



Permanent Mission of
Finland to the
United Nations



Permanent Mission of Liberia to
the United Nations



Permanent Mission of Nepal to the
United Nations



United Nations
Rule of Law Coordination
and Resource Group

The Permanent Missions of Finland, Liberia and Nepal to the United Nations, UN Women and the Rule of Law Unit on behalf of the UN Rule of Law Coordination and Resource Group invite you to a discussion on:

“Women’s Access to Justice: A Transformational Approach”

Tuesday, 4 October 2016 at 1.15 pm –2.30 pm
Conference Room 7, UN Headquarters, New York

Introductory remarks

Mr. Edric Selous

Director, Rule of Law Unit, Executive Office of the Secretary-General

Panellists

H.E. Ambassador Marja Lehto

Senior Expert of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and Chair of the Executive Board of Justice Rapid Response

H.E. Ambassador Lewis G. Brown

Permanent Representative of Liberia to the United Nations

Mr. Sudhir Bhattarai

Under-Secretary and Director, United Nations, Other International Organisations and International Law Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal

Moderator

Ms. Purna Sen

Director, Policy Division, UN Women

*Please see the attached concept note for further details.
A light lunch will be served outside of Conference Room 7 starting at 13:00.*

Concept Note:
“Women’s Access to Justice: A Transformational Approach”

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The 6th Committee of the General Assembly is set to discuss “practical measures to facilitate access to justice for all, including for the poorest and most vulnerable” as a subtopic of its annual discussion on the rule of law at the national and international levels on 5 and 6 October 2016. In many countries of the world in particular women and girls still face serious discrimination in law, in the interpretation and implementation of the law, and in practice in the enjoyment of their rights. Women and girls also face particular obstacles and restrictions in accessing legal aid and justice services on equal terms. Certain groups of women and girls, such as those with disabilities, members of ethnic or other minority groups, residents in remote rural areas, living in conflict-affected areas or forced to flee often face multiple or intersectional discrimination in access to justice.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women has stated that gender stereotyping, discriminatory laws, procedural and evidentiary requirements and practices, and a failure to ensure physical, economic, social and cultural accessibility of judicial mechanisms are amongst the most common obstacles for women to access justice.¹ Providing access to justice for women is an essential component in the realization of all human rights for women and girls rights protected under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Women’s effective and equal access to justice is a fundamental element of the rule of law, and it helps to optimize the “emancipatory and transformative potential” of the law. This topic is highly relevant in light of the adoption and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 16 and its target on promoting the rule of law at all levels and ensuring equal access to justice for all. SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering women constitutes another strong commitment to address the justice needs of women and girls. When adopting the 2030 Agenda Member States committed themselves to significantly increase investments to close the gender gap, to strengthen support for gender equality institutions at all levels and to systematically embed gender perspectives into all aspects of implementation.

The need for a transformational approach to women’s access to justice is particularly acute in conflict and post-conflict settings. In such contexts justice must address not only the singular violations against women and girls, but must also seek to transform the underlying inequalities which render women and girls vulnerable during times of conflict. States parties should address structural gender inequality, including through women’s direct participation in shaping transitional justice mechanisms, the establishment of specialized and easily accessible courts to address violations against women and girls, and engagement with informal justice mechanisms to ensure that informal processes are brought into line with human rights and gender equality standards.

This event will provide an opportunity for Member States to share good practices, challenges and lessons learned on enhancing women’s access to justice, including in fragile and post-conflict settings. It will also provide an opportunity learn more about the normative work and recommendations of the CEDAW Committee on women’s access to justice, and States parties’ commitments and obligations in this area. This event also follows up on a high-level meeting on women’s access to justice held in 2012, providing an opportunity for Member States to report on the implementation of the voluntary pledges to enhance women’s access to justice made on that occasion.

The event will offer a space for dialogue between the legal and rule of law advisers, development experts and human rights experts on an issue which is of fundamental importance to the rule of law, to the promotion and protection of human rights, and to strengthening institutions and good governance.

¹ CEDAW General Recommendation No. 33 on women’s access to justice (2015)