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WORLD LEADERS ADOPT DECLARATION REAFFIRMING RULE OF LAW AS FOUNDATION

FOR BUILDING EQUITABLE STATE RELATIONS, JUST SOCIETIES

Respect for Accepted Norms Cannot be Ambiguous, General Assembly President Stresses as Speakers Warn against Selectivity

World leaders and civil society representatives reaffirmed today their commitment to the rule of law as the foundation of equitable State relations and the basis upon which just and fair societies were built, as they adopted a lengthy declaration during the General Assembly's first-ever high-level meeting on the rule of law at the national and international levels.

By terms of the "Declaration on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels" [\[A/67/L.1\]](#), adopted at the start of the day-long meeting, the Assembly reaffirmed that human rights, the rule of law and democracy were interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and that they belonged to the universal and indivisible core values and principles of the United Nations. The rule of law applied equally to all States and international organizations, including the United Nations. All persons, institutions and entities were accountable to just, fair and equitable laws, and entitled to equal protection before the law, without discrimination.

Further by the text, delegates rededicated themselves to supporting efforts to uphold the sovereign equality of all States, to respect their territorial integrity and political independence, to refrain from the threat or use of force in a manner inconsistent with the United Nations Charter, and to uphold the peaceful resolution of disputes, in conformity with the principles of justice and international law. Given the strong interrelationship between the rule of law and development, advancing the rule of law at the national and international levels was essential for sustained and inclusive economic growth, and that interrelationship should be considered in the post-2015 international development agenda.

Also by the text, the Assembly reaffirmed the principle of good governance and committed itself to the effective, just and non-discriminatory delivery of public services, such as criminal, civil and administrative justice, commercial dispute settlement and legal aid. The independence of judicial systems, along with their impartiality and integrity, was a prerequisite for upholding the rule of law.

Opening today's "milestone" meeting, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reminded delegates that the wider body of international law developed at the United Nations provided the basis for peacefully resolving conflicts and the means to ensure there was no relapse into fighting. The universal standard-setting power of the General Assembly, the enforcement power of the Security Council and the judicial power of the International Court of Justice all provided indispensable tools to deepen the rule of law, he added. He pressed all States to commit themselves to the equal application of the law at the national and international levels, to uphold its highest standards in their decision-making, and to accept the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. "Make the most of this truly historic occasion to commit to respect for international law and justice," he said. "It is as essential within countries as it is among the family of nations."

Striking a similar tone, General Assembly President Vuk Jeremić (Serbia) said that to be effective, the corpus of international law must be observed by all States, great and small, rich and poor alike. "If our aim is to strengthen trust between nations, then respect for accepted norms and standards cannot be ambiguous or selective." The Declaration recognized the importance of national ownership in rule of law activities, and stood at the heart of the social contract between a State and its citizens, he said, urging

delegates to draw inspiration from Montesquieu: "There is no nation so powerful as the one that obeys its laws, not from principles of fear or reason, but from passion."

Taking that idea further, International Court of Justice President Peter Tomka challenged delegates to apply the "impressive" list of instruments and conventions that comprised the normative framework for the rule of law. Noting that the Court had adjudicated more cases over the past two decades than during its first 44 years of existence, he said only 67 Member States had accepted its jurisdiction — slightly more than one third of the United Nations membership. "We have no reason to be satisfied," he emphasized, voicing hope that the Court's jurisdiction would become compulsory for all States. In the meantime, it would carry out its duties with dedication, utmost impartiality, independence and in accordance with international law.

In the ensuing debate, leaders from more than 80 countries outlined their efforts to bolster national legal institutions, ensure greater access to, and impartiality of national courts, and to integrate international legal instruments into domestic legislation. A number of speakers also aired concerns that justice was not always pursued fairly and that what was overlooked in one situation might be aggressively sanctioned in another.

President Paul Kagame of Rwanda cautioned that principles such as universal jurisdiction were being used selectively as political tools to control and dominate. In Rwanda's post-genocide experience, it had sought to balance punitive measures with restorative alternatives, a home-grown solution that had served it better than any other system could. It was applicable to the international arena, he said, emphasizing that double standards at the global level must end.

Linking that idea to the United Nations, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa said it was important to ask whether the international community was governed by a system in which all were accountable under "equally enforced and independently adjudicated" laws. Given the undemocratic and unrepresentative nature of the Security Council, it was a matter of concern that its decisions could be attacked for a lack of legitimacy, regardless of content.

Offering a perspective from South Asia, President Mohamed Waheed of the Maldives asked whether international organizations held themselves to the standards they set for States. It was regrettable that some international actors had "instructed" his country to take measures that contradicted national laws. When those measures had been questioned, the Maldives had been labelled as "uncooperative", doubt had been cast on its democratic credentials, and major investments had been lost. Unless small States drew attention to injustices, "the next could be you", he warned.

Speakers explained their position after the Declaration's adoption, with some expressing their concerns that paragraph 28 recognized the Security Council's positive contribution to the rule of law. The Minister from Venezuela emphasized that the organ had flouted the concept in its treatment of the Palestinian question and in its recent decisions on the situation in Libya, while his counterpart from Nicaragua said he would have liked to see a greater focus on the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Pointing one way forward, the Minister from Liechtenstein pledged to submit suggestions to the Security Council for strengthening the United Nations sanctions system. She also pledged to help enhance political support for the International Criminal Court by convening an informal network that would address the dilemma that it was a purely judicial institution unable to "withstand political headwinds".

Others addressing the meeting were the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The meeting also heard from the Germany's Foreign Minister, in his capacity as President of the Security Council.

Also speaking today were the Heads of State and Government of Benin, Cyprus, Estonia, Honduras, Austria, Iran, Latvia, Finland, Bulgaria, Maldives, Equatorial Guinea, Mongolia, Gabon, Albania, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Zambia, Bangladesh, Croatia, Haiti, Lesotho, Samoa, Switzerland and Guatemala.

Senior Ministers and other high-level officials addressing the meeting were from Kyrgyzstan, Slovakia, Thailand, Nepal, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Luxembourg, United States, Costa Rica, Belgium, Romania, France, Chile, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Tunisia, Morocco, Trinidad and Tobago, South Sudan, Japan, Denmark, Liechtenstein, Ecuador, Cameroon, Jamaica, Algeria, Netherlands, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Ukraine, Qatar and Australia. Representatives of the European Union delegation and the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See also spoke.

Also addressing the meeting were representatives of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, International Development Law Organization, International Crisis Group and the International Institute of Higher Studies in Criminal Science.

The General Assembly will reconvene at 9 a.m. tomorrow, 25 September, to begin the general debate of its sixty-seventh session.

Background

The General Assembly convened today its first-ever high-level meeting devoted to the rule of law at national and international levels. According to a background note issued by Secretariat, the rule of law is central to many of the challenges facing the global community and the Assembly's day-long meeting will highlight the central place that it is assuming in world affairs (see Press Release [GA/11288](#)).

At the national level, strong, inclusive and accountable institutions which demonstrate equitable application of the rule of law are crucial for conflict prevention and the consolidation of post-conflict peacebuilding gains. The note says that complex and interconnected threats — organized crime, trafficking, conflict and terrorism — undermine international security and development and require effective rule of law instruments to address them at national, regional and global levels.

As for international implications, the note underscores that the rule of law accords predictability and legitimacy to the actions of States, strengthens their sovereign equality and underpins the responsibility of a State to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction. Full implementation of the obligations set out in the United Nations Charter and in other international instruments, including within the human rights framework, is central to collective efforts to maintain international peace and security, effectively address emerging threats and close off accountability gaps for international crimes.

For the meeting, delegations had before them Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's report on the topic, "Delivering justice: programme of action to strengthen the rule of law at the national and international levels" (document [A/66/749](#)), in which he says that Member States should use the opportunity provided by today's event to make individual pledges related to the rule of law.

And while he stressed that responsibility for strengthening the rule of law lies with Member States and their citizens, the United Nations is ideally placed to support their efforts and to provide integrated and effective assistance. To galvanize collective efforts to strengthen the rule of law at the national and international levels, Secretary-General Ban proposes that the Assembly adopt a programme of action for the rule of law, agree to a process to develop clear goals and adopt other key mechanisms to enhance dialogue on the rule of law.

He says that the global system is under unprecedented stress from interconnected and complex transformations in human and physical geography, and as such, environmental degradation, rapid urbanization, conflict, severe income inequalities and exclusion of vulnerable groups pose major challenges to human development and security. "Robust principles are needed to underpin the management of our future [and] the rule of law is a core principle of governance that ensures justice and fairness, values that are essential to humanity," he declares.

The Secretary-General says that the rule of law is central to his vision for the Organization over the coming five years, and must guide the collective response to a fast-changing world. The United Nations defines the rule of law as a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards.

Further, he says, the rule of law requires measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency.

"At the national level, the rule of law is at the heart of the social contract between the State and individuals under its jurisdiction," he continues, and adds that the rule of law ensures that justice permeates society at every level. It guarantees the protection of the full range of human rights, brings citizens and non-citizens alike legitimate avenues of recourse in cases of abuses of power and allows for peaceful and fair resolution of disputes. Strengthening the rule of law fosters an environment that facilitates sustainable human development and the protection and empowerment of women, children and vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced persons, stateless persons, refugees and migrants.

Looking ahead, the Secretary-General firmly believes that it is crucial for Member States to agree on key goals in relation to the rule of law, with corresponding targets, so that they and the United Nations have clear objectives towards which to work. Secretary-General Ban proposes that Member States agree to embark on this process at today's high-level meeting. He also proposes the adoption at the high-level meeting of other mechanisms aimed at strengthening dialogue on the rule of law at the international and national levels.

The report lists the Secretary-General's proposals for commitments to be made by Member States and the United Nations, aimed at addressing the current challenges in strengthening the rule of law at the international and national levels. They take the form of a programme of action aimed at creating a common agenda for all Member States and the United Nations so that future discussions in this broad area can be more effectively structured and collective action better targeted. They are gathered under a number of key headings, including, increasing compliance with international law; strengthening United Nations treaty bodies; strengthening the International Court of Justice and its role in international relations; improving national-level service delivery; national data collection; and implementing a normative framework in human rights and social development spheres, among others.

Opening Remarks

"Within States, the just application of the rule of law stands at the foundation of responsible governance," said VUK JEREMIĆ, President of the General Assembly, noting that it was the first time the issue of the rule of law had been discussed thematically by Heads of State and Government in the General Assembly. The issue was of fundamental importance for political dialogue and cooperation among all States, he stressed, adding that "international law must not be seen as a utopian aspiration with little relevance to the conduct of world affairs".

The rules and principles codified by centuries of treaties and agreements between nations should serve legitimate State interests, rather than trying to override them. Indeed, he said, quoting the famous philosopher and jurist Hugo Grotius, "once arms are taken up, all respect for law, whether human or divine, is lost — as though by some edict, a fury had been let loose to commit every crime". When peoples observed international law, they put themselves in the service of preventing that "fury" from being unleashed; it was upon that fundamental tenet that the United Nations had been built.

The high-level meeting represented a "landmark moment" in the global peace process, he said, noting that it was taking place under the sixty-seventh session's overarching theme on the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Through the course of the day's deliberations, it was critical not to lose sight of the importance of fully respecting the equality, sovereignty and territorial integrity of United Nations Member States.

To be effective, the corpus of international law must be observed by all States, great and small, rich and poor alike. "If our aim is to strengthen trust between nations, then respect for accepted norms and standards cannot be ambiguous or selective." Everyone should know that everyone else would adhere to the same principles and rules. Today's Outcome Document recognized the importance of national ownership in rule of law activities, he said. It stood at the heart of the social contract between a State and its citizens. He, therefore, urged participants to draw inspiration from the words of the French political thinker Montesquieu, who had written, "there is no nation so powerful as the one that obeys its laws not from principles of fear or reason, but from passion."

Following those remarks, United Nations Secretary-General BAN KI-MOON said the rule of law was like the law of gravity: it ensured the world remained grounded, so that order prevailed over chaos. It united societies around common values, anchoring us in the common good. But unlike gravity, rule of law must be nourished by continued efforts by genuine leaders. In that vein, today's first-ever high-level debate on the rule of law reflected an increasingly vast movement of citizens demanding justice, respect for accountability and an end to impunity. Strengthening rule of law meant consolidating the United Nations' three pillars: peace, development and human rights.

"Justice is not an abstract notion" he said. Rather, it was a contract, reflected in the police officer's badge that inspired confidence, or the birth certificate that gave a young girl an official existence.

The United Nations Charter provided indispensable tools to deepen the rule of law, he said: the universal standard-setting power of the General Assembly, the enforcement power of the Security Council and the judicial power of the International Court of Justice. A wider body of international law developed at the United Nations provided the basis for peacefully resolving conflict, and the means to ensure there was no relapse of fighting. And with the development of accountability mechanisms, no war criminal should ever find safe harbour in the modern world.

He went on to say the United Nations was promoting the rule of law in more than 150 countries, urging concrete action in five areas. First, he called on all States to commit to the equal application of the law at national and international levels. There should be no selectivity in applying resolutions, decisions and law. "We cannot allow political self-interest to undermine justice," he said. Next, he called on States to uphold the highest standards of the rule of law in their decision-making, and to accept the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

He also urged States to help the United Nations strengthen police training, improve corrections and enhance the judiciary in fragile and conflict-torn countries. Finally, he urged States to adopt today's declaration. "Make the most of this truly historic occasion to commit to respect for international law and justice", he stressed, urging civil society to keep pushing for action. Rule of law activities deserved a central place in the United Nations structure, and he pressed States to help him forge a structured approach to strengthening the rule of law and delivering justice.

"Strengthening the rule of law is for every country and is in everyone's interest," he said. "It is as essential within countries as it is among the family of nations". Today's meeting was a milestone, but not an end in itself. The challenge now was to follow up, generate momentum and continue to give high profile to an essential foundation for a better future.

PETER TOMKA, President of the International Court of Justice, focusing on the international aspects of the rule of law, said the founders of the United Nations had sought to set the conditions by which fundamental legal rules and obligations could be applied and monitored, and had reaffirmed their faith in human rights, and the dignity and worth of the human person. "The concept of the rule of law is and should be at the heart of the Organization's work. Any action that is not grounded in the rule of law is devoid of legitimacy," he said. The United Nations had achieved impressive results in the normative realm and the list of instruments and conventions "is a long one". So, the real challenge lay in the implementation of that framework. Since the application of legal instruments often generated disputes, applying the rule of law required comprehensive adjudicative mechanisms, aiming always for the Charter-mandated principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

As such, when disputes were brought before it or referred to it by the Security Council, the International Court of Justice played a crucial role in diffusing tensions between States, in particular disputed claims to sovereignty or maritime zones. The Court's decisions and Advisory Opinions could also lead to creative solutions between States, such as joint management regimes. If parties were unable to resolve their differences, the Court remained available to assist them by adjudicating the dispute on the strength of their legal arrangements and evidence, in accordance with international law. The international community now had more than 90 years of experience in the judicial settlement of disputes and, as the main judicial arm of the United Nations, the Court was an important mechanism for ensuring the application of the rule of law. "It has the important and noble role of determining existing law and rendering justice between quarrelling States," he added

He said that while there had been years, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s "when the judges were sitting idly in the Peace Palace", he was pleased to report a dramatic increase in States' willingness to submit cases to the Court. Indeed, the body had adjudicated more cases in the past two decades that it had during the first 44 years of its existence; 60 compared to 52. So far this year, the Court had rendered three judgements and had advanced work on another. The Court's jurisdiction was based on the consent of States involved in a dispute, and, while all 193 Member States were party to the Court's statute, only 67 States had accepted its jurisdiction — slightly more than one third of the Organization's total membership.

"Thus, [we have] no reason to be satisfied," he said, expressing the hope that one day, the Court's jurisdiction could become compulsory in all States and noting that such adherence had been higher in earlier years of the Organization. Finally, he welcomed the Secretary-General's efforts to bolster adherence to the Court's jurisdiction. In the meantime, the Court would continue to carry out its duties under the Charter, "with dedication, in utmost impartiality, independence and in accordance with international law within the bounds of the jurisdiction conferred upon it."

GUIDO WESTERWELLE, Foreign Minister of Germany and the current President of the Security Council, said that today's meeting attested to the international community's firm commitment to the rule of law. Since 2003, the Security Council had held several thematic debates on the rule of law in the context of peace and security, he said. Meanwhile, many of its country-specific resolutions had regularly addressed issues related to the rule of law, both in its international and national dimensions.

As a principle organ of the United Nations, the Council remained committed to international law as "indispensable to a more peaceful, prosperous and just world". The cooperation of States with international laws played a critical role in fostering stability and order in international relations. It also provided a framework for addressing common challenges. The Security Council was committed to, and actively supported, the peaceful settlement of disputes. It had consistently called upon Member States to settle their

disputes peacefully, he said. In that vein, he called upon all States that had not yet done so to consider accepting the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

The Council had included support for the rule of law in the mandates of peacekeeping missions and special political missions worldwide. In addition, he stressed, all such missions, especially at their end, must include capacity-building to national institutions in order to promote their respect for the rule of law; national ownership of rule of law activities was critical. The Security Council remained strongly opposed to any impunity for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, he added. States must thoroughly investigate and prosecute persons responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and other such violations. It was only through accountability that violations could be prevented.

Additionally, the Council had repeatedly expressed concern about the threat posed by transnational organized crime and drug trafficking around the world, and had initiated long-term capacity-building efforts and regional initiatives to fight them. Similarly, sanctions remained an important tool in the maintenance of international peace and security; those sanctions should be carefully targeted so as to minimize adverse consequences. The Council was committed to clear rules and guidelines for placing individuals on sanctions lists, as well as removing them. Finally, he stressed, all countries that respected the rule of law at home must enforce it abroad, and those that enforced it abroad must also respect it at home.

NAVI PILLAY, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the rule of law was the backbone for the legal protection for human rights. Likewise, it must be grounded in human rights. Recounting her experience in South Africa, she said she had seen how apartheid had created the veneer of the rule of law, based on the institutionalization of injustice. Her experience had shown her that the rule of law without human rights was only an "empty shell".

Today, her Office, with its 58 field presences, worked with national stakeholders to build strong institutions that were prerequisite for effective justice systems. She said it supported the creation of accountability frameworks to address human rights violations, including transitional justice mechanisms, that were in line with international norms.

"I cannot stress enough the importance of national ownership of rule of law principles," she said, urging that action be based on international human rights law developed mainly under the auspices of United Nations. The International Court of Justice had shed light on the scope of States legal obligations deriving from international legal human rights instruments.

She urged States to use today's meeting to commit, if they had not done so, to become party to all human rights treaties and withdraw any reservations. Respect for the rule of law demanded compliance with the principles of equal legal protection and prohibition of discrimination on any grounds, such as race, sex, disability, language, religion, national or social origin, and property. States also must repeal discriminatory laws.

Further, respect for the rule of law required putting in place accountability mechanisms for human rights violations, she said. Combating impunity required gross human rights violations not be subject to amnesties. She urged States to ratify the statute of the International Criminal Court, and to ensure strong domestic judicial mechanisms to implement the principle of complementarity. "The rule of law is best served when all individuals are empowered to claim their rights", she concluded.

HELEN CLARK, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), said the rule of law was critical for establishing the justice, stability and growth required for sustainable development and poverty eradication. In its work, UNDP had witnessed how fundamental it was to strengthen and apply laws and legal regimes, for example towards the protection of women, to ensure full empowerment and equality. Moreover, in places where poor and marginalized citizens knew their rights and had a means to have grievances addressed, then strategies for inclusive growth for sustainable development could flourish. "So rule of law is at the very heart of what is needed for human development," she said, and noted conversely that States that did not adhere to the rule of law often became a target of grievances by their citizens.

She said that UNDP welcomed the call made in the Declaration just adopted to consider the links between the rule of law, human rights and development in the effort to set a post-2015 sustainable development agenda. She said that her agency had wanted to establish the rule of law in more than 40 countries that had been affected by conflict over the past two decades. It worked with national authorities to improve their legal systems and also worked with citizens' groups to empower individuals to bolster and expand the rule of law.

Overall, she said, implementing the rule of law required sustained and comprehensive efforts, as short-term responses were not enough. She hoped that Member States would agree to work in partnership to strengthen the rule of law and, in the meantime, UNDP would do its part; the agency had heard Member

States' call to provide more coherence and would aim to work with other agencies and programmes of the United Nations, in that regard. The United Nations Development Programme would also respond rapidly and in a way well-conditioned to address country needs, drawing on the expertise of its country teams and the wider United Nations.

YURI V. FEDOTOV, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said that, in a globalized world, illicit drug trafficking and transnational organized crime posed great threats to the principle of the rule of law. Both threats had grown in scale and sophistication. However, over the past ten years, it was evident that violent crime had decreased in countries where the rule of law had been improved.

The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the beginning of the post-2015 agenda were essential to the lives of millions of people. In that context, in recent years, UNODC had seen an increase in the need for capacity-building with regards to its work in such areas as respect for human rights, justice for children and others. The Office worked, in particular, through the creation of partnerships and through integrated regional programmes, as well as at the grass roots level. With regard to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and the Protocols thereto, as well as the United Nations Convention against Corruption, he said that the Organization must work to help countries implement those critical agreements.

"If we are to make inroads against these multiple threats, our strategy must be aimed at the national and the local levels simultaneously", he went on. Such a system should be informed by the highest international standards. Today's High-level meeting was a critical step in reaching that important benchmark, he said.

Statements

BONI YAYI, President of Benin, said the rule of law was the optimal framework for a functioning democracy and it was up to States to put in place credible stable institutions that fostered democracy. The United Nations was obliged to help States in such work. Formal democracy could make it possible for leaders who did not place value on the rule of law to accede to power. They were the gravediggers of the rule of law. The formal separation of powers was not always operational and actors were not always imbued with the highest moral values. Thus, the foundation for the rule of law was equitable justice, whereby actors were endowed with irreproachable ethics. A feeling of injustice was the source of social disorder and institutional instability.

He went on to say that, for ordinary citizens in young democracies, the prevailing tendency was to believe they had no rights vis-à-vis the community to which they belonged. Such trends called on States to work for a culture of democracy, and ensure the rule of law would take root. That work must include fighting corruption, disorder and poor governance. For its part, Benin, in the last 10 years, had made progress in electoral governance and the creation of stable institutions. There also were many challenges, such as ensuring that social ethics were compatible with the requirements of the rule of law.

Benin adhered to United Nations Charter principles, he said, which provided a sound basis for world peacebuilding. Indeed, that must be the purpose of the rule of law at the international level. Everything must be done to make the global security system more credible. No State must be above international law. Benin could not accept interference in internal affairs. Further, there must be concerted efforts to ensure governance and law was not discriminatory. That aspiration required reform of the Security Council and re-establishment of equity in international relations.

DEMETRIS CHRISTOFIAS, President of Cyprus, said that lack of respect for the rule of law led to bad governance, civil unrest and political instability. If that principle was not adhered to, States could fail, and, with devastating consequences, affect the entire international community, and become a global security threat. It was, therefore, crucial for all nations to press for the universal promotion of the rule of law, as well as strict monitoring of its application. Yet, achieving such aims "is an enormous challenge for both the United Nations and its Member States," he said, explaining that universal application of the rule of law required close cooperation between the Organization and its Members to ensure constant information exchange, so that relevant data could be shared and various situations could be closely monitored.

Continuing, he stressed the need to get regional actors involved in the effort, and noted that Cyprus fully subscribed to the relevant goals set out by the European Union in that regard. His country was also committed to reinforcing the rule of law through national policy and to upholding the Charter and the main pillars of the United Nations; peace and security, human rights and development. Further on national issues, he said that the Cyprus Constitution maintained a separation of powers, ensuring an independent judiciary and access to justice for all. It was also fully committed to protecting human rights, promoting gender equality, and equality in labour matters.

He went on to stress the need to step up the fight against impunity as a stepping stone in the vital effort to establish the rule of law in post-conflict situations. To that end, the International Criminal Court was the competent institution to address that issue, and Cyprus welcomed enhanced acceptance of the Rome Statute. At the same time, Cyprus had incorporated in its penal code provisions that made genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes punishable with life imprisonment. His country had also initiated the internal processes required to address the amendments to the Rome Statute on the "crime of aggression" adopted at the 2012 Review Conference in Kampala, Uganda. In conclusion, he said the high-level meeting, and the Assembly's adoption of the Declaration, sent a "strong message" about the importance of the rule of law. "In a divided world, the concept of the rule of law is one of the greatest unifying factors, perhaps the greatest; the nearest we are likely to come to a universal principle," he said.

TOOMAS HENDRIK ILVES, President of Estonia, said that Member States must recommit themselves to common values, and deepen discussion and action on the rule of law: a governance that ensured justice and fairness, and in which all persons, including the States itself, were held accountable, and where laws were promulgated publicly, enforced equally and adjudicated independently. "The rule of law is a guarantee for the full range of human rights", he said. In that context, the United Nations, as the advocator and protector of the global system of human rights, must continue to improve its tools to prevent human rights violations. Estonia looked forward to becoming a member of the Human Rights Council, one of the Organization's bodies whose essential function was to respond and draw attention to situations that might give rise to serious human rights violations.

Expressing his satisfaction that the Secretary-General, in his report, had devoted an entire section to "establishing the age of accountability", he said that "impunity provides fertile ground for the recurrence of conflicts and breeds instability". Recent milestones in that respect included the first conviction by the International Criminal Court, of the former Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga, as well as the conviction of Charles Taylor, the former President of Liberia, by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. As it celebrated its tenth anniversary, the International Criminal Court enjoyed an increase in international trust; and, he called upon States that had not yet done so to join the Rome Statute and cooperate with the Court.

The rule of law was not only about bringing criminals to justice, he went on. The concept was also essential for entrepreneurs, companies and foreign investors. More than 20 years after Estonia had restored its independence and market economy, it had rooted the principles of good governance together with broadening the use of information technology. Its experience showed that open markets in a predictable legal environment were preconditions for rapid and sustainable economic recovery and growth. Finally, he said, the effective participation of all stakeholders in public affairs was an important way to further the rule of law. "Everyone must have the possibility to improve and influence his community life," he said. Additionally, civil society's contribution was vital in advancing the rule of law worldwide.

PORFIRIO LOBO SOSA, President of Honduras, said the concept of the rule of law was at the heart of the United Nations work. It promoted development and, in turn, development strengthened the rule of law. In his country, there was no immunity for any public functionary or civil servant. "We are all equal before the law," he said, noting that magistrates for the Supreme Court of Justice were elected with the broad support of civil society. The National Judiciary Council guaranteed the professionalization of judges and magistrates, while the Constitution outlined that an annual percentage of the budget was earmarked for the judiciary.

He went on to say that Honduras was reforming the police, aiming to "clean it up", professionalize it and provide it with the technical tools necessary for it to fulfil its mandate. At the international level, Honduras had taken advantage of peaceful dispute mechanisms at the United Nations. It had accepted the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, as well as the inter-American human rights system. Honduras had accepted the jurisdiction of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and had taken cases to it to resolve commercial disputes.

In a similar vein, Honduras also adhered to a number of free trade agreements, with a view to strengthening the rule of law in its international relations. He proposed that a sub-theme for the Sixth Committee (Legal) centre on creating a culture of legality, as the rule of law could not be reduced to a legal body of work, or to State action to ensure that the rule of law prevailed. It was not enough to have laws, police, judges and prosecutors. What was needed was a change in society's values, so that it understood the rule of law as necessary for human development. It was necessary for all parts of society, including moral centres such as families and churches, to promote such a culture.

HEINZ FISCHER, President of Austria, said that the rule of law and sustainable economic development went hand-in-hand and were mutually reinforcing. His country's own history after the Second World War, as well as the recent history of neighbouring Eastern Europe, provided evidence of that fact. At the Millennium Development Goals Summit in 2010, Member States had reaffirmed that good governance and the rule of law were essential for sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger. The International Development Law Organization

was a pioneer in that area, as businesses were more likely to thrive where laws were clearly defined, known to the public and applied neutrally. In addition, he stressed, the challenge of corruption must be addressed, as it was “a true enemy of development”. In that vein, he noted that Austria’s International Anti-Corruption Academy was providing training on how to fight and prevent corrupt practices.

Stressing the interdependence between the rule of law and the protection of human rights, he urged Member States to intensify their efforts towards a universalization of international human rights treaties. Freedom of expression — the right to receive and impart information — was also essential in building democratic societies based on the rule of law. Austria called upon all Member States to actively promote an international order built on the rule of law and international law, with the United Nations at its core. That included the ratification and implementation of relevant international agreements and the settlement of disputes by peaceful means, including through the International Court of Justice.

“We cannot turn a blind eye to mass killing of innocent civilians, as we are currently witnessing in Syria”, he said, stressing that accountability and the fight against impunity for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law were crucial. However, a referral of a situation by the Security Council to the International Criminal Court was “only the starting point of justice”. The Court could not fulfil its mandate without political and material support and cooperation by Member States, in particular with regard to the surrender of suspected perpetrators. Furthermore, today’s meeting must not be seen as a one-time event; the momentum should be maintained for follow-up and further action.

MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD, President of Iran, welcomed the “vitaly important message” of today’s meeting, and stressed that regulating sound social relations and establishing order, peace, freedom, public welfare and long-term security depended on the implementation of the rule of law. He said lawmaking was a “sacred task and God, who is the most righteous and the wisest, is a lawmaker himself.” The nature of laws should be just, based on wisdom, and should be inclusive. Laws should also embrace the legitimate interests of all and must not be subject to arbitrary interpretation. “Legislators should genuinely represent people and only support decisions which fall within the actual will of people in a free, equal and just manner,” he said, adding that law enforcement officials should be fair and defenders of the rights of the general public, and enjoy the trust of the people.

Continuing, he said that laws that bred discrimination among people and nations were illegitimate and should not be recognized. For example, the discriminatory veto right that rested with the permanent members of the Security Council lacked legitimacy, “and that is why that body has failed to establish justice and ensure sustainable peace and security in the world.” Indeed, some of those veto-wielding Council members had chosen to remain silent regarding the nuclear warheads maintained by a “fake regime”, while at the same time impeding the nuclear progress of certain other nations. They also wrongly invoked the Charter and misused free speech to justify their silence regarding offenses to the human community and to divine prophets. “They support these offenders infringe upon the freedoms of others and allow sacrilege [...] while they criminalize investigation into a historical issue and jail researchers,” he said, decrying such double standards, particularly regarding the “Zionist regime” and its occupation of Palestinian lands.

Next, setting out his prescription for a better and more effective rule of law in international relations, he said, among other things, that the General Assembly, as the “highest organ of the United Nations”, must be revitalized to restore its real position as the manifestation of universal governance. Further, measures must be taken to completely reform and change the working methods governing the Security Council, both in terms of its powers and its structures. Further, the modern principles of justice and fairness must be preserved in legal structures. The international community must hold occupiers accountable and make efforts to return occupied territories to their rightful owners and the rights of the aggrieved nations restored. “The principles of equal sovereignty of all States must be respected,” he continued, urging States to adhere to their international obligations and to remain steadfast against laws imposed by “bullying” countries. He also stressed that divine prophets and religions, which were the common heritage of all mankind, should be protected by law in all societies, so that conflicts and hostility could be avoided.

ANDRIS BĒRZIŅŠ, President of Latvia, aligning himself with the European Union, said his country’s strong commitment to the rule of law, democracy, human rights and good governance stemmed from its own experience. More than 70 years ago, Latvia and the other Baltic States had been eliminated from the world political map due to the collapse of a rules-based international system, with two totalitarian regimes — the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany — dividing Europe by violating international law and ignoring the sovereign will of free countries. Twenty years ago, Latvia restored its independence and re-emerged as a reliable member of the international system.

He said Latvia had since developed an open, liberal and fast-growing market economy and replaced its totalitarian regime with stable, democratic institutions. The key to its success had been establishing the principles of justice, the rule of law and democracy. A strong, multilateral, rules-based international order was essential for maintaining global peace and security, with the United Nations playing

an important role. A comprehensive approach to addressing the rule of law was needed. Voluntary pledges by States at today's meeting were the first steps in reaffirming the political commitment to the rule of law.

In that context, he said Latvia pledged to provide assistance for justice sector reform and strengthening the rule of law. To reduce the workload of courts, Latvia would introduce mediation by 2015 and facilitate out-of-court dispute resolution, where appropriate. In addition, it would take steps to join the Joint Action for Free Expression on the Internet within one year. Latvia also was committed to gender equality and women's rights. In sum, he urged States to support the International Criminal Court, as it was the only international court entrusted to prosecute the gravest crimes against humanity and played an important role in closing the accountability gap.

SAULI NIINISTÖ, President of Finland, speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, stressed that respecting the rule of law was critical in achieving international peace and security, human rights and development. The Nordic countries were committed to the core principles of the rule of law, including legality, equality, accountability and participation, and supported its integration into all United Nations activities. All were equal before the law and entitled to equal protection of the law. In that regard, the disadvantaged, marginalized or vulnerable "deserve our particular attention", he said. Further, legislation should be amended and institutions reformed to ensure that women and men had equal right to participate in decision-making and governing.

Although the International Court of Justice was central in upholding the rule of law, he said, it was an "underused tool" in peaceful resolutions of conflicts. He urged Member States who had not done so to accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court. He also noted how the Court was a major actor in fighting impunity for the most serious international crimes. The Nordic countries were committed to the universal ratification and effective implementation of the Rome Statute and he called upon all Member States to join the Statute, which he pointed out also played an "important restorative function" for victims of such crimes through its Trust Fund for Victims.

He went on to echo the Secretary-General's call that all Member States allow individuals the full right to association and assembly, and stressed that civil society organizations, which played an important role in advancing the rule of law, be given the necessary legislative and political space "to thrive". The adoption of the high-level meeting's outcome document would guide future work in strengthening the rule of law. It was, he declared, an agenda for peace, sustained economic growth and sustainable development. What was needed now was concrete action that would convert political will into benefits on the ground.

ROSSEN PLEVNELIEV, President of Bulgaria, said that his country was a supporter of rule of law as the foundation of a predictable and just international system and the best strategy for the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflicts. Over the past two decades, the country had adopted the highest international standards in its legal systems. This year alone, it had joined the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture. Bulgaria further supported the universal abolition of the death penalty, and, having been one of the original signatories to the Rome Statute, it supported the important role of the International Criminal Court.

Based on recent testimonies of "brutal acts" and "massacres" by Syria against its own people, Bulgaria supported the referral of that State to the International Criminal Court. In addition, he addressed the concept of terrorism — one of the "ugliest" crimes against humanity — and said that the recent attack in Bulgaria had sparked a renewed commitment to counter the threat of terrorism. In that vein, he looked forward to the universal adoption of the United Nations Convention against Terrorism by the international community.

Democracy and the rule of law were at the core of United Nations values, he continued. As a clear commitment to the cause of human rights, Bulgaria had, for the first time, presented its candidature to the Human Rights Council. Bulgaria saw the opportunity as a chance to further develop its domestic policy with the highest standards. It was also working on judicial reform, and cooperating, in that vein, with relevant international bodies. Finally, he said, although Bulgaria felt that the Outcome Document of the present meeting did not fully reflect the fundamental connection between legality, accountability and respect for human rights, it was pleased that the text did stress the way that the rule of law should be applied at the national and international levels.

MOHAMED WAHEED, President of Maldives, said that despite the almost universal support the rule of law had gained, it was not entirely clear whether that principle had been applied in its true sense; because when leaders considered that the law should not be applied to them as much as it was applied to the ruled, then it was not rule of law. Indeed, when national leaders, responsible for upholding the law, acted with impunity, the rule of law failed, since rule of law could exist only when it was measured equally for the most powerful, as well as the weakest.

He said in his quest for democracy, his tiny nation enacted a new Constitution four years ago that guaranteed the separation of powers, a universal bill of rights, multiparty elections, and a free media. The judiciary was granted independence, and accountability measures set in. While that dramatic change in the legal, governance, constitutional, and administrative systems had subjected the Maldives to many challenges, the Government remained committed to implementing the Constitution, upholding the rule of law, and making it a way of life. Bolstering the Government's capacity to protect the rights of the vulnerable groups in society was another important strategy for promoting the rule of law in the Maldives.

Continuing, he stressed that national Governments and international organizations alike had a duty to promote the rule of law; but wondered whether international organizations subjected themselves to the same standards that they set for Member States. It was regrettable but true that some powerful international actors had come out in public to "instruct" the Maldives to take certain measures contradictory to the laws of the country. And when those instructions were questioned, the Maldives was labelled as an "uncooperative State"; thereby casting doubt on the country's democratic credentials, he said. Asserting that the world's small States could not afford to be complacent, he observed that his own country's experience in the past few months had shown that if small states did not stand up and draw attention to injustices, "the next could be you". He recognized, however, the valuable and indispensable role international organizations played in promoting the rule of law, noting that small States such as his valued their membership to such international organizations and depended on them to work together in promoting the rule of law.

TEODORO OBIANG NGUEMA MBASOGO, President of Equatorial Guinea, said implementing the rule of law was essential to efforts to ensure a peaceful and stable world. The law was the only element that could reconcile different interests in communities, and laws must be supported by all elements of societies. His country fought at all times to ensure democratic values in the national judiciary. Indeed, the national judicial system had evolved since the late 1980s, and today, it maintained the proper checks and balances between State bodies and ensured the protection and promotion of human rights.

At the international level, despite a broad framework of legal instruments and obligations, the rule of law was imperilled because some States gave the concept short shrift. Indeed, Equatorial Guinea did not believe that the rule of law should be imposed by one State, and neither did it believe that any State should infringe upon the work of the United Nations. The Organization was charged with setting and maintaining world order and no State was above that aim. He said that State sovereignty should be strengthened.

The United Nations had been created to maintain peace and that goal should be respected. He said that year after year, nations had come before the Assembly to call for measures to make the international legal, finance and trade systems more equitable. Equatorial Guinea hoped that international provisions, as well as the decisions taken by the United Nations, would be respected, so that the rights and aims of all States could be enjoyed to ensure peace and security throughout the world.

ELBEGDORJ TSAKHIA, President of Mongolia, said that one of the main goals in his country's transition to democracy was the establishment of a society ruled by law. Since that democratic revolution more than 20 years ago, "where not a single window was shattered", he heralded Mongolia's firm commitment to the rule of law. However, the rule of law and corruption could not co-exist together. The core principle of democracy was that no one was above the law. "That includes everyone from high government officials to ordinary citizens," he stated.

His country, governed by rule of law, had strong penalties for corruption, which he called the "mortal enemy" of democracy in developing countries. Because those crimes were committed by public servants and not citizens, the fight against corruption was a test for all leaders and public servants. There was also a strong correlation between corruption and socio-economic development, with higher levels of corruption resulting in less development. Thus, the fight for the rule of law was also a fight for more transparent and successful economic development.

"Mongolia is a young democracy," he stated. Its success was not just political or economic. It needed an independent judiciary, one immune from political pressure. In that regard, there were more than 20 new legislative acts to bring structural reform to its legal system. He also expressed his belief that Governments — which were created by people, there to serve people, and were not above the law — needed to honour human rights and never take human life. Capital punishment "brings no peace to society", he stressed, nor did it deter crime. Therefore, Mongolia had been commuting death sentences since 2009, and was developing legislation that would abolish the death penalty "once and for all". Since assuming the presidency over the Community of Democracies, he said that his top priority would be educating on the negative impact of corruption, and building zero tolerance, while strengthening capacity to fight such crimes. The rule of law was a top priority and "a passion" of his as well as a goal for his country. "Our democratic progress and economic success depends on it," he stated.

ALI BONGO ONDIMBA, President of Gabon, reaffirmed his country's attachment to the rule of law, democracy and human rights, noting that strengthening those principles could happen only in a climate of

peace and equitable economic development. Gabon's multiparty system had seen the creation of new institutions. In 2009, Gabon had navigated a delicate political transition, and today, those bodies helped consolidate the rule of law. While democracy and the rule of law must be mutually reinforcing, political action must respect the laws that fostered those principles.

The consolidation of the rule of law relied on impartial justice to prevent extremism and intolerance, he said, a belief that had led him to carry out reforms aimed at making legal bodies more accessible and equitable. Gabon had adopted laws to protect women and children against discrimination. There was also a new legal system for the protection of minors to prevent trafficking. Further, Gabon had introduced measures to strengthen transparency, reorganized the land and housing administration, and was combating violations of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

In other areas, he said Gabon had ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption and, to enhance governance, participated in the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative. The challenges ahead called for an enhanced rule of law at the international level that reaffirmed State sovereignty. In that vein, Africa must be fairly represented on a reformed Security Council and a better functioning of the Human Rights Council required more dialogue. There was no one single model to strengthen the rule of law and resources were needed to assist countries emerging from crisis. In sum, he encouraged more cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, as well as regular Assembly plenary meetings focused on strengthening the rule of law.

BUJAR NISHANI, President of Albania, said history reflected the evolution of the rule of law, in that each time countries lost respect for the law, they faced war and suffering. Each time the law was respected, they found peace and prosperity. Indeed, people were increasingly required to leave aside individual interests for the sake of the common good. With that in mind, he underscored the universal character of the jurisdiction of the international courts and tribunals, and that the law existed to serve peoples' well-being.

He went on to say that Albanians had had a "complicated" relation with the rule of law, as its "deformed" application to serve "ruling class" concepts of justice created one of the most evil dictatorships in Europe after the Second World War. Albanians' struggle for democracy in the 1990s was related to their strong disagreement with the governance of a State unaccountable to its promulgated laws. Thus, it was no surprise that strengthening the rule of law at the national level had been a guiding principle for a new democracy and the cornerstone of a harmonious society that boasted an open market economy.

Albania supported the protection of human rights, he said, and sympathized with the freedom struggle, from Syria to Myanmar. Albania was a committed partner in the promotion of justice, accountability and the combat against impunity. It supported the principle of universal jurisdiction and found it deplorable that rulings by the international courts and tribunals had been disregarded, as had happened with the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on Kosovo's independence. In the Balkans, "chauvinistic" minds had sanctioned an ideology of superiority into law, legitimizing genocide and massacre. The victims demanded justice. It was disturbing that rather than issuing apologies, the highest levels served only "negationist statements". For its part, Albania had taken steps to establish dialogue with all countries in the region and praised the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) in Kosovo as an invaluable addition to peace and security after Kosovo's independence.

GOODLUCK EBELE JONATHAN, President of Nigeria, said he was pleased at the international progress made towards a broad approach to support the rule of law "in line with national plans and priorities". Equally significant were insights into emerging mechanisms and practices that promoted its implementation. Strengthening the rule of law at the national and international levels was a shared responsibility, essential for peaceful coexistence among states, and critical to addressing global challenges.

In that regard, only an international system built on the rule of law could guarantee human rights and the interests of the less powerful in the global arena, he said. He recognized primacy of the rule of law in protecting democracy, noting that Nigeria had shown strong political will to fulfil its obligations through the domestication of relevant international instruments and practices. The freedom of information act, for example, promoted open Government, while the terrorism prevention act and the money laundering act lent impetus to the global fight against terrorism, terrorist financing and economic crimes.

Further, he said electoral reforms had been carried out to ensure people could freely choose their leaders through free and fair elections. More broadly, he urged States to honour their obligations, including that to refrain from the threat or use of force, to settle disputes in peaceful means, protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and abide by international humanitarian law. State equality was important in the promotion of the rule of law at the international level and he discouraged any semblance of selective observance or enforcement of the rule of law. With that, he assured the Assembly of Nigeria's unwavering commitment to the rule of law and its commitment to implement pledges made to the international community at the current meeting.

JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA, President of Ghana, said that the respect for the rule of law was an integral part of the United Nations Charter, and that ensuring respect for it was fundamental to the protection of international peace and stability, as well as to ensuring a vibrant and dynamic democracy. Ghana had, over the last 20 years, worked consistently to strengthen its system of governance, through legislation aimed at ensuring accountability and good governance, transparent management of oil revenues, the protection of human rights and transparent and credible elections, to name but a few.

With one of the highest rates of economic growth in the world — 14 per cent last year — the country was reaping the benefits of such work, he said; it had recently graduated into middle income status. The Government was in the process of undertaking a number of interventions, including in areas such as building the capacity of Government institutions responsible for ensuring compliance with existing laws, reviewing laws on investment, strengthening the institutions related to the prevention of corruption and ensuring the transparent management of Ghana's oil revenue.

Further, he said, the country had become a party to many international conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and others. Ghana believed that it was also important to give attention to regional and subregional institutions, such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and to help strengthen them. Moreover, he said, systems of governance could only be considered effective if they upheld and protected the rights of the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society. In short, Ghana believed that respect for the rule of law was essential to creating a more just world and to ensuring international peace and security.

MWAI KIBAKI, President of Kenya, said that his country supported an international order grounded in the rule of law, as envisaged in the Charter. Indeed, the rule of law was essential for democracy and ensuring sustainable development for all. Kenya had been dedicated to promoting the rule of law and that goal remained as important today as it had at the country's independence. It had built on that commitment to bolster poverty eradication efforts and enhance the protection and promotion of human rights.

In the past two years, the new Government had worked to implement the constitution and legal institutional and administrative reforms that had further strengthened the rule of law. Those reforms in the country had generated greater involvement by the people of the country in its development and governance. As a member of the international community, Kenya had also played its part in promoting the rule of law throughout the East African region and the world. He hoped that the United Nations would continue to promote the building up of rule of law institutions in countries that were recovering from conflict and strife. It was also important to ensure that pursuit of the rule of law was used as an avenue to enhance sustainable development and to ensure justice and equality for all.

ELLEN JOHNSON-SIRLEAF, President of Liberia, said that national and international peace and security must rest on the acceptance of the primacy of law in international affairs, and those laws must be based on fairness and equality. After 14 years of "ravaging conflict", Liberia had worked hard to establish the rule of law. Indeed, that goal had been an important part of its poverty eradication strategy and was central to its Transformative Agenda. The rule of law was also key to Liberia's interaction with the Peacebuilding Commission.

"We are proud of the progress we have made in rebuilding our justice and security institutions," she said, noting that a gender-based violence court had been established, as had a law reform commission and an independent national human rights commission, which was helping to foster reconciliation among all Liberians. She said that a new commercial court had also been set up to help improve the investment climate. She said that just last week, the Security Council had agreed on the phased reconfiguration of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) over a three-year period. As that process moved forward, her country would be even more challenged to maintain momentum for change and reform, including in efforts to decentralize justice institutions by placing "hubs" in strategic locations around the country to make justice more accessible in remote areas. The first of those hubs was about to begin its work, she noted.

Liberia would face challenges in mobilizing resources to set up four remaining hubs, as well as in extending service to address gender-based violence in all counties, harmonizing formal and informal legal systems, and eradicating outmoded laws. "Yet, we are not deterred but encouraged, based on how far we have come," she said, announcing a slate of voluntary pledges, including plans to develop and publicize an integrated national justice strategy by 2013. She also pledged that Liberia would establish a civilian oversight board for its national police by 2013 to hear complaints of misconduct. Liberia would also introduce new legislation and training programmes to tackle transnational criminal activity by mid-2013. Overall, she said finally, Liberia would continue to put in place institutions that would accelerate access to justice.

HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBAMBA, President of Namibia, said that his country was founded upon the principles of democracy, the rule of law and justice for all. It had a Bill of Rights and had acceded to the

international treaties and conventions related to those principles. It had also joined subregional, regional and international organizations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union and the United Nations in order to help foster a system of international governance based on respect for the sovereign equality of States.

While the United Nations Charter assigned the Security Council with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, it had become clear that, with the passage of time, the current composition and structure of the Council had become unrepresentative and undemocratic. It was for that reason that Namibia reiterated its call for the comprehensive reform of the Security Council to make it more democratic, transparent and to better represent and serve the whole of humanity. Furthermore, it encouraged the Council to always coordinate with regional organizations in the fulfilment of its mandate, including conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and sustainable peacebuilding.

"The United Nations came into being in order to protect humanity from the scourge of war", he said, stressing that such a noble goal could only be achieved when all of the Organization's Member States refrained from the threat or use of force in any manner that was inconsistent with the purposes and principles of justice and international law, the right to self-determination, non-interference in the international affairs of States, respect for human rights, and, indeed, respect for the equal rights of all. It was also the duty of the international community to avoid the perception that certain institutions were used to advance the interests of certain Member States, at the disadvantage of others. In that regard, the operations of the International Criminal Court should, at all times, be guided by fairness and objective assessment to ensure justice. "We should avoid the temptation of subjecting this institution to self-serving political considerations and influences".

PAUL KAGAME, President of Rwanda, said today's discussion should start with the principle of universal justice. The rule of law was premised on the idea that equality before the law was universal. "This, however, is not always the case," he said, noting that many countries could attest that justice was not always pursued fairly. What might be overlooked in one situation was aggressively sanctioned in another. It was more useful for people to act together towards a form of universal justice that was meaningful to all. In that way, the rule of law would uphold equality among nations and guarantee fairness.

Second, he cautioned that States must be alert to the dangers of politicizing justice issues at the national and international levels. Principles such as universal jurisdiction were being used selectively and "in one direction", as political tools aimed at control and domination. Rwanda had first-hand experience with the importance of the rule of law, and the implications of both its absence and unequal application. That situation had led to the 1994 genocide and unjust treatment in the name of universal jurisdiction.

He said the issues of justice and politics required a balanced approach. A punitive course of action was not always best, even when grievances were legitimate. In Rwanda's post-genocide experience, it had sought to balance punitive measures with restorative alternatives. That home-grown solution had served it better than any other system could and was applicable to the international arena. Often, motives for pursuing justice were punitive and aimed to serve the interests of one party over another. The system must change to eliminate double standards at the international level. With that, he urged States to adhere to the right to fair hearings, and to respect both human rights and review mechanisms. The rule of law had been enhanced in Rwanda to ensure people were not hindered by financial constraints or distance to judicial centres, efforts that had been supported by its international partners.

JACOB ZUMA, President of South Africa, stated that a better South Africa, a better Africa and a better world would only be fully realized through a global commitment to the promotion of the rule of law and the realization of human rights worldwide. "We feel at home in this discussion," he said, noting that his country was founded on values such as the supremacy of the Constitution and equality, among others. Because the rule of law and human development were "inextricably linked", his country promoted the rule of law through efforts to raise the standard of living of the disadvantaged, the provision of essential services, and the fulfilment of socio-economic rights. South Africa also was party to bilateral and trilateral agreements that supported peace and harmony dependent on the rule of law.

However, he stressed, while the promotion of the rule of law on a national level was important, equal attention on the international level was also needed. "If not, the United Nations runs the risk of being accused of double standards and hypocrisy," he said. Thus, it was important to ask whether or not the international community was governed by a system where all were accountable under law that was "equally enforced and independently adjudicated". In that regard, the composition of the Security Council and how it impacted the promotion of international law, and the rule of law in particular, needed to be looked at. Given the undemocratic and unrepresentative nature of the Council, he expressed concern that its decisions would be attacked for lack of legitimacy, regardless of content.

Continuing, he said that the current configuration of the Council was not fair and did not reflect the contemporary geo-political realities, "especially with respect to Africa", as the African continent was both

generally under-represented and specifically unrepresented in the permanent category. As long as the Security Council was unrepresented and undemocratic, adherence to the international rule of law would continue to elude the international community. Nonetheless, he heralded the actual decisions recently made by the Security Council, including the adoption of resolution 1989 (2011), as a “noteworthy illustration” of the Council’s willingness to adhere to the rule of law. Noting that the resolution had been criticized for lack of due process in the listing and delisting of individuals, he said that the resolution was an improvement in that it provided individuals with recourse to challenge unfounded listings. Still, he pointed out, there was a need to ensure greater accountability for action taken under the auspices of the Council.

MICHAEL CHILUFYA SATA, President of Zambia, said that the old adage “it is more difficult to build than to destroy” was particularly true for the principle of the rule of law. As such, there was a need to ensure that national legal systems were built on firm foundations and that local societies had confidence in the laws that governed them. He said that for developing countries such as his own, one of the main impediments to enhancing the principle was access to justice. Indeed, in societies coping with high poverty levels, “justice seldom comes with an affordable price tag,” and it was often necessary for people to resort to alternative or extrajudicial means of seeking remedy or legal protection. That situation was exacerbated by the “mischief” created by those with money and power who sought to corrupt and pervert justice systems.

With all that in mind, he was pleased to announce that since his Government had assumed power last year, Zambians had embraced reinvigorated initiatives aimed at promoting respect for the rule of law, including the fight against corruption. His Government was implementing a robust anti-corruption campaign, which had helped to significantly restore confidence in the governance system. He said the Government had also launched campaigns to sensitize the public to the importance of reporting corruption and vice. Moreover, the Zambian Parliament had been active in pushing through legislative measures on, among others, abuse of office, and gender-based violence. The Government had also continued to support the national Human Rights Commission’s oversight role. Efforts were also being made to offer more affordable and speedier avenues for dispensation of justice.

Continuing, he said Zambia was a party to many international treaties, including the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention against Torture. He appealed to the United Nations and its Member States to continue to provide adequate resources towards the development of a credible and legitimate international legal system and towards enhancing the capacities of all institutions and peoples to cope with its requirements. He also urged all States, regardless of strengths or weaknesses, to commit to negotiating treaties in good faith, representative of the needs of all, and a desire to be bound by them.

JOSÉ MANUEL DURÃO BARROSO, President of the European Commission, said that the universal values of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights had “spurred the European Union forward in good times and held us together in more difficult times”. Those transformative values had taken the bloc’s new member States from totalitarianism to thriving democracies in a quarter of a century. The European Union’s support for the high-level meeting, and for the rule of law itself, was not simply declaratory. In each of the areas covered by the Declaration, the Union would make substantive pledges, backed up by concrete measures. In that vein, its member States had presented a list gathering all their pledges, he said, highlighting a few of those priorities.

Among those was the strengthening of the rule of law at the international level. Respect for international law was the best alternative to the use of force; and when the use of force was inevitable, it should be legitimized by the international law emanating from the United Nations. Secondly, he said, more needed to be done to uphold international law in the member States’ national systems. They would work both inside the bloc and with their third-party partners to improve the delivery of justice, including through supporting a worldwide campaign on the right to a fair trial. In addition, he said, “we can, and will, do more to promote transitional justice by working with the United Nations in conflict and post-conflict situations”.

From terrorism to organized crime to maritime piracy and human trafficking, threats posed by globalization put democracies and the security of citizens at risk. The European Union pledged to strengthen its own capacities to face those dangers, as well as to help its partners and the United Nations as a whole strengthen theirs. However, it was not just security threats that could harm the democratic fabric of societies. The populist tendencies that germinated in times of economic and social turmoil also represented a considerable peril to the rule of law, open societies and democratic systems. That was also why responsible political leadership that put the rule of law and the interests of citizens above its own was needed. “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”, he said.

SHEIKH HASINA, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, said that peace today was threatened, among other things, by civil wars, people’s uprisings, religious intolerance, transnational crimes, terrorism, piracy, climate change impacts and financial and energy crises. “Thus has grown the need to reaffirm mankind’s faith in the just, equitable and fair application of the rule of law, the United Nations Charter and its principles of justice and international law”, and on the Statute of the International Court of Justice for the peaceful

settlement of disputes. While Bangladesh believed in peace and justice, she said, it also believed in sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. Nations had diverse legal systems; therefore, the International Court of Justice Statute had an emphasis on the representation of major civilizations and principal legal systems of the world.

Unfortunately, given the current power structure and architecture of global institutions, the equitable applications of international law and the realization of a just global order based on the rule of law remained an illusion. In that vein, she continued, powerful nations must respect international legal systems, multilateral treaties, and support for the fair and just application of customary international law. Greater voice and representation of developing countries in major global institutions — including the Security Council, the International Court of Justice and the Bretton Woods institutions — was vital to ensure the principle of equity. She went on to describe treaties and other agreements signed both between Bangladesh and other countries and within the country's own borders. On the basis of the rule of law and justice, Bangladesh had also concluded trials of religious extremists and terrorists and had held trials of war criminals from its war of liberation in 1971, among other achievements.

To ensure the rule of law, the country had made legal services affordable to vulnerable and marginalized groups such as women and minorities, by enacting the Legal Aid Services Regulation Act of 2001. Its Alternate Dispute Resolution System also allowed free-of-cost access to an informal justice system at the grass-roots level. To strengthen democracy and the rule of law, the Government had also strengthened its Commission on Information, Anti-Corruption, National Human Rights, Law, Energy Regulation and Elections. A Citizen's Charter of Rights had been instituted to ensure that the Government delivered the rule of law and public services to every citizen. As a responsible and peace-loving nation, Bangladesh was a strong proponent of democracy, human rights, rule of law and secularism, she said.

ZORAN MILANOVIĆ, Prime Minister of Croatia, described the rule of law as the “very essence” of a social contract between individuals and their Government. The principles that composed that contract were also the same applied on the international level, contributing to sovereign equality of nations, political independence and territorial integrity, as well as the maintenance of collective peace and security. The rule of law should cover “every corner of daily political and social life of all citizens around the world,” he stated. To strengthen the rule of law, successful cooperation among States was necessary, in particular within the United Nations framework and with positive contributions from major United Nations bodies, notably the Security Council and the General Assembly.

He went on to say that Croatia highly valued the contributions of international courts and tribunals in the advancement of the rule of law, in particular the International Court of Justice. On a national level, his country made the Rome Statute an integral part of its national legislation, including penalizing, in its new criminal code, recently defined crimes of aggression, and would continue to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and closely follow its decisions and future doctrinal and practical consequences.

Turning to the importance of rule of law in post-conflict peacebuilding, peacekeeping and conflict prevention, he said that the rebuilding of national civilian capacities and institutions towards creating and implementing national peacebuilding strategies was important to his country. It was a contributor to CAPMATCH, the online platform that matched demand and supply of specialized civilian capacities. Further, as Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, he promoted the rule of law in conflicted affected countries. Concluding, he said that in the past 20 years, Croatia had gone through a “long and demanding journey”, from a war-torn nation and host of peacekeeping missions, through post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation and development to a country “at the doorstep” of membership to the European Union and provider of development assistance to other countries and a participant in peacekeeping and peacebuilding worldwide. Throughout that process, Croatia made committed efforts to respect and recognize the rule of law as the core of any democratic society. It was, he stated, the cornerstone of his country's national and international policy.

LAURENT SALVADOR LAMOTHE, Prime Minister of Haiti, detailed the vast progress his country had made towards the rule of law over the last 14 months, noting actions taken to combat corruption and smuggling. The lack of independence of the judicial system was a problem. It was chronically dysfunctional and unable to meet people's expectations. The rule of law in Haiti could not exist if the judicial security did not succeed.

For that reason, the Supreme Court, which had been bereft of its president and several judges for over five years, was today operational, he said. The supervisory and administrative body of the judiciary also had been established. The Government had refrained from interfering in the judicial system, but was aware of the need to provide financial resources for it. Haiti also was working to protect judges from economic and political pressure.

In other areas, he said Haiti would monitor the institutionalization of its national identification and registration system. The headquarters for the national police was being built and the first-ever ministry to promote human rights and combat poverty had been established. Further, Haiti guaranteed a number of freedoms, including those of expression and worship, and boasted more than 50 political parties. But, there was a long road ahead in the area of human rights, he said, noting lengthy detention as one area requiring urgent Government action. He concluded by stressing the role of citizens in strengthening the rule of law.

THOMAS MOTSOAHAE THABANE, Prime Minister of Lesotho, said that, while respect for the rule of law was at the very heart of the founding and work of the United Nations, challenges to the principle abounded at national and international levels, leading to brutal conflicts, oppressive regimes and violations of human rights. Today's meeting provided a golden opportunity to reaffirm commitment to enhancing such respect and for agreeing on steps to consolidate the rule of law worldwide. The concept of the rule of law had been gaining momentum over the past decade, as witnessed in resolution adopted by the Security Council and the establishment of a relevant office in the United Nations Secretariat.

Nevertheless, strengthening the concept at the global level was critical to tackling current challenges and reinforcing the peaceful coexistence among nations. The need to enhance compliance with international legal instruments as well as commitment to the Charter could not be overstated, he continued, stressing that consistency in applying the international law and the democratization of international relations were also essential to building a just world order. "Double standards degrade the integrity of the international legal system," he declared, adding that all laws must be applied equitably and effectively and must enjoy the support of societies.

Bolstering the trust of the wider international community in the rule of law meant that flagrant violations of international law must cease; laws must be applied to both the mighty and the weak, with equal consequence. "The international community must work together towards strengthening the International Court of Justice and other international dispute resolution mechanisms to demonstrate that the era of impunity is no more," he said. At the national level, the rule of law was a cornerstone for building stable and resilient societies. Lesotho believed that the concept promoted social interaction among citizens and State authorities and promoted an environment in which basic freedoms and human rights were protected. In that spirit, Lesotho, ruled by a democratically-elected Government and committed to respect the rule of law, had enshrined the rights of its citizens in its Constitution. In conclusion, he said that today's meeting should be seen as the beginning of a process through which the rule of law could be more intensively advocated, respected and practiced.

TUILAIPA SAILELE MALIELEGAOI, Prime Minister of Samoa, said that the United Nations was uniquely placed to lead and coordinate global activities on the "noble goal" of bringing about universal justice. The day's discussion should not be a one-off effort, but instead the start of a concerted and continuous process. The challenge was to ensure that a coordinated approach was in place to develop effective instruments to address the interrelated threats to the peaceful coexistence of peoples and nations. "The rule of law does not exist in a void," he said; instead, it was how individual Governments localized the international norms of behaviours that gave the rule of law meaning.

Samoa had no military forces and was not a member of any military grouping, he said. Thus, its only guaranteed security was the strict observance of the rule of law for protection. To increase its compliance with international law, the country had established a Law and Justice sector, which had launched a four-year plan with the vision of "Justice for a Safe and Stable Samoa". The plan focused on improving and strengthening the legal system and services in Samoa by increasing community safety, improving access to justice, integrating customary and community-based justice with the formal justice system and promoting integrity and good governance. A Law Reform Commission also worked closely with relevant stakeholders and members of the public to assess legislative compliance with international conventions, particularly the human rights conventions to which Samoa was a State party.

The country was fully committed to the peacekeeping work of the United Nations. Despite its small size, it had contributed officers to the peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, Timor-Leste and to the Regional Assessment Mission in the Solomon Islands. More than 30 per cent of its peacekeepers were women, surpassing the United Nations goal in that regard. In addition, Samoa was participating in the "Justice Rapid Response" multilateral stand-by facility. In addition, the country viewed the International Criminal Court as an important part of the architecture of world peace based on the rule of law. The institutionalization of the Court ten years ago was a major achievement in the protection of human rights and in upholding international humanitarian standards. In that spirit, he announced that Samoa would be ratifying the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on crimes of aggression tomorrow, as part of the United Nations Treaty Event.

ASYLBEK JEENBEKOV, Speaker of Parliament of Kyrgyzstan, said the mandatory implementation of laws was the key to sustainable development and economic growth. Kyrgyzstan supported the rule of law at national and international levels and was party to many international treaties. It had assumed the

obligations of 40 instruments, the 42 International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and the Helsinki Final Act, obliging it to abide by the norms of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Kyrgyzstan was committed to implementing its obligations and favoured compliance with the internationally recognized standards of law.

On the domestic front, Kyrgyzstan was pursuing reforms to enhance its judicial, law enforcement and penitentiary systems, as well as to better serve young people and protect the poor. His Government had pledged to strictly govern in accordance with the law, as had been seen over the last two years, to ensure the rule of law in the wake of the 2010 events. As such, Kyrgyzstan had adopted a new Constitution to transition into a parliamentary democracy and had held fair presidential elections. The foundations had been laid for an independent media.

He went on to say that implementing the rule of law was a complex challenge for developing countries, due to resource shortfalls. Laws alone were not enough to ensure the rule of law. Law was a multifaceted phenomenon between justice and humanism, with the core freedoms and human rights determining the essence of legislative and executive bodies. The rule of law related to the quality of laws and addressing unstable legislation depended on addressing other issues. Peoples' confidence in Government ensured the legitimacy of regulatory instruments. With that, he said the United Nations must be at the centre of efforts to assist countries in strengthening the rule of law.

Explanations of Position

The representative of Venezuela outlined his delegation's opposition to paragraph 28 of the Declaration adopted on the Rule of Law, saying that the aim of promoting that concept should be to ensure the interests of all people of the world. Yet, without the existence of a truly democratic system within the United Nations, particularly regarding the make-up and decision-making mechanisms of the Security Council, "the rule of law will forever be a utopian dream". Venezuela, therefore, expressed reservations to language in the Declaration regarding that body's work. Indeed, rather than strengthening the rule of law, the Security Council had often flouted the concept, as evidenced in its disregard for the desire of the wider United Nations membership, its treatment of the Palestinian question and the recent decision it had adopted on the situation in Libya.

The representative of Cuba said the Declaration did contain elements that could foster establishment of the rule of law worldwide, especially language regarding the strengthening of intergovernmental organizations and global financial institutions so that they operated in the service of all nations, rather than a few. He said that non-selectivity and respect for the sovereignty of States must be the basis of the rule of law. Yet, language within the Declaration, especially that stating that the Security Council had "positively" affected the rule of law actually ran counter to that position. Indeed, that undemocratic body and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) routinely flouted international law. Further, the Declaration did not refer strongly enough to Security Council reform. By concluding, he urged efforts to address the long-standing financial and economic blockade against Cuba, and he invited the United States, if that country was truly committed to the rule of law, to implement language in the Declaration regarding coercive measures and sanctions.

Nicaragua's representative acknowledged the dedication of the co-facilitators to arrive at consensus on the Declaration. And while it welcomed language on human rights, the International Court of Justice and the rights of women and children, Nicaragua would have liked to see more focus on the peaceful resolution of disputes. Indeed, certain States continued to resort to illegal coercive measures, rather than taking part in dialogue. He would have hoped for more references to the efforts of the International Court of Justice, a body in which Nicaragua had invested much hope, as it sought to ensure sovereign equality among States. As from October of this year, Nicaragua planned to withdraw its existing reservations to certain parts of the Court's statute. Turning to the Security Council, he said that that body did not have a role in promoting the rule of law. Indeed, that effort fell to States, especially regarding matters such as setting up a post-2015 development agenda.

Bolivia's representative joined consensus on the resolution, saying his country had adopted a Constitution by means of a constitutional referendum in 2009, which had strengthened the rule of law. In October 2011, the first direct election of the highest authorities — including the Supreme Court of Justice and the Council of the Judiciary — were held in an atmosphere of peace.

However, Bolivia had a reservation to paragraph 28 of the Declaration, he said, noting that his Government welcomed the maintenance of peace and condemned aggression in any form. Its Constitution prohibited the installation of a foreign military base on its territory. It was obliged to avoid unilateralism. More broadly, he said comprehensive Security Council reform could no longer be delayed and paragraph 35 of today's document should reflect that urgent need. Bolivia requested that its reservation be reflected in the record of today's meeting.

Statements

EVELINE WIDMER SCHLUMPF, President of Swiss Confederation, said the rule of law was a crucial principle at the root of all endeavours to create lasting peace and the preconditions for the promotion of human rights. No States or institutions could sit back and take the rule of law for granted, and world leaders were present to reflect that. Stressing the importance of translating thoughts and commitments into action, she went on to highlight several areas where efforts must be strengthened. First, there was a need for accountability, for strengthening the fight against impunity and for transitional justice, as well as for sharing best practices, she said, emphasizing that a transitional justice was crucial in combating human rights violations and preventing the recurrence of atrocities. "Words are not enough; we need to act decisively in order to attain accountability," she said, calling on the Security Council to refer the parties to the conflict in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

She recalled that during the 2011 Conference of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, participants had explored concrete means for the application of international humanitarian law, and the Swiss delegation had been greatly encouraged by efforts towards ensuring compliance. The United Nations played a vital role, and its procedures enjoyed ever-greater credibility, she said, adding: "In our view, all United Nations organs must comply with the rule of law." Within the Organization, the Swiss Government favoured improving the Security Council's working methods and due process on the part of its sanction committees. The rule of law was especially important to countries emerging from conflict and the legacy of human rights abuses, she noted. Transitional justice must be carefully coordinated, and while there was a need for common missions, a "one-size-fits-all" approach was not the answer. The individual or collective pledges made so far showed that "all of us can make a difference", describing the declaration adopted today as "a starting point for fully achieving the rule of law".

OTTO PEREZ MOLINA, President of Guatemala, said his country and the United Nations had joined efforts to strengthen the rule of law by creating the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a *sui generis* arrangement created under the domestic institutional and juridical order, but which authorized the Secretary-General to appoint the Commissioner, to whom it granted the right to recruit international and national staff. The latter, financed partially by contributions from international donors, had been conceived as an interim arrangement to strengthen national institutions in charge of criminal prosecution, law enforcement and the administration of justice.

He said that although the agreement between Guatemala and the United Nations allowed the Commission to act as a complementary prosecutor alongside the Public Prosecutor's Office, its main function was to strengthen the security and justice systems through technical assistance, training and general support. While the Commission was intrinsically independent, that independence had been deliberately bestowed by Guatemala to ensure it the ability to carry out its mandate. To date, the Commission had helped resolve various paradigmatic cases relating to transnational organized crime and brought the perpetrators of illicit activities to justice, he noted. It had also transferred functions to the Public Prosecutor's Office, and had worked closely with the national judicial and legislative organs in adopting legislation to strengthen the security and justice sectors.

An important by-product of that effort was the close cooperation on criminal investigation and prosecution between the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of the Interior, he continued. An example of the close cooperation among Guatemala's State institutions was a meeting held barely two weeks ago, when the President of the Supreme Court, the President of Congress and the Vice-President of Guatemala, as well as the Commissioner of CICIG, the Public Prosecutor, and the Ministers for the Interior and Foreign Affairs, had come together to jointly present the Commission's work programme for next year, and prepare for a possible two-year extension, he said, adding that, with the help of the United Nations, Guatemala had a success story to present in the area of strengthening the rule of law.

NARAYAN KAJI SHRESTHA PRAKASH, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, stressed that the rule of law should not be used as a cover for one country to dominate another, and neither should double standards be used in applying it. Internationally, the rule of law should be created in such a way as to create a level playing field for all States. Nepal was committed to promoting the rule of law internationally by adhering to the Charter and its obligations under global treaty bodies, he said, urging greater global support in promoting the rule of law in countries emerging from conflict, which needed to focus on strengthening administrative, law-enforcement and judiciary institutions. Nepal was committed to strengthening the rule of law, promoting and protecting human rights and ensuring equity and justice at the national level, as part of its historic transformation process.

He said that, in line with the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Accord, which had marked a key turning point in the nation's peace process, an interim Constitution had been adopted, and a transitional justice mechanism to conclude the peace process and address global and local requirements on peace, justice and reconciliation was in the offing. The Government had ratified seven of the nine core human rights instruments, and in recent years, had reformed governance and the rule of law, with positive results. Nepal

had become a secular State, with legal, political and administrative steps to empower women, the down-trodden, indigenous groups and marginalized communities. It had criminalized caste-based discrimination, begun the process to criminalize torture and taken steps to curb domestic and gender-based violence. Nepal had launched a three-year action plan, coordinated by the Office of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers, to implement global human rights obligations.

MIROSLAV LAJČÁK, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, said his country's foreign policy was based on respect for core democratic values, international law and effective multilateralism. At the international level, it was of the utmost importance to ensure the equality of States, full compliance of their actions with international law, and their responsibility to individuals on their respective territories and under their sovereignty. At the national level, the rule of law was a key principle that interacted with society on every level, while guaranteeing the protection of human rights, as well as fair resolution of disputes while providing legitimate tools of recourse in the event of abuses of power.

He said his country had joined other Member States that had submitted their national pledges with the aim of strengthening their support for the rule of law. Slovakia had also undertaken to ratify, by the end of 2013, the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, Slovakia would strengthen its legal and institutional framework to strengthen women's right to be free from all forms of violence and discrimination, in compliance with international human rights law. It fully supported the fight to end impunity for perpetrators of the most serious crimes under international law, such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, he said, urging States that were not yet parties to the Rome Statute, should consider ratifying it and subsequently incorporating it into national legislation.

BAJRAKITIYABHA MAHIDOL, Chair Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice of Thailand, spoke on behalf of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), saying that with the entry into force of its Charter in 2008, the regional body was now becoming a rule-based and people-centred community. "The grouping's Charter clearly expressed the grouping's firm commitment to enhancing the rule of law, good governance, democracy, and constitutional government," she noted. ASEAN leaders recognized the crucial role of the rule of law in ensuring justice, equality, stability and sustainable prosperity, and at the international level, in ensuring respect for the fundamental principles of international law, including the sovereign equality of States. ASEAN's institutional and legal framework had been strengthened through the adoption of a number of legal documents and mechanisms, and it had strengthened its cooperation with the United Nations by adopting the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the United Nations in 2011, with the aim of expanding cooperation in areas including human rights, good governance, democracy and the rule of law through consultation, information sharing and capacity-building.

Speaking in her national capacity, she said her country's Constitution protected human dignity, rights and liberties, as well as equality for all. Its people were entitled to equal protection before the law, regardless of race, gender or religion. In 2011, Thailand had established the Independent National Rule of Law Commission to ensure that all State organs performed their duties on the basis of the rule of law. Turning to women's rights, she stressed the importance of incorporating gender sensitivity and a rights-based approach into the criminal justice system because "in too many societies, women are subject to discrimination, overt and subtle". Noting that Thailand had launched the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders, or the "Bangkok Rules", in 2010, she emphasized its determination to implement them in correctional facilities throughout the country, and expressed hopes of sharing best practices for the benefit of female inmates around the world.

Thailand was also committed to implementing the Updated Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, she continued. Underscoring the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of the child, as well as access to effective remedies based on the rule of law, she said Thailand would sign and ratify the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the Communications Procedure. Concerning the link between crime and development in relation to the rule of law, she said "crime hinders sustainable development, but development can help reduce crime". Opium cultivation had been reduced as a result of strengthened community capacity to develop alternative legitimate means of income, demonstrating that the rule of law and sustainable socio-economic development worked together for the betterment of society, she said. In that light, Thailand urged all Member States to support the document adopted today, particularly in relation to transnational organized crime and drug trafficking, in order to solidify the importance of the rule of law in preventing crime while promoting sustainable development and peace.

NIKOLA POPOSKI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, said his country remained committed to the United Nations Charter and international law. It recognized that mechanisms for strengthening international adjudicative dispute-resolution, in particular strengthening the role of the International Court of Justice as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations through effective implementation of its decisions was essential to strengthening the rule of law. Recalling that his country had

brought a bilateral dispute to resolution by the International Court of Justice, he said its judgment of 5 December 2011 was yet to be honoured by the other party concerned.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia supported the Secretary-General's recommendation to strengthen the International Court of Justice's role in international relations, he said, adding that, in order to increase the legitimacy of actions taken by the principal organs of the United Nations, and their compliance with international law, Member States should, where appropriate, more frequently request its advisory opinions to ensure that the international legal system was equally accessible and that international law was not selectively applied. In conclusion, he expressed his country's support for the Secretary-General's campaign to increase the number of Member States accepting the International Court of Justice's compulsory jurisdiction, pursuant to article 36 of its Statute, recognizing that "optional declarations are the best way to ensure that international disputes are settled peacefully in accordance with international law."

JEAN ASSELBORN, Deputy Prime Minister of Luxembourg, said that alongside States and international organizations, civil society groups also had a role to play in strengthening the rule of law. Stressing the importance of the International Criminal Court in fighting impunity for the most serious atrocities — genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression — he said that by early 2013, Luxembourg would ratify the amendments to the Rome Statute contained in the resolutions adopted at the June 2010 Kampala Review Conference, which had already been incorporated into the domestic Criminal Code. Luxembourg highly valued the role of the International Court of Justice, he added.

Strengthening the rule of law was particularly important for countries emerging from conflict, he said. To ensure sustainable peace, a State must restore the trust of its citizens and create an enabling environment in which rights were respected and protected. Several tools could be used to that end, and in that context, Luxembourg would give at least €1 million to the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund from 2012 to 2014. Underlining the important role of Member States in strengthening the rule of law as well as international rules and norms by ratifying relevant international treaties, he said his country would ratify the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on a Communications Procedure, as soon as possible. Luxembourg's pledges were detailed in the registration form submitted to the United Nations Rule of Law Unit, he added.

ERIC HOLDER, Attorney General of the United States, said history had proven that establishing the rule of law was essential in many endeavours, including the fight against terror threats and efforts to strengthen civil society. Given recent developments, the United States understood how vital was the rule of law in ensuring justice and peace, he said, adding that his delegation was present to pledge its commitment in that regard and to seek the support of the United Nations.

He went on to say that his country stood by Governments that sought to serve people and advance the goal of human rights for all, including the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Underscoring the strong link between supporting democratic values and the rule of law, he said the latter was vital to development, particularly in many fragile States. "The greatest threat to development is weak rule of law," he declared, adding: "It's a top priority." The United States supported efforts led by the United Nations in that regard, in addition to pursuing its own programmes for granting legal aid to those who could not afford them, including for women and girls.

ENRIQUE CASTILLO-BARRANTES, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica, applauded the adoption of the Declaration, but said he had greater ambitions for its content. Costa Rica had nonetheless accepted the text as a basis upon which to build, both internationally and domestically. Hailing United Nations programmes to strengthen the rule of law, he said the Secretariat's Rule of Law Unit had been pivotal. However, little could be achieved to implement the rule of law without conviction on the part of States, he emphasized, affirming his country's own commitment and pointing to national laws that served as the cornerstone of its relations with other nations. The synergy between national and international rule of law must go beyond multilateral agreements, he said.

That synergy must focus on strengthening human dignity and democracy, and on developing inclusive, sustainable development, he continued, adding that his country gave constitutional rank to international human rights instruments. In 1973, Costa Rica had accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, he recalled, stressing the importance of abiding fully by its decisions. Democracy was the rationale that legitimized constitutional and legal norms, compliance with which should be equally applied to all, he said, stressing that no one should be above the law. Transparency was part of legality, while impunity made a mockery of the rule of law, and must not be allowed. For that reason, Costa Rica was profoundly committed to the International Criminal Court, he said, underscoring the need to focus on the universality of justice.

DIDIER REYNDEERS, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, said the rule of law was decisive in the three pillars of United Nations operations — peace and security, social and economic development, and human rights. On peace and security, he said the Syrian crisis was "an insult"

to the international community and stressed the need to respect international humanitarian law. Recalling that he had recently been confronted with the untold suffering experienced by the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he said the rule of law was vital in preventing mass atrocities.

There could be no sustainable development without the rule of law, he continued. Businesses could not invest in countries where it was weak because they could not function without it. Therefore, the rule of law had large social and economic implications in terms of costs. Belgium hoped the rule of law dimension would be reflected clearly in the post-2015 international development agenda so as to ensure equitable, inclusive and lasting economic growth, he said, pointing out that true rule of law was not confined to elections. The outcome document adopted today was not ambitious enough, he said, emphasizing, however, his delegation's commitment to fulfil the 17 commitments it set forth. On the struggle against impunity, he said his country attached great importance to the role of the International Criminal Court.

TITUS CORLATEAN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania, associating himself with the European Union, said respect for and promotion of the rule of law must guide all national and international endeavours. Highlighting his country's experiences, he recalled that over the past decades, Romania had engaged in steadfast endeavours to promote and consolidate rule of law principles, such as the supremacy of law, separation of powers, equality, accountability, legal certainty and transparency. It continued to focus on further implementation of those principles, especially in relation to social justice and sustainable development. Outlining four areas in which his country supported the rule of law, he said the first was in the fight against corruption, and the promotion of integrity through stronger legislation and the comprehensive 2012-2015 National Anti-Corruption Strategy.

Secondly, in the area of stability and predictability of the legal framework, Romania had adopted four new codes in criminal and civil law, with a view to modernizing the judicial process and enhancing legal certainty. Third, and perhaps most important, was in independence of the judiciary, he said, stressing that "independent and reliable justice is of utmost importance for the functioning of the State". Recent debates in Romania demonstrated full compliance with the decisions of the highest court, or of the Constitutional Court by all legal and political actors, he said. Fourth was ensuring transparency as one of the basic principles of the Government's 2012 programme. Reiterating Romania's firm support for the International Court of Justice, he emphasized the need to strengthen the role of international courts and tribunals, and announced his Government's intention to initiate an internal debate concerning the possibility of accepting the Court's compulsory jurisdiction.

ALI AHMED KARTI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sudan, said his country had undergone important legal and legislative changes that demonstrated its commitment to a culture of peace, and to resolving all thorny aspects in a peaceful manner, while respecting justice. In 2005, Sudan had adopted laws, in line with international norms and standards, with a view to creating a permanent constitution, in light of recent developments, including the separation of South Sudan. Through the new constitution, it sought to enshrine the values of freedom and the rule of law, while respecting international norms and conventions. Sudan had also enacted laws and launched programmes to combat the use of weapons, including nuclear weapons.

He went on to state that his country was trying to improve its legislative performance through strategies to improve traditional justice mechanisms, bearing in mind that more vulnerable people needed equal access to justice. Emphasizing the need to adhere to the principles of the Charter, especially the right of States to guarantee their sovereignty, he said the role of the International Criminal Court should be promoted on the basis of international sovereignty. Sudan reiterated the importance of reforming the United Nations and other international institutions, he said, endorsing statements by preceding speakers concerning the politicization of political justice as a way to sanction weak nations while ignoring violations committed by the strongest ones.

PASCAL CANFIN, Minister for Development of France, highlighted several key aspects relating to the rule of law, among them the importance of the normative legal framework, including the Geneva Conventions, the treaties against genocide and torture and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Stressing the central role played by the United Nations, he said his country had allied with Argentina on the most recent international instrument on forced disappearances. France supported the elimination of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination, and the universal abolition of the death penalty.

Regarding the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on the Post-2015 development agenda, he emphasized: "We should not prejudge the discussion, but the dimension of the rule of law must be included." He added that the rule of law enabled conditions for development. The Arab Spring was one example attesting to the link between the rule of law and development, he said, cautioning, however, against imposing a single model and stressing the importance of respecting diversity and pluralism in applying the rule of law. Finally, he said the fight against impunity was not a simple legal and moral responsibility, and underlined the importance of the International Criminal Court.

ALFREDO MORENO CHARME, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, said one of today's biggest challenges was strengthening the international legal order and the rule of law. The latter was essential for the peaceful coexistence of peoples, and for human rights and economic development. Its observance at the international level was crucial and indeed underpinned the United Nations Charter. In that context, respect for international treaties — including border treaties — was basic, and all parties must comply with them in good faith. The General Assembly had a role to play in urging States to conclude, accede to or ratify such international treaties. Of equal importance was the peaceful settlement of disputes, he said, citing, in particular, the International Court of Justice and other tribunals.

He went on to underline the importance of such special tribunals as the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea, the specialized tribunals and the International Criminal Court. From the point of view of preventing human rights abuses, the Court was a "milestone on the road to the abolition of impunities", he said. Recognizing the importance of the rule of law at the national level, he said that was a prerequisite for peace. Ultimately, international law could only function properly if the rule of law functioned properly at the domestic level, he said. The United Nations, and particularly the General Assembly, must continue to promote discussion, as well as ways and means for its Member States to ensure the rule of law. Chile would submit draft legislation by June 2013 on cooperation with the International Criminal Court, he said.

ZALMAI RASSOUL, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, said upholding the rule of law was an essential part of his country's transition from decades of war to a State working to address security, development and justice challenges. In past years, there had been progress in increasing justice-sector capacity and embedding it further in the national development strategy. Afghanistan had also taken wide-ranging steps to support an independent, more transparent, impartial and credible justice sector, including by adopting a Constitution that safeguarded the rights of all citizens, overhauling the national legal framework, and developing national action plans to restructure and build capacity in Government ministries, he said. To end impunity, the newly drafted Criminal Procedure Code had been presented to the National Assembly this year and was expected to be placed on the legislative agenda soon. Several working groups had been continuing efforts to revise the Penal Code and strengthen the protection of all citizens, particularly the rights of women and children, he said.

There had been considerable progress in broadening participation in education, he said, citing, in particular, higher education for judges and teachers, in order to create the tools needed to establish the rule of law as a solid basis for building sustainable peace. Security-sector reform, begun in 2001, had led to the formation of a national army and police that represented the country's diversity, he said. In line with the transition process, Afghanistan's national security forces had assumed increased responsibility for meeting the security needs of the country's citizens, he said. The Government had taken steps to create a fully transparent administration, most recently having issued a Presidential Decree in July that directed all ministries, agencies and independent directorates to undertake comprehensive reforms to defeat corruption and strengthen transparency. The President had instructed the Ministry of Justice to ensure that national legislation was fully in line with global commitments, he said. On the global level, Afghanistan was chairing intergovernmental negotiations, on Security Council reform, with a view to increasing representation on that organ, as well as its transparency and effectiveness.

MATHIAS MEINRAD CHIKAWA, Minister for Constitutional and Legal Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania, said his Government was committed to upholding and promoting the rule of law nationally, regionally and internationally. At the national level, the rule of law was at the heart of the social contract between the State and the individual, he said, adding that the nation's 1997 Constitution as having been its "magna carta" in providing guidance and measures to ensure adherence to the rule of law. The principle of equality before the law, accountability to the law and separation of powers were embodied in the Constitution. Describing international law and the rule of law as the pillars of the international system, he said that, at the international level, the United Republic of Tanzania had ratified a number of multilateral treaties that imposed extensive obligations on Member States. Regionally, it was among the countries that voluntarily subscribed to the African Peer Review Mechanism, having agreed to be reviewed on four thematic areas — democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, and economic development.

KAIRAT UMAROV, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, said: "In the time of major economic, social and political upheavals, the establishment of and respect for the rule of law take on paramount importance for the world community." The rule of law manifested itself primarily through strict adherence to its norms and principles in all areas of public life, and the United Nations should play a coordinating role in that respect. Kazakhstan was a champion of the rule of law, on both the national and international levels, he said, adding that his country had consistently called for strict compliance with universally accepted legal norms by all members of the international community. The rule of law ensured the predictability and legitimacy of actions taken by States, promoted their sovereign equality and provided the basis for a State's accountability to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction.

Over the past two decades, Kazakhstan had carried out reforms in virtually all areas of public and social life, he said. The Government had paid special attention to consolidating the State, developing applicable law and establishing an effective and transparent mechanism for the development of the individual and society, as well the improvement of living standards. The State also consistently adhered to the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which contained common standards to guide States. Kazakhstan was a party to more than 190 international treaties and conventions, primarily in the area of human rights. There was an ongoing effort to ensure public participation in the set-up and exercise of State power, and the State had been able to pursue the gradual devolution of socially important sectors and functions to civil society, he said.

AUDRONIUS AŽUBALIS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, pointing out that his country would seek non-permanent Security Council membership in 2014 and 2015, said that since the restoration of independence more than 20 years ago, Lithuania had had to overcome serious challenges while building a more democratic State based on rule of law principles. Today, it was ready to help the efforts of others to reform legal and administrative systems so as to enhance the rule of law. Lithuania had a legal tradition of complying with voluntarily accepted international obligations and respect for universally recognized principles and norms of international law, he said, adding that it expected the same from others.

In order to reinforce international commitments, such as legal accountability and strengthen global judicial mechanisms, Lithuania had decided to recognize the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, in line with paragraph 2, article 36 of that Court's Statute. The Government would also deposit the respective instruments of accession to the Optional Protocols to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations concerning the Compulsory Settlement of Disputes, during the 2012 Treaty Event. That would bring a major addition to the long list of specific treaties to which Lithuania was already a party. He called for wider international efforts to encourage recognition of the International Court of Justice's jurisdiction, and expressed his deep concern over the recent attacks on the United States and German diplomatic and consular offices in some countries. Lithuania strongly condemned the outrageous attack on the United States diplomatic facility in Benghazi, he stressed, describing such attacks as unacceptable from the perspective of the rule of law.

RAFIK BEN ABDESSALEM, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, said the Arab Spring revolutions that had begun in 2010 had erupted out of an overwhelming desire for change and a need to ensure justice and equality. They had reminded the international community of the need to bolster the rule of law and implement it broadly towards ensuring justice for all without discrimination. In the wake of those events, Tunisia had supported efforts to ensure cooperation between States and intergovernmental organizations so as to strengthen the application of the rule of law and relevant institutions. Having come through its own revolution, Tunisia intended to press ahead with efforts to lay the groundwork for a stable and democratic State, he said, adding that its motto was "do away with the past". The Government was working to ensure a State that, among other things, cherished the values of equity and responsibility before the law.

He said his country was committed to aligning national legislation with international legal norms characterized by non-discrimination and equity. Tunisia planned to enshrine constitutional equality between men and women, and was keen to consolidate other social gains. Following free, impartial and transparent elections, the Government, which derived its legitimacy from the Tunisian people, had established several historic institutions, and was committed to proceeding with a democratic transition, he said, stressing the independence of the judiciary. It would ensure the participation of national organizations, and was also committed to bolstering transitional-justice laws. "We will press ahead with our efforts," he said, acknowledging that certain social challenges might arise following the revolution. However, Tunisia would continue to cooperate with international and regional partners to ensure the aspirations of its citizens.

SAAD-EDDINE EL OTHMANI, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco, said the United Nations was the most appropriate framework for collective endeavours towards establishing an international commitment to peace and human rights. The rule of law was a fundamental pillar of the Organization's efforts towards preventing armed conflict and safeguarding international peace and security, in particular by promoting those values in post-conflict situations. Only a few days ago in Rabat, Morocco, the United Nations, Qatar and Norway had hosted a workshop on capacity-building in post-conflict situations, which had allowed participants to exchange views and experiences, he said.

Establishing a close link between the rule of law and human rights was critical, he said, adding that the international community was duty-bound to pursue efforts to confront border issues, such as transnational organized crime, on the basis of the principle of shared responsibility. Africa, in particular, had seen a resurgence of such threats, and efforts aimed at combating them would be to no avail unless they were based on strategic approaches that took national and cultural specificities into account. For its own part, Morocco had launched a national reform initiative that had been crowned with the adoption of a new constitution that reaffirmed the State's commitment to democracy and the separation of powers, as well as judicial independence and human rights, among other key principles.

WINSTON DOOKERAN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, said his country's Constitution recognized that the rule of law was at the heart of the social contract between States and their citizens. Individual rights and freedoms were protected and entrenched in the Constitution, while equality before the law and legal protection were safeguarded by the country's Supreme Law and buttressed by the various global human rights and other instruments to which Trinidad and Tobago was a State party. Its public and private institutions or entities were accountable to, and not above, the law and disputes were adjudicated by an independent judiciary that was free from executive or parliamentary influence and control.

He said his country recognized the interdependence between the rule of law at the national and international levels, adding that that was the cardinal principal on which his country's foreign relations were based. Trinidad and Tobago had developed productive relations with other countries in its subregion, hemisphere and further afield, by concluding several initiatives geared towards achieving socio-economic development, such as the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). He expressed support for the Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles, adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 2009 meeting in Trinidad and Tobago. As a founding member of the International Criminal Court, Trinidad and Tobago had enacted legislation to give full domestic effect to the provisions of the Rome Statute in order to prevent impunity for the perpetrators of the most heinous crimes, he said.

JOHN LUK JOK, Minister for Justice of South Sudan, said that after several decades of "bitter struggles" for peace, freedom, dignity and human rights, his country's independence had been achieved through the peaceful holding of a referendum. The people had chosen peace in gaining their independence from Khartoum, which had long sought to impose an Arab identity in what was now the State of South Sudan, a peace-loving member of the United Nations and the African Union. Committed to human dignity, the rule of law, and ensuring a stable home for its people, South Sudan recognized the importance of the rule of law at the international level, based on the promotion and implementation of international legal standards, he said.

Noting the efforts led by the Secretary-General, including those outlined in his recent report on the rule of law and transitional justice, he recalled that immediately after independence, his country had promulgated a transitional constitution that would govern the country through 2015. After that time, a new constitution would be drafted through a democratic and inclusive process. The rule of law was enshrined in the transitional Constitution, which also proclaimed that South Sudan had been founded on justice, equality and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also guaranteed judicial independence and included a "bill of rights" enshrining the rights of women and children, freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as voting rights.

As for ensuring implementation of those aims, he said, South Sudan had begun rebuilding its institutional framework "from the ground up", and aimed to integrate core global human rights instruments into domestic legislation. The Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs were cooperating on that effort. In spite of progress made, however, the country still needed the support provided by bilateral partners, the United Nations and other multilateral bodies, he emphasized. Building rule of law institutions was one of the most demanding tasks that the Government had undertaken, he said, expressing its willingness to accept United Nations support to help build rule of law mechanisms so that it could meet its Charter-based obligations.

KOICHIRO GEMBA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, said the rule of law was wisdom that mankind had acquired "after long years of trial and error". Its essence was the supremacy of law over power, ensuring that all power was exercised for the purpose of the people's survival and happiness. The idea of the rule of law could be found universally, because the survival of humankind was maintained by virtue of mutual love, discourse and mutual support. "Where there is society, there is law," he stressed. Briefly describing the history of rule of law philosophy in Asia, he said that while there might be cultural or historical differences between East and West, human society was the same.

Europe had made two great contributions towards establishing the rule of law as a universal political truth for mankind, he continued. The first had been the creation of democracy, a system by which to establish laws through discussions. The second had been the creation of international law, the application of the rule of law in inter-State relations. As representatives of the international community, Member States had the responsibility to promote the rule of law philosophy inherited from the past, he continued. However, it could not yet be claimed that the rule of law had been fully established in the international community today. There were many causes of tensions, such as international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and issues relating to national territory. Now, in particular, violence by the Syrian Government against innocent civilians could not be tolerated, he stressed. "We must strive to find ways to solve these issues peacefully, based on the rule of law."

VILLY SØVNDAL, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, said the international community's commitment to global peace, security and stability was evident in its focus on the rule of law despite today's

global challenges. As co-facilitator, with Mexico, of the Declaration adopted today, Denmark viewed the rule of law as a core value and principle of governance. From the perspective of a small State like Denmark, the rule of law provided a common framework for cross-border issues, helping to create a level playing field and prevent conflict. Emphasizing the necessity of a rights-based approach to development, he cited Denmark's new development strategy, "The Right to a Better Life", the aim of which was to fight poverty by ensuring human rights and economic growth. He also stressed the need for women, children and vulnerable groups to enjoy unhindered access to justice, decision-making resources and opportunities.

AURELIA FRICK, Foreign Minister of Liechtenstein, focused on the three pledges that her country had made in the context of the present meeting. The first was to continue to promote the ratification and implementation of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court regarding the crime of aggression. The importance of the 2010 Kampala compromise could not be overstated, she said, stressing that it was not just a technical matter to define the crime of aggression in international law. It was no small thing for States parties to agree on conditions under which the Court would in future be able to investigate and prosecute perpetrators. The Kampala compromise established a new mechanism to enforce Article 2, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Charter, which prohibited a State from using force against another State in any manner inconsistent with the Organization's purposes. It would, therefore, protect States from aggression by other States, she added.

The second pledge was to continue to promote the strengthening of political support for the Court, in particular by convening an informal network that it would launch in New York in two days' time. The network would go to the core of the dilemma with which the Court was confronted: it was a purely judicial institution, not designed and lacking the tools to "withstand political headwinds". That was particularly true in situations where investigations were mandated by the Security Council, and even more so when the Council failed to fully support the Court after it had referred a situation, she said. The third pledge was to submit to the Security Council suggestions on strengthening the United Nations sanctions system. Liechtenstein had been working with like-minded States to improve the listing and delisting process, and to bring some measure of due process to targeted sanctions. "Today, fair and clear procedures for listing and delisting are no longer an experiment," she said, emphasizing that it was now time for the Council to learn from the lessons of early developments in that area, and to apply them to other sanctions regimes, as well.

MARIA FERNANDA ESPINOSA, Minister of Heritage of Ecuador, said her country considered the rule of law to be a pillar of peace, justice and cooperation among nations. Ecuador recognized equality among all citizens and guaranteed access to the administration of justice. It was a signatory to the core human rights treaties at the heart of the rule of law and equitable international relations. She encouraged Member States to consider elaborating a universal declaration on the rights of nature, as her country had done in response to the ongoing impact of climate change. Ecuador respected the rights of all States that chose to pursue their own political systems, she added.

Reiterating the call by the international community for stepped up efforts to reform the Security Council so as to ensure democracy and transparency in its operations, she said that, as currently structured, that body was undemocratic, favouring the will of a few over that of others. She went on to say that sovereignty and territorial integrity were pillars of the concept of the rule of law, and as such, Ecuador rejected unilateral measures which contravened that concept. It was vital to strengthen regional rule of law mechanisms, she said, calling attention to the efforts of the Union of South American States in that regard. For its part, Ecuador had strengthened oversight bodies and all institutions concerned with the administration of justice, she said, adding that those dealing with the rights of indigenous people would be upgraded to meet international standards.

PIERRE MOUKOKO MBONJO, Minister for External Relations of Cameroon, welcomed the Secretary-General's report and said that today's debate was an opportunity to follow up internationally and nationally. In light of many political crises, particularly in Africa, the rule of law was a concern for nations emerging from conflict. While the rule of law was legitimate power, it should not be confused with the mere protection of individuals, he said, cautioning against losing sight of the fact that all people had the right to be able to eat, be clothed, seek shelter and live in safety.

The foremost function of the rule of law was to ensure that people were not deprived of those rights and to guarantee their fundamental dignity, he continued. Reform of the Security Council was vital, he said, as was strengthening the International Court of Justice, the world's main legal body. In Cameroon, the rule of law was linked to a thriving society. Democratic values were enshrined in socio-economic life. Citizens' participation at all levels of public business was important, he said, reaffirming the importance of peace and stability. Without the rule of law, there would be no dignity for all.

ARNOLD NICHOLSON, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica, said he was mindful that the rule of law was not restricted to the national level, as the foundation principles of justice, fairness, accountability and transparency were inextricably linked to its effective enforcement at the international level. To that end, a strengthened General Assembly and reform of the Security Council would

contribute in a more positive manner to advancement of the rule of law at the international level. In that regard, a more representative, efficient, accessible and transparent Council would further enhance both its effectiveness and its legitimacy.

Pointing out that his country faced the ever-growing challenge of armed violence linked to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and to the illegal drug trade, he said the threat posed by organized crime not only attacked Jamaica's sovereignty, but constrained its ability to protect civilians, a situation with immediate implications for its ability to uphold the rule of law. Thus, international cooperation and assistance was crucial in allowing countries to meet their own national objectives that were inherent in upholding the rule of law, including attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and enhanced cooperation with bilateral partners.

He went on to emphasize the need for technical assistance and capacity-building support in the area of strengthening judicial and legal systems, in particular the criminal justice system and legislative drafting. The increase and growing complexity of highly sophisticated illegal activities like cybercrime underscored the importance of compliance with international obligations, including those relating to terrorism, narco-trafficking and organized criminal enterprises, he said, calling for vital technical assistance to tackle those and other new challenges, such as those relating to financial crimes.

MOURAD MEDELICI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, said his country was prepared to participate in multilateral deliberations towards improving the rule of law. However, impunity, injustice and double standards hindered that goal and must be stopped. The Assembly must realign its prerogatives, and the Security Council must democratize, he said, adding that there must be more coordination between the United Nations and multilateral institutions.

Expressing regret that there had been no settlement of the Palestinian question, and that the Palestinian people remained unable to exercise their right to self-determination, he stressed that they must have that right, as must the people of Western Sahara. Additionally, rule of law could not be accompanied by hateful manifestations that bred Islamophobia, he said, calling for the creation of a mechanism under United Nations auspices to end such negative phenomena. He also called for urgent, effective solutions to face up to new transnational threats, saying his country was doing its part in that regard.

URI ROSENTHAL, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, said that, as an open economy, his country depended on a strong international order and, therefore, needed the rule of law at both the national and international level. Challenging impunity was a vital part of promoting the rule of law, and as such, it was important for perpetrators of crimes against humanity to be held accountable, regardless of their positions. Alluding to the recent sentencing of former president Charles Taylor of Liberia by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, he said that action showed that the international community had made great progress in that area.

While it was preferable to prosecute perpetrators inside the country in which the crimes were committed, it was incumbent upon the international community to take on the task if a State was unable or unwilling to do so, he said, adding in that regard that the Netherlands firmly supported the International Criminal Court, and calling on States that had not yet done so to ratify the Rome Statute. Similarly, the Netherlands supported the effective investigation and prosecution of international crimes at the national level, he said, adding that, together with Belgium and Slovenia, his country would launch an initiative for a new international instrument on mutual legal assistance and extradition. He also called for strengthening the International Court of Justice through the universal acceptance of compulsory jurisdiction.

WIVINE MUMBA MATIPA, Minister for Justice and Human Rights of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, denounced violations of territorial integrity, saying Rwanda's presence in her country should be condemned. Rwanda was not only violating the principle of territorial integrity, but also compromising the rule of law that had been established in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where human rights violations were increasing with the recruitment of children by armed groups, violence against women, as well as atrocities, war crimes and other crimes against humanity. That situation required joint efforts by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the international community, she said. The United Nations was the best institution to provide integrated assistance.

She said that, at the national level, her country had taken various measures, including the promulgation of its Constitution, and a host of reforms relating to human rights, capacity-building, combating impunity and fighting corruption. For instance, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had created a human rights liaison entity with a focus on women. A free general election had been conducted in 2006, and the Government had also taken measures against terrorism, transnational crimes, such as money-laundering, and gender-based violence. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had also launched a programme to compensate victims of sexual violence, and had activated a moratorium on the death penalty, she said, adding that those measures show her Government's commitment to the rule of law, in line with the United Nations Charter and international law.

DATO' SRI ANIFAH AMAN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, said States must honour international obligations in good faith, promote and protect human rights and effectively administer justice. Nationally, Malaysia continued to take measures to enhance and improve its laws, with the principles of democracy and justice in mind. Its new Security Offences Special Measure Act 2012, which had replaced the Internal Security Act 1960, showed that the Government was committed to ensuring that security was safeguarded and the people's rights upheld. The Government had also enacted the Peaceful Assembly Act 2011 to ensure adequate regulation of the right to peaceful assembly. However, laws could not be broken under the pretext of exercising fundamental rights, he warned, saying that went against the notion of the rule of law. States had a legal obligation to abide by binding international treaties, to which they must adhere in good faith, he said, adding that such obligations also extended to the national level.

Treaty obligations should be incorporated into domestic legislation, and Malaysia was ensuring domestic compliance with international treaties, he continued. To strengthen the rule of law internationally, it was necessary to commit to an international order based on international law, and the international community must enforce it in a non-selective manner, he stressed. All States must refrain from the threat or use of force and settle disputes peacefully. They must respect the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity and non-interference. Impunity must be ended and perpetrators must be held to account. The inclusion of strong language on ending impunity and holding those responsible to account was very relevant, but in order to work, it must be in conformity with international law and United Nations decisions, he said, urging the Organization to make a decision on non-compliance and enforce it across the board. No one should be above the law, and in situations involving crimes, such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, serious and other gross violations of global humanitarian and human rights law, use of the veto should be avoided in the Security Council.

KIM SUNG-HWAN, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea, said that despite divergent views, the rule of law should be deeply rooted in justice, morality, territorial integrity and sovereignty. "Without due consideration of these elements, the rule of law can be abused as a pretext for the strong to impose their will upon the weak," he cautioned. Emphasizing his country's support for full compliance with and development of international law, he pointed out its participation in various international legal bodies, such as the International Law Commission, International Criminal Court and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, as well as several rule of law initiatives. He also highlighted the importance of the rule of law to democracy and sustainable development, attributing his country's ability to achieve a "mature democracy, economic development and enhancement of human rights in less than half a century" to its steadfast commitment to the rule of law. Although higher education and an efficient public sector were key factors in the rule of law "taking deep root" within society, respect for the rule of law was in turn highly instrumental in creating an environment in which entrepreneurship could flourish.

OLEKSANDR LAVRYNOVYCH, Minister for Justice of Ukraine, said that unfortunately, his Government had become a frequent object of criticism by some international organizations and Governments in respect of compliance with the rule of law. In the last few years, however, it had taken a number of steps towards establishing guarantees relating to the rule of law in different areas, including public administration reform, judicial reform, large-scale anti-corruption programmes and comprehensive criminal procedure reform, which had been a "crucial challenge" for years.

Those steps were aimed at achieving maximal openness and transparency in the decision-making process and were reflected not only in national legislative initiatives, but also in Ukraine's voluntary international commitments. It had participated in the international initiative "Open Government Partnership", and reaffirmed its commitment in the areas of public administration, equal access to justice for all, the fight against corruption and involving civil society in defining and implementing State policy. Ukraine highly appreciated the efforts and active participation of the United Nations in dealing with a wide range of global challenges, including climate change, terrorism, human rights protection, and the settlement of armed conflict, each of which was closely linked to the rule of law. The Organization should remain the centre of international efforts in that regard, he said.

ALI BIN FAHAD AL-HAJRI, Minister of State for Political Affairs of Qatar, said there was no doubt that the superiority of the law over the State was linked to respect for citizens' rights and freedoms. Qatar's Constitution was keen on imposing restrictions on both the legislative and executive authorities in order to maintain various public rights and freedoms, he said, adding that the restrictions would prevent the authorities from encroaching upon or interfering with protected rights and freedoms.

Stressing the need to use today's meeting to restore confidence in the rule of law, especially at the international level, he said it was not easy to trust the rule of law in an international community ruled by force and conflicting interests. Qatar always strove to uphold the law, equality under the law, accountability before the law, and justice in the application of the law, he added. The Government had established the Commission for Administrative Control and Transparency, which was fully empowered and provided with all

the necessary resources. In addition, Doha had hosted the Fourth United Nations Conference against Corruption, he said, adding that a rule of law and anti-corruption centre had been opened in that city.

RICHARD MARLES, Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs of Australia, said his country's commitment to the rule of law underpinned its social stability and prosperity. The entire nation was based on a universal idea of equality and opportunity. Over the years, Australia had worked to strengthen the rule of law in conflict-affected societies. Since 1947, some 65,000 Australians had served in more than 50 United Nations and other multilateral peace and security operations, he said. Through successful work in its own region, Australia had sought to help neighbours in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste build a lasting and enforceable rule of law culture.

As Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth of Nations, Australia recognized the strong commitment of all Commonwealth countries to the rule of law as a core value, he said. There had been practical progress towards the rule of law in terms of its link to security, development and human rights. Delivering training for courts, correctional services, police and other justice agencies, as well as ensuring that civilian populations had free, easy access to legal information that helped secure their rights should not be taken for granted. There was a need for sustained commitments and the sharing of hard-won lessons.

He went on to say that his country was supporting such efforts through the Peacebuilding Commission, including as part of the Burundi, Sierra Leone and Liberia configurations. Support for the rule of law was a central part of Australia's development assistance programme, and the country had given more than \$300 million this year to help strengthen the rule of law in developing countries. By 2016, it would have had trained 14,000 law and justice officials. Australia recognized that the rule of law in itself was vital for extending freedom, expanding development, preventing conflict and building peace, he said.

DOMINIQUE MAMBERTI, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, said that prior to creating procedures on the rule of law, it must be remembered that the "ultimate and essential goal of all law is to promote and guarantee the dignity of the human person". In addition, the rule of law recognized the equality of the rights of nations, as well as respect for treaties and other sources of international law, consistent with the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Recalling the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, he cautioned against uncritical adherence to laws and rules that could result in abuse of the rights of individuals. He also warned against the susceptibility of law to multiple applications and interpretations that could render it contradictory or uncertain.

Faith in the dignity of the human being was fundamental to understanding the rights codified in the founding documents of the United Nations, he continued. "The right to life of every human being — in all stages of biological development, from conception until natural death — [must] be considered and protected as an absolute and inalienable value, prior to any State's existence, to any social grouping, independent of any official recognition." All other fundamental human rights were connected to human dignity and thus to the rule of law, including the right to be a father or mother, the right to establish and raise a family, the right to grow up and to be educated in a natural family, the right of parents to educate their children, the right to work and to equitable redistribution of wealth generated, the right to culture, to freedom of thoughts and to freedom of conscience. There was also freedom of religion because the religious dimension was an essential part of each person and to some degree was identifiable with his or her very liberty.

HRVOJE SIKIRIC, Chair, United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), said that, as the Organization's core entity in the field of commercial law, the Commission viewed today's event as providing a unique opportunity to consider the rule of law from a perspective not commonly associated with it — a commercial and trade point of view. Its work on modernizing and harmonizing international commercial and trade law was of key importance to the conduct of commercial activity, which in turn assisted economic development. Any outcome document from today's meeting should refer to UNCITRAL's work and recognize its contribution to promoting the rule of law in the economic field. Recognizing that business practices were constantly evolving in a rapidly changing world, States must develop the capacity to modernize commercial laws in response to those practices, and also to establish legal environments that would support and enable trade and commerce. Legislative reforms must be accompanied by appropriate institutional reforms.

IRENE KHAN, Director-General, International Development Law Organization, said the Declaration adopted today was significant and timely. There was a global crisis in the rule of law that was reflected in the dangerous deficit of trust in public institutions. Restoring people's confidence in justice systems was an enormous challenge. While many countries appreciated the need to build effective legal systems, they lacked the necessary resources and capacity, she said, noting that the level of aid was nowhere near the level of demand. International aid must be significantly expanded.

Institutions of law and justice must be made to work for people, she continued, underlining the importance of engaging local authorities, as well as civil society. The focus must be on the end-users of justice, and the best results came when legal and institutional reforms were tailored to meet local needs and

firmly anchored in international standards and values. Fairness, impartiality, transparency, integrity and accountability could be interpreted in different ways by different cultures, she said. Reform initiatives must tackle inequity in the formal system, in a way that did not undermine local ownership. Legal reform alone would not produce justice for women, she warned, stressing that policy initiatives and political will were needed.

LOUISE ARBOUR, President and Chief Executive Officer, International Crisis Group, noted that in their eagerness to impose the rule of law, people often confused three competing visions of it — institutional, concerned mostly with law enforcement; procedural, which referred to rule by laws that must be enforced properly and in a non-discriminatory way; and substantive, which encompassed many human rights requirements and reflected equality. Under the latter vision, not only was everyone equal before the law, they were also entitled to equal protection and benefit.

She said only such an understanding of the rule of law would prohibit enactment of a law to regulate the use of torture, or to deprive women of the right to vote, for example. Under that substantive understanding, rules served a higher purpose than the mere orderly regulation of human conduct. Laws must also enhance liberty, security and equality, and strive to attain a “perfect coincidence” between law and justice, she emphasized, warning that the endorsement of “law and order” and the “rule by law” versions ran the risk of subverting its purpose entirely. The robust enforcement of laws that violated fundamental human rights could entrench authoritarianism and, worse, give them the veneer of respectability associated with respect for the rule of law, she pointed out.

CHERIF BASSIOUNI, President, International Institute of Higher Studies in Criminal Science, called on the United Nations to build capacity within its own system, emphasizing that the Organization must avoid generality and ambiguity in its rule of law activities. The diffusion of those activities across the United Nations system presented a challenge and limited the effectiveness of their implementation. In that regard, he proposed the establishment of a special council in the Secretariat to coordinate rule of law activities, including funding and administration, across the system. It should consist of officials selected from various entities dealing with the rule of law, and tap the experience of non-governmental organizations. The rule of law had achieved a high level of recognition, as evidenced by the number of statements made in today's meeting, he said. With the world's people suffering hunger, disease and impunity in the face of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture, rape, human trafficking and other criminal

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