



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON THE RULE OF LAW

STATEMENT BY THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR PACIFIC ISLAND AFFAIRS

(Check against delivery)

Mr President

Mr Secretary-General

Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

The rule of law is the highest and best guarantee of the freedom and dignity of all people.

It protects people from the arbitrary use of power and gives victims access to justice.

It provides the predictability and transparency necessary for business and the protection of property.

It ensures that disputes can be resolved fairly and peacefully.

Sustainable peace particularly requires trusted and credible institutions, processes, and governments.

In turn, development and long term peacebuilding require this confidence in the rule of law.

Only then can human liberty flourish.

Australia understands this today, just as we did in 1948 when our then Foreign Minister, Dr HV Evatt, presided over the UN General Assembly as it adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In Australia, our commitment to the rule of law underpins our own social stability and our prosperity.

We value these concepts so deeply that our whole national ethos is based upon a universal ideal of equality and opportunity that in the Australian vernacular is known simply as "a fair go".

Sadly, as an international community we see too often the terrible price paid by ordinary people when the rule of law breaks down.

We see people made vulnerable to disadvantage and discrimination.

We see communities who do not trust their police, courts or leaders.

And we see development held back due to conflict and insecurity.

Over many years, Australia has worked to strengthen the rule of law in conflict-affected societies.

Since we joined the first peacekeepers in 1947, 65 000 Australians have served on more than 50 UN and multilateral peace and security operations.

Through successful work in Australia's own region, we have sought to assist our neighbours in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste to build a lasting and enforceable rule of law culture for themselves.

And as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth of Nations, an organisation of fully one third of all the world's peoples, Australia recognises the strong commitment of all the nations of the Commonwealth to the rule of law as a core value.

The rule of law is inextricably linked to the three pillars of the United Nations - security, development, and human rights.

High ideals, to which we are making practical progress.

Delivering training for courts, correctional services, police and other justice agencies.

Assisting with legal, judicial and constitutional reform.

Ensuring that civilian populations have free and easy access to legal information to help secure their rights.

None of this can be taken for granted.

It requires sustained commitment and the sharing of hard-won lessons, including by the UN.

Australia is pleased to support such efforts through the Peacebuilding Commission, including as part of the Burundi, Sierra Leone and Liberia configurations.

Support for the rule of law is also a central part of Australia's development assistance program.

We have dedicated over \$300 million this year to helping strengthen the rule of law in developing countries, and by 2016 we will have trained 14,000 law and justice officials.

Australia recognises that the rule of law is itself a vital condition for extending freedom, for expanding development – for preventing conflict and building peace.

And the rule of law ensures that when all these efforts fail – and in the worst events, when atrocities are committed – impunity does not prevail.

And so let us ensure that the work of this high-level meeting – and this important Declaration - leads to practical progress towards the UN's highest ideals of security, development and human rights for all the peoples of the world.

