

**Remarks for Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.**  
**United Nations General Assembly – High-level Event on the Rule of Law**  
**Monday, September 24, 2012**  
**United Nations Headquarters**  
**New York, NY**

Mr. President; your Excellencies. I am honored to represent the United States at this historic meeting on the rule of law – and I want to thank all of the distinguished leaders gathered here for bringing your voices, your perspectives, and your commitment to this critical discussion.

History has proven that the establishment and enforcement of the rule of law is essential – in protecting the security and civil liberties of our citizens; in combating violent crime, public corruption, and terrorist threats; and in strengthening civil society. In recent days, we have been reminded – in the most painful and tragic of ways – of just how vital the rule of law is to ensuring freedom, opportunity, justice, and peace.

I am here not only to pledge the United States’ commitment to these principles – but and our support for the United Nations’ robust efforts to strengthen the rule of law worldwide. And I want to assure each of you that my colleagues and I are determined to stand with any nation that strives to ensure integrity, foster innovation, and create opportunities for prosperity and progress; that cherishes the benefits of a free, fair, and open society; and that seeks to eradicate the corrupt and abusive activities that can weaken political institutions, threaten the democratic process, undermine the strength and promise of civil society, and diminish the quality of life for countless individuals, families, and communities.

From our national systems, to the UN’s work in advancing the goals of international peace and security; of human rights for *all* people – including women, LGBT individuals, and persons with disabilities – and of economic development and job creation – we’ve seen, time and again, that there is a strong link between fostering democratic values and supporting the rule of law.

Particularly in recent years, our commitment to the rule of law has helped to inform, augment, and re-energize our work in confronting a range of challenges – from fighting crime, corruption, and terrorism, to promoting global security, good governance, and ensuring equality and fair opportunity for all. Today’s meeting underscores the fact that this work must remain at the center of how our nations approach development, especially in conflict-affected or fragile states. And it reaffirms – as the World Bank’s recent Global Development Report highlighted – that, in today’s world, the greatest threat to development and recovery is a weak rule of law.

That’s why the promise we’ve gathered to fulfill – and the pledges we’re here to make – are, and must continue to be, a top priority. It’s also why, at the international level, I am proud to say that the United States will continue to support UN-led efforts to expand access to legal aid, to more effectively combat drug trafficking and organized crime alongside our international partners, and to build on UN initiatives in the rule of law sector that are focused on conflict and post-conflict situations.

Within our own borders – particularly as we approach the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision guaranteeing the right to counsel for indigent criminal defendants – the United States also pledges to take steps to improve access to justice for those who cannot afford representation. Additionally, we’re focused on launching a new domestic violence prevention

initiative, strengthening safety net programs that help increase the availability of legal aid, and enhancing our focus on protecting the essential rights of women and girls.

In these and our other efforts to strengthen the rule of law and encourage cooperation on an international scale – from our comprehensive counterterrorism activities, to capacity-building, prosecutorial training, and regional assistance work – the Department that I am privileged to lead, and the nation that I am honored to serve, are proud to stand with the leaders in this room. Like you, we approach the challenges before us with resolve, humility, and an eagerness to reinforce old friendships and forge new ones. And we are eager to join with you in driving this critical work into the future.

Thank you.