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UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SIXTH COMMITTEE, UNGA77
THE RULE OF LAW AT THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Agenda item 84

7 OCTOBER 2022

Delivered by Melina Lito

(check against delivery)

Mr Chair,

I would like to start by thanking Deputy Secretary General for introducing this segment on the rule of law activities at the national and international levels. We also thank the Secretary General for his report on ‘strengthening and coordinating United Nations rule of law activities.’

The United Kingdom is committed to the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We believe that these are the absolute foundations on which open, stable and prosperous societies thrive. The United Kingdom promotes and defends democracy, human rights and the rule of law through membership of international organisations, including the Commonwealth, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of Europe, and through a range of activities at both the national and international levels.

As we noted in our statement last year, the Covid-19 pandemic has posed an unprecedented threat to rule of law. It has challenged all legal systems to find new ways to ensure access to justice and dispute resolution continues in unprecedented circumstances. The UK and other countries have been able to respond positively to this challenge by embracing widespread adoption of technology to support virtual hearings in the courts and tribunals. Sadly we also note in many countries Covid-19 has been used as a pretext for increasing pressure on those who defend the rule of law, including human rights defenders, journalists and legal practitioners.

As the pandemic continued, we saw some countries introduce legislative measures which limit the rights of individuals and restrict access to justice and fair trials. Such restrictions went beyond providing a safe environment for those accessing their justice systems.

In countries where this has happened, the relationships between governments and citizens were therefore damaged. The confidence in the rule of law, to varying degrees, was eroded, in most cases by the very institutions intended to

protect individual freedoms. Technology was at times manipulated to erode societies, exploit people, and ruin lives through criminality, information suppression or misinformation.

As a result, the need for an independent judiciary, not susceptible to influence or interference, but which upholds the rule of law and ensures the impartial administration of justice, no matter who the defendant, was never better demonstrated.

Mr Chair,

As the world emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic, we have new challenges. We have the challenge, at a global level, of making sure the public has confidence in the rule of law, and the institutions that implement and protect it. This means helping communities rebuild and strengthen by incorporating a ‘people-centred justice” approach which focuses on the rights of the individual, not the state. An approach that puts individuals at the heart of policy, enabling them to access and seek justice, not one which limits their freedoms.

We also have the challenge of demonstrating to everybody that the system works for them, not against them; where the most vulnerable, disproportionately impacted through the pandemic, particularly those who faced domestic violence, and those who faced conflict-related sexual violence have access to justice. The United Kingdom continues to support access to survivor-centred justice for the victims of conflict-related sexual violence that is truly responsive to the needs and wishes of survivors, as well as ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable.

Furthermore, we have the challenge of how we deliver and the use of technology. The pandemic highlighted how reliant we all are on technology to stay connected. The United Kingdom has supported technology initiatives seeking to provide creative solutions to access justice and seeking dispute resolution, including remote hearing capabilities and online access to service systems.

Finally, we also have the challenge of incorporating lessons learnt during the pandemic. We should continue to apply them to deliver maximum benefit with a hybrid approach in strengthening the rule of law, and not reverting to the pre-covid norms. A combination of in-person and remote co-operation will as a result, reach those who need access to justice, further and faster.

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom has been a strong partner in support of Ukraine and in supporting accountability for the violations of international law that Ukraine and its people have suffered and for Russia's violation of the UN Charter. The use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of a State, as well as the recent attempt to annex Ukrainian territory through sham referenda, are incompatible with international rule of law and must have consequences for Russia.

The United Kingdom, along with our partners, are also supporting Ukraine to build capacity within their justice systems. We are also supporting the work of the International Criminal Court to ensure those responsible for the atrocities that have been committed in Ukraine are held to account.

We must show to the world, and more importantly those impacted directly, those who perpetrate the most serious crimes, do not do so with impunity. The United Kingdom stands with Ukraine.

Mr Chair,

The rule of law is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16, but of course, a fair and consistent justice system is fundamental for making progress across other Sustainable Development Goals. A fair and consistent justice system encourages economic development. It benefits communities. It promotes equality and freedoms.

The United Kingdom is proud to be a champion for SDG 16 and our international rule of law activities

We look forward to the developments in these committee discussions, the Secretary General's continued efforts in promoting the rule of law and his new vision on the rule of law.