

Introductory remarks by Volker Türk for the 6th Committee

8 October 2021, 1000-1100

Madam Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I am pleased to introduce the Secretary-General's annual rule of law report. At the outset, let me thank Qatar, Liechtenstein and Mexico for their leadership in facilitating the annual debate and resolution on the rule of law.

As is traditionally the case, the Secretary-General's report includes updates and analysis on wide-ranging United Nations assistance activities to Member States in the area of the rule of law at the national and international levels during the past 12 months, characterized this time by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Organization has helped to strengthen the rule of law and human rights, among other things, in the prevention and countering of terrorism; by supporting the design and conduct of participatory constitution-making; and in seeking accountability for crimes committed against United Nations peacekeepers.

At the international level, the Organization continues to promote the codification and development of international instruments, norms and standards, through training programmes, capacity-building activities and resources for Member States.

The report highlights contributions by international and hybrid courts and tribunals and other international accountability mechanisms to promote respect for the rule of law at the international level.

The report provides examples of the positive impact of our assistance in mitigating the COVID-19 crisis, and how such assistance has helped to realize people's right to due process, and supported more accessible justice services to respond to the social and economic fall-out from the pandemic.

Yet, despite the many examples of progress highlighted in this report, the United Nations continues to observe situations that are lacking respect for the rule of law.

This includes continued politicization of justice institutions and threats to their independence, attacks on national human rights institutions and the shrinking of civic space.

The pandemic has exposed deep structural inequalities, which have disproportionately impacted the lives and futures of women, minorities, and the most disadvantaged – from the distribution of wealth and resources to the protection of their human rights, access to justice and security, and the delivery of basic services.

These discrepancies in the level of dignity afforded to diverse individuals and groups that comprise our human family have further eroded public trust, especially among young people. It is clear that we need to act on this.

Madam Chair,

The United Nations efforts on rule of law reflect in large part our attempt to fulfill the promise of the United Nations Charter, and what it means to place dignity and human rights at the centre of our actions.

Increasing demands for justice and systemic change require urgent attention to the triple planetary crisis, the rights of future generations, the end of gender and racial injustice, accountability for egregious crimes, curbing corruption and exploring measures to address insufficiently governed digital spaces and the use of new technology. The Secretary-General has pointed this out repeatedly, including in the *Call to Action for Human Rights*.

These crises have led us to a crossroads where we can either shift gears, correct course, unite, and take a different path to a brighter future — or stay on the same perilous path that has led us to where we are.

Last month, at the request of the UN75 Leaders' Declaration, the Secretary-General presented to the General Assembly his vision on "*Our Common Agenda*" — in many ways a wake-up call to take urgent action to address these and other challenges facing us today and in the future.

Our Common Agenda recognises that the rule of law and human rights are central to our greatest challenges, and essential to resolving them.

Our Common Agenda emphasises the renewal of the social contract by placing people at the centre of governance and justice; building trust by ensuring institutions listen and are responsive to the needs of those they are meant to serve, and concretely addressing drivers of inequality — economic, social, gender and others.

The broadening of people's access to justice and ensuring that the delivery of justice services responds to the needs of communities, including marginalized and vulnerable individuals, is fundamental to this vision.

This calls for institutions to build trust through consistent demonstrations of responsiveness and transparency.

Fundamental to building trust is addressing and eliminating corruption and causes of corruption. *Our Common Agenda* offers suggestions on how to tackle this and illicit financing.

The rule of law must also be understood as a fundamental contribution to stability, democracy and human rights. It needs to be continuously cherished, protected and strengthened.

Strengthening the rule of law involves respect for the norms of international law, including on the use of force, and recognition of the primary responsibility of States to protect their populations from genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and war crimes.

In this regard, this year's report highlights important inroads made by Member States in the pursuit of accountability for serious violations of human rights, including in the context of transitional justice, conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

At the international level, *Our Common Agenda* underscores the importance of international solidarity, the unique role of inter-governmental bodies and our multilateral system to resolve peace and security issues and settle disputes. The United Nations' continuing support to promote an international legal framework, norms and standards are therefore essential to contributing to more networked, effective, and inclusive forms of multilateralism.

The potential for Sustainable Development Goal 16 has yet to be fully realized. Our recovery from COVID-19 presents a challenge but also an opportunity to achieve the promise of peaceful, just and inclusive societies, if grounded in the rule of law and human rights.

Furthermore, we need to think about how the rule of law can be taken forward by all segments of society, in all contexts, especially where the basic tenets of the rule of law are being questioned.

Indeed, this Committee's important annual resolutions reiterate that human rights and the rule of law are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and that the advancement of the rule of law at the national and international levels is essential for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Therefore, in *Our Common Agenda*, the Secretary-General calls for a new system-wide vision for the United Nations engagement on the rule of law.

Building on the principle of people-centred approaches to governance and justice and a renewed social contract grounded in human rights, the vision will set out the cornerstones of a comprehensive approach that will seek to engage closely Member States and other relevant stakeholders.

With United Nations support, the Secretary-General is calling for all Member States to help to create a rule of law agenda that is a better fit for the everyday needs of people and that could deal effectively with future crises and challenges.

Against this backdrop, if I may suggest, the Sixth Committee may wish to consider as a sub-topic for the next session, "*Promoting a people-centred rule of law at the national and international levels as the foundation of Our Common Agenda*".

Thank you.