

High Level Meeting on Rule of Law, 67th Session of the UN General Assembly 2012

24 September 2012

Speech for Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator

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The rule of law underpins achieving the mission of the United Nations: to advance peace, human rights, and development. In our rapidly changing, unequal, and, at times, dangerous world, implementing the rule of law is critical for establishing the justice, stability, and inclusive growth required for sustained human development.

It is therefore highly appropriate that the UN General Assembly has dedicated this special High Level Meeting to the Rule of Law.

As Administrator of the UN Development Programme, let me reflect further on why the rule of law is so critical to national development efforts.

Rule of law: building block for development

In its work around the world, UNDP witnesses how fundamental the rule of law is to the quality of people's lives and for the success of national development efforts.

- Where laws protect women from violence and discrimination, their lives are immeasurably improved, providing a basis for full empowerment.
- In places where poor and marginalized citizens know their rights and can have wrongs redressed, there are less discrimination, fewer human rights abuses, and more effective service delivery.
- Where citizens overall are free from the debilitating fear of violence or intimidation, then strategies for inclusive growth, and other components of sustainable human development can flourish.

Thus rule of law is at the very heart of what is needed for development efforts to be effective. Conversely, shortcomings in the rule of law underlie the exclusion, suffering, and poverty of many people. It is not surprising that governing institutions which do not enable the rule of law become a target of citizen grievances.

UNDP welcomes the call of Member States negotiated in the Declaration from this Meeting to consider the inter-linkages between the rule of law, sustainable development, poverty reduction, and human rights, in the context of a post-2015 international development agenda.

UNDP's approach & work

In response to Member State requests, UNDP works on rule of law related programming in more than 100 countries. We have worked to strengthen the rule of law in more than forty conflict-affected countries in the past decade.

- We work with national institutions to strengthen their ability to enforce and implement the law in a fair, effective, and inclusive manner.

For example, in Timor-Leste, UNDP assisted the Ministry of Justice to train the first Timorese judges and lawyers, strengthen the national police force, and establish a comprehensive land registry.

- We also work with the citizenry to expand access to justice and empower individuals to make effective use of the law.

For example, our support to people in Somalia to access legal assistance through local community programmes resulted in a dramatic rise in use of the formal justice system. Such 'quick wins' are particularly important where authorities face pressure to demonstrate their effectiveness.

A call to action

Establishing and strengthening the rule of law is a long-term endeavour. It requires sustained and proactive partnerships and investments. Short-term responses often result in failure.

Efforts to strengthen justice and security systems and legally empower the poor need to be embedded in national development planning and policy.

I hope Member States will agree to work in partnership, and to support *nationally-led* processes to strengthen the rule of law. Inspiration can be found in the impressive strides made by many nations who have made the rule of law a national priority.

UNDP is committed to playing its part. We have heard the call of Member States for greater coherence in the UN's rule of law work. UNDP and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations are combining efforts as cluster leads of the UN's efforts to strengthen justice, police, and corrections rule of law assistance in post-conflict and crisis contexts.

We aim to respond rapidly and in a well-co-ordinated way to country needs, drawing on the skills of the whole UN system and of other stakeholders.

The rule of law enables citizens to invest in their own futures and exercise their rights. It enables governments to govern better, respond to emerging challenges, and advance human development.

UNDP looks forward to working with Member States on development approaches to securing the benefits of the rule of law both now and through the post-2015 development agenda.