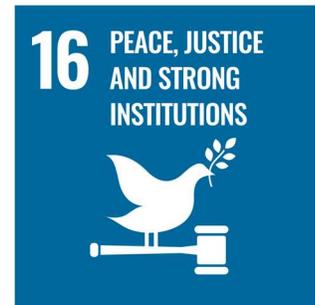


8th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

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Virtual

Report of Roundtable on SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions



1. **Main moderator:** Cynthia Veliko, Regional Representative, OHCHR Regional Office for South East Asia
2. **Moderator for thematic working groups, if any:** David Murphy (OHCHR), Georgina Lloyd (UNEP), Romchat Wachirarattanakornkul (OHCHR), Sean Lees (UNDP), Gunilla Backman (UNFPA), Lucio Valerio Sarandrea (UNICEF), Tanja B. Sejersen (ESCAP), Patrick Duong (UNDP) and Nicholas Booth (UNDP).
3. **Rapporteur:** Huda Ali Shareef, Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Government of Maldives

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1. **Policy recommendations on priority for action to make further progress on SDG 16 in Asia and the Pacific.**

The roundtable on Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) made several recommendations on the Goal for Asia and the Pacific:

1. **Uphold fundamental freedoms and ensure public access to information.** With civic space in the region continuing to shrink and a growing range of online restrictions and surveillance in place, the accountability of States in ensuring public and safe access to information and freedom of expression while combating disinformation remains a priority for the region. It is therefore important to protect those most at risk, namely, journalists, media workers, human rights, and environmental defenders

with a particular focus on youth and indigenous people, by strengthening legislative and institutional safeguards and ensuring accountability for human rights violations. Building awareness of the critical situation requires enhanced monitoring at country-level, including collecting disaggregated data. Related legislation must meet international human rights standards, and effective implementation of legislation on access to information is required.

2. **Equal access to justice for all during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.** Barriers to equal access to justice increased with the onset of the pandemic and led to the suspension of court hearings and further restricted access to legal assistance and legal aid services. Many judiciaries in the region reacted quickly in introducing, or expanding, the ability to hold court hearings online and both state and civil society legal aid providers in many countries developed applications and systems for remote access to legal advice, especially to assist the increasing number of survivors of gender-based violence. Innovations on e-justice or digital justice can increase access to justice in the region. However, particular attention must be paid to accessibility of digital technologies for all, including persons with disabilities, and to the technical, economic, and social constraints which exist. More broadly, international standards relating to human rights and rule of law, including space for traditional justice mechanisms, must be upheld by Member States.
3. **Strengthen environmental rule of law and protect environmental defenders to build back better from COVID-19.** Environmental rule of law must be strengthened through effective legal frameworks, strong institutions, access to information and justice in environmental matters, recognizing and addressing the digital divide, and a by providing safe enabling environment for environmental human rights defenders, including indigenous peoples, children, youth and local communities, in order to sustainably recover from COVID-19, in order to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and meet globally agreed environmental commitments.
4. **Address discrimination and stigma.** Public communication and public support campaigns that promote non-violence and rejects xenophobia, racism and all forms of intolerance, play a key role in countering the alarming spike in intolerance and hate speech that has fueled longstanding challenges with discrimination and stigma including on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. At the same time, there is a need for increased efforts to change negative social norms and practices. As recalled in the UN Plan of Action on Hate Speech and Guidance Note on Addressing and Countering COVID-19-related Hate Speech, freedom of expression and the right to information play a central role in countering hate speech. A whole of society approach is required to proactively address on and offline misinformation networks, ensuring that government, civil society, private sector and vulnerable populations work together to inform policies and programming that balances freedom of expression with the need to curb mis/disinformation.
5. **Improve the collection and quality of data, particularly disaggregated data.** Recognizing the centrality of SDG16 as an enabler and accelerator for the 2030 Agenda, further efforts are required to strengthen national capacities for data collection, analysis and data prioritization. As with many other SDGs it is also urgent to address the lack of data disaggregated by sex, race, colour, age, language, religion, national, ethnic or social origin, disability, migration or other status.
6. **Increase efforts to eliminate gender-based violence and violence against children.** Increased efforts are needed to eliminate gender-based violence and violence against children and women, including by addressing drivers, such as discrimination, harmful social norms and practices as well as gender

stereotypes with a view to interrupt the intergenerational cycle of the phenomenon. It is also important to repeal discriminatory laws and policies that facilitate gender-based violence and violence against children and women; to strengthen laws, policies, and national action plans on eliminating gender-based violence and violence against children and women, to increase the capacity of frontline law enforcement and justice actors on women's and children's access to justice, and of the social service workforce, and to take additional measures for persons at heightened risk of violence, such as women and girls with disabilities, indigenous women and LGBTIQ persons.

- 7. Strengthen responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels.** Further efforts to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of all, especially women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, marginalized communities, and those left behind, in decision-making at all levels and in all fields of sustainable development. This includes commitments to achieving diversity, gender parity and equitable representation in decision-making bodies in support of SDG 16, as well as SDG 5, SDG 10, core international human rights instruments and the Women, Peace & Security and Youth, Peace & Security agendas, through promotion of social innovation and digital platforms, and comprehensive understanding of cultural contexts. Amendments to electoral codes, and the introduction of temporary special measures have effectively been used to close the gender gap and increase diversity of representation and similar measures should be adopted to strengthen political participation of other under-represented groups. Available tools for participant should be used, such as Citizen Oversight of Procurement and Local Budget Mechanisms, SDG Localization, Environmental Impacts Assessments, and Citizen Score-Cards.
- 8. Strengthen efforts towards providing a legal identity for all through universal civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS).** Accurate, complete and timely vital statistics from civil registration records are critical for the region in order to recover from the current crisis and monitor progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Efforts need to be accelerated towards universal registration of births, deaths and other vital events, as agreed in the Ministerial Declaration to 'Get Every One in the Picture' in Asia and the Pacific, in order to achieve legal identity for all through a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management. We must increase our attention on hard-to-reach and marginalized groups to ensure registration for all, including for unregistered adults, in alignment with the promise to Leave No One Behind in recognition of the increased need for individuals to prove their identity