

Security Council Open Debate on The promotion and strengthening of the rule of law in the maintenance of international peace and security
19th of January 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by The Secretary-General to the United Nations

I should like to thank Ambassador Baso Sangqu, President of the Security Council, for having organized this important meeting.

Today's open debate comes at a time of breathtaking political change driven by people's calls for accountability, transparency and the rule of law. Women and men everywhere want their rights to be respected. They are risking their lives in peaceful protest to demand the opportunities, dignity and secure future that every individual deserves. There is no silencing this cry for justice. Repression only raises the volume. Our task is to usher in an era of respect for the law in every field, from peace and security to trade and development; from the high seas to local communities. Never has the United Nations rule of law sector faced such great challenges or such historic opportunities. This Security Council meeting is part of a broader international push to rise to this moment. Earlier this week, the United Nations gathered officials, ambassadors and distinguished thinkers on the rule of law for a two-day meeting dealing with justice, human rights, peacekeeping and related issues. In September, we will convene a high-level meeting on the rule of law — the first event of its kind and the first time since 2005 that these issues will be discussed by top leaders. The United Nations work to promote the rule of law extends to more than 150 countries. Our efforts to combat transnational crime, build confidence and capacity in State institutions, and battle discrimination against women are all part of this effort. United Nations programmes have already helped tens of thousands of vulnerable individuals to obtain justice. We are supporting legal aid. We are training public defenders. We are raising awareness, since it is often those who most need the rule of law who also know least about their rights. We are working on strategies to counter the growing threats posed by piracy, drug trafficking and organized crime. For societies traumatized by years of fighting and gross violations of human rights, nothing is more critical than establishing the rule of law. When the guns fall silent, the United Nations is often the first organization on the ground, helping fractured countries to start building peace and strengthening key institutions. Our goal is to quickly demonstrate the value of the rule of law. That builds public confidence in political settlements. Our approach has three basic components: first, promote accountability and reinforce norms through transitional justice; secondly, build justice and security institutions to promote trust; and thirdly, focus on justice for women and girls to foster gender equality. The Security Council has helped bring these priorities to the top of the international agenda, but the Council can do more. I encourage the Council to include the promotion of transitional justice measures more broadly in the mandates of peacekeeping and political missions. I also encourage the Council to reject any endorsement of amnesty for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity or gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. I urge members to bring justice closer to the victims. That means giving them the opportunity to speak out to truth commissions and to participate in judicial proceedings. It also calls for supporting remedies and reparations, and it requires strengthening national prosecutions for serious international crimes. The primary obligation for accountability rests with domestic justice systems. It will require the development of security institutions that are accountable to laws and to the people. It will take more funding for women's access to justice, and it will demand greater attention to the economic and social roots of gender inequality. We have made progress in helping vulnerable groups, but we need to do more to include their perspectives when we design rule of law activities and when we carry them out. We must also support innovative initiatives such as the deployment of civilian justice and corrections experts on missions. And we should use the United Nations Rule of Law Indicators, designed to monitor criminal justice institutions, during and after conflicts. But when national justice systems fall short, the international community must be able to respond with international prosecutions, particularly before the International Criminal Court. The United Nations was established in the name of the world's peoples. As their demands for justice rise, we must respond. We have to create a world where the rule of law, social justice, accountability and a culture of prevention are the foundations of sustainable development and durable peace. It will take commitment from the international community and the Security Council to see that justice is done where justice is due.