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Agenda item 84: The rule of law at the national and international levels

Statement by Austria as coordinator of the

Group of Friends of the Rule of Law

delivered by

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Mr. Chair,

I am honored to speak on behalf of 51 members of the Group of Friends of the Rule of Law.

We thank the Secretary-General for the latest report on the topic contained in document A/79/117. The implementation of the New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law underlines the continued priority this fundamental principle enjoys. Not surprisingly, this group fully concurs with the statement that rule of law is the foundation for peace. But even more than that: the rule of law is a cornerstone of societies worldwide and a core objective for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In our view, the rule of law – if applied coherently – generates conditions for lasting peace, security, the realization of human rights, economic development and social progress. If our intention is to build more peaceful, just and inclusive societies and a sustainable common future on our planet, as enshrined in SDG 16, the rule of law must be the firm, unwavering foundation of our efforts.

The topic of today's debate, namely "The full, equal and equitable participation at all levels in the international legal system", can also be understood in the context of SDG16. The idea of full, equal and equitable participation lies at the very heart of justice, equality and sustainable development. Without the possibility of full participation of all members and all people, the international legal system itself remains incomplete. Inclusive participation is a crucial aspect to achieve justice and strong institutions, as outlined in different sub-targets of SDG16. Inclusivity also enhances credibility of the institutions concerned and thereby ensures support for institutions.

The international legal system comprises states, international organizations such as the UN, including its organs such as the General Assembly and the International Court of Justice, and a multitude of other international courts and tribunals. The full, equal and equitable participation at all levels in this system is a noble goal. Clearly, the scope of full, equal and equitable participation is very broad. Historically, the voices of certain groups - be it women, minorities or

states with fewer resources - have often not been heard equally. This exclusion can create inequality and undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of the international legal system. Increased UN membership with 142 additional sovereign states joining the 51 founding members since 1945 is an illustrative example of enhanced inclusivity.

But equity is not just about representation. It's about ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to influence decision-making and the creation of international law rules. The equity of voices in the General Assembly is ensured by the principle of equality of voting power enshrined in Art. 18 UN Charter. A similar degree of inclusive decision-making is not realized with regard to the Security Council. The recently adopted Pact for the Future recalls the intention to reform the Security Council, recognizing the urgent need to make it more representative, inclusive, transparent, efficient, effective, democratic and accountable.

The full, equal and equitable participation at all levels in the international legal system should not only benefit states but individuals as well. Inclusive representation, participation and leadership, including gender equality, must also be championed in international courts and tribunals. Just 4 of 15 judges of the International Court of Justice are women. In total, the Court has only had 6 women judges in its history, compared to 106 men. Half of the people on the planet are women and girls. Some of the cases the Court has dealt with involve issues that disproportionately affect women. The world should not turn a blind eye on this reality. We are determined to improve the participation and leadership of women, as well as other underrepresented groups, in the judiciary in order to enhance the legitimacy and representativeness of courts.

Mr. Chair,

The benefits of full, equal, and equitable participation at all levels in the international legal system are profound. A diverse system is better equipped to address today's challenges – be it climate change or global conflicts – and more resilient. Let us commit to the promise “Leave No

One Behind". Let us commit to the principle of inclusivity in the international legal system. Let us create pathways for all voices, small states and big states, women and men and all individuals, to be heard and represented. Let us uphold the UN Charter and ensure the rule of law as a universal and fundamental principle. Such a system upholds justice and paves the way for a more equitable and peaceful world.

Thank you.