UNDP Annual Meeting on

Rule of Law and Human Rights

Securing Development: Advancing Rule of Law, Human Rights and Peace in a Fragmented World

2-4 June 2026 | New York / Hybrid

Context and Evolving Challenges

The global landscape for the rule of law and security, human rights, local action and peacebuilding is currently facing unprecedented strain driven by rising geopolitical tensions, protracted conflicts, and democratic backsliding. Compounding these crises is a significant gap in financial support: in 2025 ODA fell by 23%, marking the largest annual decline ever recorded.[1] Shifting donor priorities and a decline in international solidarity are actively diverting crucial resources away from foundational governance and institution-building.

Consequently, human development is under severe pressure, with 1.1 billion people living in multidimensional poverty[2] and nearly 40 percent of the global population residing in fragile or conflict-affected contexts[3]. OECD projections warn that up to 86 percent of the extreme poor could be living in fragile settings by 2030[4], while the rule of law has already declined globally for seven consecutive years[5]. At the same time, global insecurity is intensifying, highlighted by world military expenditures surging to USD 2.7 trillion in 2024, creating a drastic imbalance between military spending and investments in human security[6].

Development cannot take root without security, and security cannot be sustained without the rule of law and governance.

To combat the massive economic and social costs of violent conflict—estimated at $19 trillion globally[7]—there must be an urgent shift toward highly cost-effective prevention. Indeed, investments in prevention can yield returns of $26 to $103 for every $1 spent, making prevention far more cost-effective than responding after conflict erupts.[8]

This emphasis on prevention is reflected in the Pact for the Future, UN80 initiative, the resolutions that emanated from the Peacebuilding Architecture Review[9], as well as the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, which all underscore the importance of addressing root causes of conflict and investing in peaceful, inclusive societies.

In this context, development cannot take root without security, and security cannot be sustained without the rule of law and governance. Interventions grounded in local realities are essential to translating global rule of law and human rights commitments into tangible, community-level impact.

Rule of Law and Security, Human Rights, Local Action and Peacebuilding as Drivers of Development

Strengthening rule of law and security, human rights, local action and peacebuilding is central to building safe, resilient, and inclusive societies. Effective, accountable, and people-centred institutions are essential to preventing conflict, reducing violence, and fostering trust. These institutions must be anchored at the local level, where state–society interactions are most immediate and visible.

UNDP's Global Programme on Rule of Law, Human Rights and Justice for Peace, Security and Development—operating in over 100 countries and territories—demonstrates this nexus in practice.

Justice, human rights and accountability are fundamental to breaking cycles of violence. Impunity for serious crimes undermines peacebuilding and fuels instability, while access to justice remains out of reach for many, especially in fragile contexts. Community-driven justice initiatives, mobile courts, and locally led transitional justice processes have demonstrated that accountability can be tangible, timely, and meaningful for affected populations.

Security and development are closely linked; instability disrupts growth, governance, and social cohesion. Where communities feel insure, unsafe and security institutions lack accountability, development remains fragile, and public mistrust grows. UNDP prioritizes the security–development nexus, helping countries strengthen institutions, enhance oversight, expand justice, and promote safe communities through integrated support and partnership. UNDP's people-centred approach to justice and security is a system-wide shift that centers people's rights, needs and lived experiences, aiming to make justice and security systems accessible, responsive, inclusive and accountable—through engagement with formal, informal and hybrid actors, and with attention to power, politics and social exclusion. This includes strengthening local governance systems such as municipal institutions, community structures, and subnational authorities, as critical actors in prevention, service delivery, and trust-building, particularly in fragile and crisis-affected settings.

Human rights are both a foundation for stability and a crucial tool for conflict prevention. Evidence shows that countries with sustained human rights violations are significantly more prone to violent conflict: between 2000 and 2020, 80% of civil wars occurred in countries with widespread rights abuses.[10] Protecting civic freedoms, ensuring accountability for abuses, and enabling access to justice can reduce grievances that would otherwise escalate into violence. By embedding human rights into development and security interventions, UNDP helps strengthen resilience, mitigate drivers of instability, and support inclusive governance as a pathway to sustainable peace.

Business operations can be the root cause of conflict, exacerbate hostilities, or become peace engines. Instilling conflict sensitivity in the work of the private sector helps turn vicious cycles where both peace and profits are lost into a virtuous cycle that simultaneously enhance stability and opportunities for greater prosperity across value chains.

Local action is a cornerstone of effective governance and rule of law interventions, as it brings together local governance, community engagement, and area-based development to deliver integrated solutions tailored to specific contexts. By focusing on defined geographies, whether municipalities, cities, or conflict-affected regions, local action programming enables coordinated responses across justice, security, livelihoods, and basic services. This approach strengthens the interface between institutions and communities, builds trust, and addresses the root causes of fragility and exclusion. Critically, it ensures that national policies are translated into tangible outcomes, empowering local actors as agents of prevention, resilience, and sustainable peace.

Gender equality is essential to sustainable peace, justice, and development. Women and girls disproportionately bear the costs of conflict and insecurity, while their meaningful participation strengthens conflict prevention, accountability, and social cohesion. Evidence shows that peace agreements with

women's participation are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.[11] Integrating gender-responsive approaches into justice, security, and human rights programming ensures that interventions are inclusive, address structural inequalities, and enhance resilience in communities.

Reimagining Partnerships in a Changing Development Landscape

Addressing complex challenges requires broader and more inclusive partnerships.

Reimagining partnerships in a changing development landscape requires a shift from transactional cooperation to transformational, locally anchored alliances that connect rule of law and security, human rights, local action and peacebuilding.

Today's challenges, protracted crises, rising inequalities, and declining trust in institutions, demand that we move beyond siloed approaches and invest in integrated solutions that operate across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. This means partnering not only with national governments, but with local authorities, community actors, civil society, and the private sector, recognizing that resilience and legitimacy are built closest to people.

By strengthening people-centred justice and security systems, and embedding human rights across all interventions, these partnerships can help prevent conflict, reduce violence, and rebuild trust between institutions and communities.

Private sector engagement is a critical dimension of promoting rule of law, human rights, and inclusive development. By partnering with businesses and supporting their human rights due diligence efforts, UNDP supports responsible practices, and investments that reinforce local governance and community resilience. Collaborations with the private sector—from technology firms to local enterprises—enable innovative solutions, expand resources, and amplify the impact of justice and security interventions while ensuring accountability and respect for human rights.

At the same time, partnerships must evolve to better enable local action and area-based approaches, ensuring that global commitments translate into tangible results on the ground. This includes shifting financing and decision-making closer to local actors and supporting inclusive governance systems that reflect the needs of diverse communities, especially women and marginalized groups.

Reimagined partnerships should also leverage innovation, data, digital technologies, and blended finance to scale impact, while maintaining a clear focus on accountability and equity. In doing so, UNDP and its partners can help build governance systems that are not only effective, but also inclusive, adaptive, and resilient, capable of sustaining peace and advancing development in an increasingly complex world.

Looking Ahead: The Global Programme on Rule of Law, Human Rights and Justice for Peace, Security and Development, Phase V

To address today's complex crises, the Rule of Law, Security, and Human Rights team merged with other thematic teams in September 2024 to form the Governance, Rule of Law, and Peacebuilding Hub (GRP Hub), jointly led by the Crisis Bureau and Bureau for Policy and Programme Support. The Global Programme now integrates Peacebuilding and Local Action portfolios, alongside Rule of Law, Security, Human Rights and Business and Human Rights, enabling a holistic, multidisciplinary approach, with Phase V supported by a dedicated team and resources.

Launched by UNDP in 2008, the Global Programme has become the UN system's primary mechanism for advancing inclusive people-centred justice, security, and human rights, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Phase IV (2022–2025) delivered results in over 100 countries, including: expanding access to justice in 65 contexts; strengthening mechanisms to address conflict-related and sexual and gender-based violence in 39 contexts; supporting human rights institutions in 67 contexts; enhancing oversight

and accountability for justice and security in 49 contexts; providing human rights due diligence support for businesses in 6753 contexts; advancing transitional justice in 23 contexts; developing 265 people-centred justice and security policies, services and solutions; facilitating 156 community dialogue processes for conflict prevention; and reaching over two million people through legal aid. The Global Programme also built a robust evidence base – adopting nearly 200 new monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) tools and 230 learning mechanisms, convening over 100 policy discussions and contributing to 260 more, and producing 26 global knowledge products – consolidating its role as a trusted platform for policy, programming, and technical support.

Phase V (2026–2029) builds on these achievements, deepening the Programme's strategic role as a systems-level enabler and partner of choice, while promoting innovation and adaptive programming focused on those furthest left behind.

Phase V of UNDP's Global Programme will prioritize:

- Integrated approaches linking security, justice, human rights, local governance, peace and development.
- Systems transformation approach, emphasizing context-specific, rights-based approaches, particularly in fragile, politically sensitive, or rapidly shifting environments.
- Addressing the structural drivers of insecurity, violence, and inequality with enhanced support for adaptive programming, risk-informed decision making and locally-led participatory approaches.
- Expanded partnerships, including with the private sector, and innovative financing.

Annual Meeting Objectives

The 2026 Annual Meeting will serve as a critical platform to:

- Reflect on impact, lessons learned and close out of Phase IV of UNDP's Global Programme for Strengthening the Rule of Law, Human Rights, Justice and Security for Sustainable Peace and Development.
- Introduce phase V of the Global Programme, which has integrated conflict prevention, peacebuilding and local action into the programmatic framework.
- Harness collective intelligence to review the future of security, conflict prevention, local governance and justice programming in the securing development narrative.
- Anticipate the future evolutions of the rule of law, local governance, peacebuilding, and human rights field, and devise strategies, approaches and partnership modalities that can best mitigate risks and maximize impact.
- Discuss the role of non-traditional stakeholders including the private sector and explore the best ways to engage with new partners.
- Build and strengthen partnerships across the Global Programme team, partners, champions and friends.

Format and Participation

The 2026 Annual Meeting will take place over three days, from 2 to 4 June 2026 in a hybrid format. The in-person segment will be held in New York, with the option of remote participation. Interpretation in Arabic, French and Spanish will be provided.

UNDP is committed to providing a space for frank conversations, ensuring that the dialogue remains solution driven. The goal is to collectively define what is achievable and identify the best pathways to reaching our shared objectives. Alongside these discussions, select public sessions will showcase best practices, case studies, and innovative approaches to tackling today's global challenges.

Draft Agenda

DAY 1

Tuesday | 2 June 2026

08:00-09:00	Breakfast and registration
09:00-10:30	High-Level Opening Session *Opening by UNDP Administrator Alexander De Croo*
10:30-11:00	Coffee break
11:00-12:30	PLENARY SESSION 1 Connecting Communities to National Security: A People-Centred Pathway to Sustainable Development
12:30-13:30	Lunch for in-person participants
13:30-15:00	Tentative Country Focused Discussions TBC
17:00-19:30	In-person networking reception (location TBC)

DAY 2

Wednesday | 3 June 2026

08:00- 08:30	Breakfast and registration
08:30-10:00	PLENARY SESSION 2 Human Rights for Better Security: Risk-Informed Engagement, Accountability and Prevention
10:00-10:30	Coffee break
10:30-12:00	PLENARY SESSION 3 Business is Never Neutral: Private Sector Dilemmas in Conflict and Fragile Contexts
12:00-13:00	Lunch for in-person participants
13:00-14:30	PLENARY 4 Sustaining Peace During UN Mission Transitions: Why Gender Equality Matters

DAY 3

Thursday | 4 June 2026

9:00-10:00	*Closed session – By invitation only* Rule of Law, Security and Human Rights Partners Advisory Group Meeting
10:15-11:45	*Closed session – By invitation only* Rule of Law, Security and Human Rights Partners Advisory Group Meeting
11:45-12:45	Lunch for Partners Advisory Group

REFERENCES

1 OECD, A historic decline in foreign aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA data
2 UNDP, Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2024
3 UNDP, Human Development Report Data Center
4 OECD, States of Fragility
5 World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2024
6 SIPRI, Trends in World Military Expenditure 2024
7 Institute for Economics & Peace, Global Peace Index 2024
8 International Monetary Fund (2025).
9 General Assembly Resolution 80/11, 26 November 2025 and Security Council Resolution 2805, 26 November 2025. 2025 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture | PEACEBUILDING
10 CIVICUS Monitor / UCDP, State of Human Rights and Conflict 2022; UNDP, Human Development Report 2023, Box 6.3
11 UN Women, Women's Participation in Peace Processes and Lasting Peace 2020; UNDP, Gender and Human Development Report 2023