing countries have small diplomatic missions and limited funds to send experts to international meetings. Should the UN prioritize paying for their participation in negotiations, providing training in international law, or helping governments prepare national laws to implement agreements? How might each form of assistance affect a country's ability to participate in shaping international rules and carrying them out?

judicial activity. As at 30 June 2026, the Court had 23 cases before it. Two new cases were introduced during the period under review: an appeal against a decision rendered by the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization on 30 June 2025 *(Russian Federation v. Australia and Netherlands)* and proceedings instituted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo against Rwanda on 26 June 2026.

106. The International Court of Justice delivered two advisory opinions requested by the General Assembly, namely on the obligations of States in respect of climate change and on the obligations of Israel in relation to the presence and activities of the United Nations, other international organizations and third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as well as an advisory opinion on the right to strike under International Labour Organization Convention No. 87, requested by the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization.

107. The Court held several public hearings, including on the merits of the cases concerning *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar: 11 States intervening)* and *Arbitral Award of 3 October 1899 (Guyana v. Venezuela)*.

Law of the sea tribunals and conciliation commissions

108. Regarding the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, *The "Zheng He" Case (Luxembourg v. Mexico)* was discontinued by agreement between the parties, and the Tribunal delivered its judgment in *The M/T "Heroic Idun" (No. 2) Case (Marshall Islands/Equatorial Guinea)* on 27 May 2026.

109. The arbitral tribunal constituted under annex VII to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea issued, on 22 April 2026, its award in the *Dispute Concerning Coastal State Rights in the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and Kerch Strait (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*. Law of the sea issues were considered in the *Dispute Concerning the Detention of Ukrainian Naval Vessels and Servicemen (Ukraine v. the Russian Federation)*.

110. On 2 June 2026, Cambodia instituted compulsory conciliation proceedings under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in the context of the maritime dispute with Thailand.

International criminal courts and tribunals

111. The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, and the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone continued to carry out their respective residual functions, including the enforcement of sentences, protection of victims and witnesses, assistance to national jurisdictions, and management of archives.

112. The United Nations continued to cooperate with the International Criminal Court in accordance with the mutual relationship agreement.

Other international accountability mechanisms

113. 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 to contribute to the accountability process and support the work of jurisdictions investigating and prosecuting crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. With the aim of supporting Syrian-owned and led accountability processes, since December 2024, the Mechanism has been engaging with the relevant institutions

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Interesting Facts **105**

As at 30 June 2026, the report states that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had 23 cases before it. The ICJ settles legal disputes between countries when it has jurisdiction. For example, in 2002, the Court ruled that Belgium had violated international law by issuing an international arrest warrant against the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Foreign Minister, who was protected from criminal prosecution by foreign national courts while in office. The ICJ also provides advisory opinions on legal questions submitted by authorized UN bodies. It is different from the International Criminal Court (ICC), which prosecutes individuals accused of international crimes. For example, in 2012, the ICC convicted Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, a former militia leader in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, of war crimes for recruiting children under the age of 15 and using them in armed conflict. The distinction is that the ICJ determines the legal responsibility of countries, while the ICC determines the criminal responsibility of individuals.

Definition **106**

An advisory opinion is a legal answer that the International Court of Justice gives to a UN body authorized to ask a legal question. It differs from a judgment in a dispute between two States. Advisory opinions are not binding judgments between disputing parties, but they can clarify international legal obligations and influence later decisions.

in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism has assisted 259 national investigations (see A/80/650).

114. The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar made important progress across its various investigations, including into crimes that continue to be committed following the military takeover in February 2021 (see A/HRC/60/18). The Mechanism continued to cooperate with the International Criminal Court, national investigative authorities and the States Parties in the case of *The Gambia v. Myanmar* before the International Court of Justice.

115. By its resolution 60/2, the Human Rights Council decided to establish an independent investigative mechanism to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of international crimes and the most serious violations of international law committed in Afghanistan. The Organization is taking the steps necessary for the speedy establishment and effective functioning of the independent mechanism.

116. The International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement presented to the Human Rights Council a thematic report on systemic racism faced by Africans and people of African descent throughout the criminal justice process, outlining 12 key elements for a racism-free system (see A/HRC/60/75).

C. Strengthening the administration of justice within the Organization

117. 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 2026, the United Nations Dispute Tribunal had issued 2,794 judgments and the United Nations Appeals Tribunal 1,654 judgments.

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

118. The Rule of Law Coordination and Resource Group, a high-level platform chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, continued to meet periodically to set strategic direction for the rule of law activities of the Organization.

119. The Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law is a United Nations joint mechanism established in 2012 to coordinate the efficient and effective delivery of rule of law assistance at the country and international levels. It serves as the Organization's primary operational coordination mechanism for rule of law assistance in crisis and post-conflict settings, and as a central platform for delivering integrated, multi-entity responses across the system. During the reporting period, the mechanism continued to provide expertise and funding for joint initiatives and programmes, and to support Member States in advancing credible national accountability and rule of law processes, including in the Central African Republic, the Comoros and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

120. In addition to these cross-cutting arrangements, the Organization continued its coordination and cooperation in specific subject-matter areas, including through the Inter-Agency Task Force on Policing, the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, the United Nations Network on Migration, the Global Task Force on Corruption, the Inter-Agency Task Team on Combating Discrimination in Law, the United Nations task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, the

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Interesting Facts **113**

International accountability mechanisms help investigate serious crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, particularly when national authorities are unable or unwilling to conduct effective investigations. Some mechanisms do not have the authority to prosecute suspects or conduct trials. Instead, they collect, preserve and analyse evidence, identify possible perpetrators and share information with courts or prosecutors that have the legal authority to pursue cases. For example, the UN has established mechanisms to assist investigations into serious crimes committed in Syria and Myanmar. Their work is important because investigations and trials may take place years after crimes were committed, when witnesses may be difficult to locate and evidence may have disappeared. By preserving evidence and making it available for future legal proceedings, these mechanisms can help ensure that opportunities to hold perpetrators accountable are not lost.

Definition **117**

The UN has an internal justice system for certain employment-related disputes involving its staff. For example, an eligible staff member may challenge an administrative decision affecting their contract through the applicable internal procedures. The UN Dispute Tribunal and Appeals Tribunal are not courts where Member States bring disputes against one another.

Something to Think About **119**

Strengthening the rule of law often requires improvements across several connected institutions. Police investigate crimes, prosecutors bring charges, courts hear cases, defence lawyers protect the rights of accused persons, and prisons carry out lawful sentences. The UN's Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law helps coordinate assistance provided by different UN entities so that their activities support common objectives. Effective coordination requires shared priorities, clearly defined responsibilities and ways to assess whether assistance is producing meaningful improvements, while national authorities retain responsibility for their justice systems. How can the UN and the countries receiving assistance determine whether coordinated support is strengthening the justice system as a whole?

Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, the Inter-Agency Security Sector Reform Task Force, the Al-Hol Task Force, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Transitional Justice and the Gender Justice Platform.

IV. Concluding observations

121. The relationship between the United Nations and the rule of law is fundamental. The Organization was founded on the premise that binding legal norms, applied universally and independently of power, are the only durable foundation of international peace. The Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations opens with the determination "to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained" and continues, in ensuing Articles, with specific obligations in this regard. Respecting the rule of law is therefore not a mere aspiration of the Charter. It is a commitment embedded in its purposes, principles and provisions. Its erosion, if allowed, would not only weaken the United Nations, but would threaten the entire international legal framework the Organization was created to sustain. Standing up for the purposes and principles of the Charter means giving practical effect to its provisions, and affirming the role of those purposes and principles in promoting peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.

122. The United Nations has continued to champion the rule of law. From advancing security and justice, preventing and countering terrorism, organized crime and corruption, to strengthening accountability, mandated and requested programmes have been implemented across all regions, with tangible results. The General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed the imperative of upholding and promoting the rule of law.[10] This commitment endures. The record of delivery documented in this report is far from a cause for complacency – it is a model from which further, even more decisive action by Member States is required to uphold the rule of law, supported by the United Nations where needed, in line with the New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law. It is therefore critical to preserve the multidimensional United Nations capacity to support Member States' efforts to respond to complex rule of law challenges.

[10] Most recently in General Assembly resolution 80/167.

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Something to Think About **122**

The report documents progress in strengthening the rule of law but warns that much more remains to be done. This goes beyond building courts and training judges. At the national level, countries need to ensure that justice systems are fair and accessible, combat corruption and organized crime, protect human rights and hold perpetrators of serious crimes accountable. At the international level, countries must respect their obligations under international law, settle disputes peacefully and cooperate in addressing crimes that cross national borders. Progress therefore depends not only on adopting laws and creating institutions, but also on whether those laws are enforced fairly and whether countries comply with their international obligations. What evidence would demonstrate that Member States are making meaningful progress in these different areas, rather than simply announcing new initiatives or commitments?