



Statement on behalf of the Republic of South Africa

by

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United Nations General Assembly**

Agenda item 84

**“The rule of law at the National and International
Level”**

**Under the sub-topic: “The impact of the global
coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the rule
of law at the national and international levels”**

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Chairperson,

South Africa aligns itself with the statements delivered by Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Morocco on behalf of the African Group and Austria on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Rule of Law.

My delegation would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his Report on this agenda item. We also recognize and appreciate the assistance provided by the UN to Member States in promoting the Rule of Law and ensuring respect for human rights at a national and regional level, particularly in Africa.

Chairperson,

Nearly three years into the pandemic, the virus has been profound, resulting in reports on the violation of the Rule of Law. COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching impact particularly for women and girls and has regressed global efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16, on peaceful and inclusive societies, justice that is accessible to all, and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The pandemic compelled countries to restrict movements of people in order to limit the spread of the virus. Justifiable, the fundamental freedoms of movement and assembly had to be restricted. The economic, social, and cultural rights, which include, the right to work, to education, to social security rights, to health, and decent work were severely affected. The principles of the rule of law became more pertinent in informing emergency responses of countries.

Inequity also persisted as the virus reproduces new variants. In this regard, we regret the efforts by some international actors who attributed the variants to certain countries, as these attributes have had negative impact on some countries including South Africa. However, despite these harmful actions, South Africa is still committed to upholding the principles of transparency and sharing of health information and data within the framework of multilateralism.

The pandemic has also aggravated the long-standing gender inequalities on economic, health, access to justice and educational spheres. This is confirmed by the Secretary-General's report which recognises that the pandemic exposed deep inequalities in women's access to justice, particularly in conflict-affected and crisis-affected countries in which women's justice needs were already most acute. My delegation agrees with the report that eliminating laws that discriminate against women and girls is a human rights imperative.

Gender-based violence also intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and continued to become the most urgent human rights violation issue. In this regard, we join others in calling for an end to gender-based violence.

To adequately respond to the extremely high prevalence of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, the South African government passed three pieces of legislation that amend several key areas in the fight against gender-based violence. The legislation includes the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act Amendment Bill, the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Bill, and the Domestic Violence Amendment Bill. It is anticipated that the new legislation will, (a) see all sexual offenders listed on a national register, (b) make it easier for victims to give evidence and (c) provide a support structure for the implementation of protection orders. Our country continues to commit to legal reforms to ensure that women's rights are protected and promoted through the country's legal frameworks.

In our continued efforts to combat the effects of Covid-19, we call on all States to ensure that treatment and vaccine is accessible to all. In this regard, we note with appreciation that consensus was reached by Member States to begin the process of drafting and negotiating an international instrument to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The instrument will be a good demonstration of the actions taken by Member States at a multilateral level aimed at addressing the current and future pandemics. We also look forward to the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly to be held in September 2023 on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, as an opportunity to galvanise political will at the highest level. My delegation is further encouraged by the recent statement by the Director-General of the World Health Organization that the COVID-19 pandemic is nearing its end. We look forward to a world free of this pandemic.

Chairperson,

Guided by the Constitution, South Africa has consistently demonstrated the respect for the rule of law, both at a national and international levels. This year marks a major milestone; it marks the 26th Anniversary of the adoption of South Africa's democratic Constitution. Our constitution promotes the 'Rule of Law' to governance at the national level. We view the rule of law as a necessity in the promotion and protection of democracy, good governance, and sustainable development. At the core of our Constitutional dispensation is the importance of the independence of the judiciary. Our judiciary protects the 'Rule of Law' and safeguards the rights and freedoms of people as well as South Africa's democracy.

In conclusion, **Chairperson**, we commend the United Nations with its continued initiative to promote the rule of law, norms and practices, that ensure the independence of core governance institutions. My delegation is committed to a global system based on the rule of law.

I thank you.