

**Statement on behalf of
Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark
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Agenda item 83:

The Rule of Law at the National and International levels

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M(r/s) Chair,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden - and my own country - Denmark.

The Nordic countries would like to thank the Secretary-General for his recent report on the Strengthening and coordinating United Nations rule of law activities. The report draws an alarming conclusion about a continuing global decline in the rule of law and a backsliding of democracy and women's rights. We call on the international community to do its outmost to help reverse this negative trend.

However, there are some recent multilateral achievements to celebrate too. In 2023, the number of parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, in short to UNCLOS, has increased. This important treaty sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. It is therefore also very promising that in June 2023, after many years of negotiations, an Intergovernmental Conference convened by the General Assembly adopted by consensus the Agreement under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. The instrument, also known as the BBNJ Agreement, was opened for signature this September and currently has 82 signatories, including all of the Nordic countries, which are staunch supporters of UNCLOS and consider it the constitution for the oceans. Furthermore, the adoption of the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention in May is an important milestone in the global fight against impunity. Effective international legal cooperation is fundamental for investigating and prosecuting the most serious international crimes.

Now turning to the subtopic of today's discussion "using technology to advance access to justice for all" I'm pleased to inform you that in the Nordic countries, we strive to harness the many potentials of the digital transformation, including the potential of technology to advance access to justice for all. Especially the digital technologies can, if developed and used correctly, be a strong motor towards creating better and more equal justice systems. We are of the view that all people should benefit from digital possibilities and should enjoy equal opportunities regarding

digital access to justice and to fair proceedings. Therefore, digital participation must be unconditionally guaranteed to all societal groups without discrimination and with the enjoyment of human rights. The needs of vulnerable persons, including children and vulnerable adults such as elderly people and persons with disabilities should in particular be taken into account.

For us it is important to raise people's digital literacy, including through training and education, so that everyone can benefit from digital technologies in order to further improve their access to justice. It is equally important to promote the digital skills in the justice sector to enable judges, prosecutors, judicial staff and other justice practitioners to use and apply digital technologies and tools effectively and with due respect for the rights and freedoms of those seeking justice.

M(r/s) Chair,

The Nordic countries share the New Vision of the Secretary-General for the rule of law. The New Vision promotes a gender responsive and forward-looking approach by the United Nations system. For the Nordic countries, it is very important to link the rule of law with gender equality and we are delighted to see such nexus in the New Vision. Gender discriminating laws and practices are a persisting problem, and we fully endorse the New Vision's ambition to support UN Member States' efforts to address systemic and persistent barriers to gender equality. One such barrier can be digital technologies that if not developed and used in a human rights-compliant manner, may have serious negative impacts on the protection, promotion and enjoyment of human rights and affect women and girls disproportionately, including by strengthening existing patterns of gender inequality.

Further in the New Vision, the rule of law is the foundation for peace. A central element in that foundation is the peremptory character of the prohibition in the UN Charter of the use of force that is being blatantly violated by the Russian Federation in its continuing aggression against Ukraine. Russia must immediately suspend its military operations against Ukraine as ordered by the International Court of Justice in its decision on provisional measures of 16 March 2022 and withdraw all its forces beyond the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine. The Russian Federation as a state as well as individuals responsible for committing international crimes must

be held accountable. Fortunately, digital technologies are instrumental in gathering and preserving evidence of such crimes to be used in future trials.

M(r/s) Chair,

Finally, a brief note on behalf on my own country Denmark. We continue to present ourselves as a Nordic candidate for a seat at United Nations Security Council in 2025-2026. An important topic for us will of course be to promote universal respect for the rule of law; a pivotal principle in any attempt to pursue peace and stability in international relations.

Thank you.