



**Statement**

**By**

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President of the European Commission**

**at the**

**General Assembly  
High Level Meeting on the Rule of Law**

**on**

**"The European Union and the Rule of Law"**

**United Nations**

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**- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -**

Mr President, honoured Delegates,

It is with great pleasure that I stand before you today in this first ever High Level Meeting on the Rule of Law.

This is a topic that means a lot for me and for the European Union, which I represent here today. The European Union is a Union of values and a community of law. Primary among these are the universal values: democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights.

These are the pillars on which our European Union is built. These are the values which have spurred the European Union forward in good times and held us together in more difficult times; the values which we need to nurture and to strengthen every day.

These are the values which carry the transformative power that has taken our new member states from totalitarianism to thriving democracies in a quarter of a century. A transformative power which is taking hold in our neighbourhood and which we will support not just to our South and East, but wherever there are calls for it.

Mr President, honoured Delegates,

The rule of law is a core principle of the international system that this great institution – the United Nations - is at the heart of.

This is why we wholeheartedly support the work of this high level meeting and the declaration we will adopt. We recognise and welcome in particular the importance of linking the rule of law agenda to the work of the UN on peace and security, human rights and development as simultaneously pre-condition and enablers of democracy and the rule of law.

This support is not simply declaratory. In each of the areas covered by the Declaration, the EU will make substantive pledges, backed up by concrete measures. The EU Member States have presented a list gathering all their pledges. Allow me just to highlight some of our priorities.

First is the strengthening of the rule of law at the international level. Respect for international law is the best alternative to the use of force. And when the use of force is inevitable, it should be legitimised by the international law emanating from this house, the United Nations.

Respect for international law is also the best way to guarantee the peaceful settlement of disputes among nations. At a moment when tensions are rising in some regions in the world, international law offers the possibility of cooperative and negotiated solutions.

Secondly, we need to do more to uphold international law in our national systems. The European Union Member States have some of the best records in terms of ratifying international conventions. But we can and will do more, not just to ratify, but to ensure effective implementation.

We will work both inside the European Union and with our third-country partners to improve the delivery of justice, including through supporting a worldwide campaign on the right to a fair trial. We can and will do more to promote transitional justice by working with the UN in conflict and post conflict situations.

The role of the International Criminal Court is essential in this regard. We pledge to further support its work politically, and through targeted assistance to acceding states.

Justice is indeed an essential element in fostering human development. To help create an enabling environment for its development, we will further strengthen the fight against corruption.

Distinguished Delegates,

Globalisation is not just about positive economic links; in fact transnational threats are developing even more quickly. From terrorism and organised crime to maritime piracy and human trafficking, these are problems that put at risk our democracies and the security of our citizens.

The European Union pledges to strengthen its own capacities to face these dangers, but more importantly to help our partners and the UN as a whole to strengthen theirs.

But it is not just security threats that may harm the democratic fabric of our societies. The populist tendencies that germinate in times of economic and social turmoil also represent a considerable peril to the rule of law, open societies and democratic systems.

That is why we also need responsible political leadership that puts the rule of law and the interests of the citizens above its own. There is no true democracy without the rule of law. And without democracy, the rule of law is just an instrument in the hand of the rulers.

Mr Chairman,

The rule of law is at the heart of our European Union; it is at the heart of the United Nations and it should assist and protect every person on this planet.

This is why our final pledge is to seek to empower those most vulnerable in society, especially women and children, because ultimately the rule of law is not meant to protect the rulers, but rather to serve us all equally from the mightiest to the most marginalised.

Thank you!