

2025 Warsaw Principles for the Rule of Law

Warsaw, Poland, 26 June 2025

We, representatives of public institutions, international and regional organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector, gathered in Warsaw for the 2025 World Justice Forum “*Standing Up for the Rule of Law*”, hosted by the World Justice Project (WJP) in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice of Poland, as part of Poland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In light of the growing threats posed by the global rule of law recession and the expansion of authoritarianism, we discussed strategies to reverse these trends and strengthen the oversight and accountability ecosystem, safeguard civic space to ensure the effective enjoyment of fundamental rights and uphold the principle that those who govern are bound by the law. Recognizing that this accountability ecosystem is essential to the rule of law, we launched the **2025 Warsaw Principles for the Rule of Law**.

- **Reaffirming the rule of law as a universal and foundational principle**, comprising a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitments that deliver accountability, just laws, open government, and accessible, impartial justice;
- **Recognizing that the rule of law is the bedrock of communities grounded in justice, opportunity, health, and peace**, underpinning sustainable development, accountable government, and the respect and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- **Recalling that the rule of law has been enshrined in key instruments of the international legal order**, including the Charter of the United Nations, the International Bill of Human Rights, the Statute of the Council of Europe, the Treaty on European Union, the Inter-American Democratic Charter, the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and relevant texts of the Arab League, among others;
- **Recognizing that the rule of law is a foundational element that supports progress and accountability across multiple domains**, including security, public health, environmental protection, economic, socio-political, and human development, migration, and technological innovation;
- **Emphasizing the need for a strong, bottom-up and context-responsive rule of law culture**, grounded in universal principles, to ensure that legal norms are effectively implemented, broadly respected, and serve as a check on arbitrary power. This requires fostering public trust in justice institutions, strengthening civic engagement, ensuring equal access to justice, and upholding the independence and integrity of the oversight and accountability bodies;
- **Expressing deep concern over the continuing global decline of the rule of law**, marked by the erosion of institutional checks and balances, interference with judicial independence, shrinking civic space, threats to civil society, independent media, and legal professionals, and persistent barriers to equal access to justice;
- **Noting the wide range of tools available to strengthen the rule of law and measure progress**, including international legal standards, recommendations, monitoring instruments, action plans,

and indicators from the Council of Europe, United Nations, European Union, World Bank, OECD, OSCE, World Economic Forum, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and the World Justice Project, alongside independent assessments, contributions from civil society, academia, and the legal profession, as well as lessons learned and effective strategies for advancing and defending the rule of law across different contexts;

- **Reaffirming our shared commitment to strengthen and advance the rule of law at all times**, as an essential and non-derogable pillar of the international order, irrespective of national context or political climate;
- **Noting the constructive presentations, discussions, and exchanges during this Forum, and the broad consensus among participants on the need to advance cooperation** across sectors and jurisdictions in strengthening the rule of law at the local, national, regional, and global levels;
- **Recognizing the vital role of collaboration in advancing the rule of law**, and the importance of leveraging the complementary strengths and expertise of governments, civil society, the private sector, and international collaborators to achieve greater impact through shared efforts and collective action.

We hereby affirm the following Warsaw Principles for the Rule of Law,

Principle 1: “Strengthen institutional checks and balances to maintain the separation of powers, provide appropriate oversight, and ensure accountability”

Recent global trends reveal a troubling erosion of checks on executive power, with the 2024 *WJP Rule of Law Index*[®] reporting weakened constraints on government authority in over half of the countries assessed. This decline underscores the urgent need to strengthen legal and institutional safeguards against executive overreach and to bolster the integrity and effectiveness of key oversight institutions in order to prevent and react to abuse.

To address these challenges, we commit to:

- Strengthen the independence, technical capacity, and resources of legislative bodies to effectively oversee executive actions, scrutinize public spending, and hold government accountable through open, pluralistic, participatory, and evidence-based processes.
- Safeguard the independence and integrity of judiciaries and prosecutors, ensuring they have the authority, independence, protections, and resources to adjudicate disputes, enforce the law impartially, and prosecute corruption and abuse of power without political interference.
- Guarantee the independence of lawyers and the legal profession as a cornerstone of the separation of powers, enabling legal professionals to hold authorities accountable, defend those who challenge power, and protect the legal space in which civil society operates, recognizing that without such independence, democratic processes risk erosion and the protection of rights becomes fragile.
- Reinforce the operational independence, technical capacity, and inter-institutional coordination of oversight institutions – such as national human rights institutions (NHRIs), anti-corruption agencies, supreme audit institutions, and ombuds offices – to monitor government performance, investigate

misconduct, and ensure that findings lead to corrective actions and public accountability. Support a professional, merit-based civil service committed to integrity and public service values.

Principle 2: “Safeguarding the peaceful and lawful transfer of power through open, free, and fair elections or other constitutionally established procedures, in full accordance with national legal frameworks”

A peaceful and lawful transfer of power is essential for political stability, institutional legitimacy, and public trust. Open and credible transitions prevent power concentration and ensure government accountability through institutional means. Upholding constitutional rules in these processes strengthens checks and balances and reinforces the rule of law.

To uphold this principle, we commit to:

- Ensure openness in processes governing the transfer of power and promote measures to counter disinformation, misinformation, and manipulation that undermine public trust in the institutions responsible for overseeing these processes, distort public discourse, erode confidence in the rule of law, and delegitimize the role of political opposition.
- Uphold the legitimacy of electoral outcomes by ensuring strict adherence to constitutional rules and institutional mandates, while fostering broad public acceptance of election results, safeguarding the rights of political opposition to participate freely and safely, and ensuring the peaceful transition of power.
- Safeguard the processes governing the transfer of power from undue interference, intimidation, and attempts to undermine the lawful transfer of power by strengthening legal protections, ensuring credible judicial oversight and electoral justice, securing the independence of electoral and oversight bodies, preventing unjustified restrictions on voting rights, political participation, and opposition activities, and ensuring accountability for anti-democratic actions.

Principle 3: “Protect civic space by ensuring media freedom, civil society engagement, and meaningful public participation”

Protecting civic space, both physical and digital, is essential for accountable governance and the defense of human rights. Civil society plays a vital role in identifying rule of law challenges, advocating for reforms, monitoring government performance, and ensuring accountability for public action, while giving voice to diverse and marginalized communities. This requires safeguarding fundamental freedoms – including expression, assembly, association, and the right to petition – as the foundation for meaningful participation and engagement. Combating digital authoritarianism and ensuring the integrity of digital platforms are important components of modern civic engagement and digital democracy.

To give effect to this principle, we commit to:

- Protect the independence, safety, and pluralism of media by safeguarding journalists from censorship, harassment, and violence; promoting transparency in media ownership; countering disinformation;

and upholding legal frameworks that guarantee editorial autonomy and support independent journalism as a cornerstone of democratic accountability.

- Defend the autonomy and operational space of civil society by opposing restrictive laws and policies, promoting enabling legal environments, ensuring sustainable funding, refraining from stigmatizing discourse, protecting civil society actors from threats and attacks, and fostering meaningful dialogue between civil society, government, and other stakeholders to strengthen rule of law initiatives and accountability processes.
- Promote inclusive and meaningful public participation by establishing mechanisms for civil society involvement at every stage of rule of law reforms, facilitating cross-regional collaboration, and supporting evidence-based advocacy through the use of people-centered data to inform policy debates and enhance public trust.
- Further develop a holistic and effective protection ecosystem for human rights defenders and civil society to track developments and document attacks, ensure rapid response and redress, and promote laws and policies to better support long-term protection needs, bringing together all interested parties and with the support of both public and private actors.

Principle 4: “Protect human rights and safeguard fundamental freedoms in line with international standards”

A legal system cannot credibly uphold the rule of law if it fails to protect the rights and freedoms of those it governs. Yet, across the world, these rights are under growing threat. According to the 2024 *WJP Rule of Law Index*[®], freedoms of expression, assembly, association, and privacy have declined in nearly two-thirds of countries (the most widespread deterioration recorded). This decline in human rights protections is compounded by discriminatory migration practices and coordinated attacks on marginalized and vulnerable individuals and groups.

To address these challenges, we commit to:

- Strengthen legal protections for human rights and fundamental freedoms — including freedom of expression, opinion, assembly, association, and privacy — ensuring that any restrictions are clearly defined by law and consistent with international human rights standards and constitutional principles, including necessity, proportionality, non-discrimination, and time limitations, particularly in emergency situations. Support anti-discrimination frameworks and targeted protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups whose rights are often disproportionately affected by exclusionary policies and rhetoric. Ensure the effective protection of human rights through independent and impartial judicial and administrative mechanisms, recognizing access to fair procedure and remedies as a fundamental right, guaranteeing strong accountability and enforcement measures to address violations, while acknowledging the complementary role of national human rights institutions (NHRIs). Protect human rights defenders, journalists, attorneys, civil society actors, and other advocates from harassment, intimidation, and reprisals, while promoting an enabling environment for civil society and watchdogs to operate freely and without hindrance in their work, as required by the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and other relevant mechanisms.

- Defend the international legal order and human rights institutions against efforts to undermine their legitimacy and effectiveness, while promoting cooperation to uphold the universality and interdependence of human rights.

Principle 5: "Promote integrity and accountability to eliminate corruption in both the public and private sectors"

Corruption distorts the exercise of public power, undermines justice, and erodes trust in institutions and businesses. Controls against corruption have eroded as part of the multiyear rule of law recession, yet according to the *2024 WJP Rule of Law Index®*, a majority of countries have made progress in controlling corruption since 2023. Sustaining and advancing this progress requires coordinated action across sectors, supported by independent oversight, open systems, and active civic engagement.

To advance this principle, we commit to:

- Reinforce anti-corruption frameworks and enhance the capacity of enforcement and oversight institutions to detect, investigate, and sanction corruption, and recover and repatriate the proceeds of corruption, in line with international standards.
- Ensure the functional and financial independence and technical capacity of internal and external integrity-promoting and risk mitigation systems, such as inspectors general, internal control units, anti-corruption authorized persons, internal audit, etc. These are proven systems to ensure conflict-of-interest safeguards, whistleblower protections, asset declarations, beneficial ownership registries, and open procurement processes to reduce favoritism and strengthen accountability across public and private sectors.
- Promote open government by guaranteeing access to information, transparent procurement, and budget accountability to prevent corruption and strengthen citizen, media, and civil society oversight. Support civil society through civic education and integrity initiatives, while leveraging data and technology to enhance transparency, improve internal controls, and support evidence-based policymaking.
- Foster coordinated anti-corruption efforts by engaging government, the private sector, and civil society in collective action initiatives that promote a culture of integrity and strengthen public trust through the adequate localization of initiatives to ensure they are responsive to the challenges and needs of the intended beneficiaries. Enhance international cooperation by aligning national efforts with global frameworks – such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the Council of Europe’s anti-corruption conventions, and the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention – and by addressing illicit financial flows through improved transparency, cross border accountability, and asset recovery efforts, to ensure a coherent and effective response to corruption at all levels.

Principle 6: "Advance people-centered justice by strengthening independent, open, and effective justice systems that meet the needs of individuals and communities"

People-centered justice is built on an understanding of the needs, experiences, and rights of individuals and communities, and on co-designed solutions that are responsive to those needs. It places people at

the heart of justice system design, delivery, and evaluation, seeking to ensure fair outcomes, accessible services, and meaningful participation. Effective people-centered justice relies on competent, impartial, and independent systems that deliver fair and timely outcomes, are adequately resourced, and remain responsive to the communities they serve. Justice systems must provide effective remedies, uphold individual rights, and apply the law without bias or political interference. However, the *2024 WJP Rule of Law Index*[®] shows that access to justice is deteriorating in many countries, driven by challenges such as longer delays, increased government influence, digital inequality, and resource constraints. A people-centered approach is essential to reducing barriers and ensuring that justice serves everyone.

To give effect to this principle, we commit to:

- Promote justice systems that are accessible, inclusive, user-friendly, and responsive to the needs of all individuals and communities, especially vulnerable groups. Address barriers across people's justice journeys by ensuring access to legal information, advisory services, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, delivered by state institutions or enabled through non-state actors.
- Ensure the recognition of legal aid as a fundamental tool for guaranteeing access to justice and the protection of human rights. It is important that governments provide at the earliest stage possible the access to the effective and adequately funded legal aid services for those who are in need. Legal aid systems should be regularly evaluated and improved, taking into consideration new developments and needs. The evaluation mechanism for the legal aid systems should be introduced to assess regularly the effectiveness of the system and to adapt to emerging needs, in line with the right to a fair trial and effective remedy.
- Strengthen the independence, impartiality, and operational capacity of justice institutions to ensure fair, timely, and unbiased outcomes by safeguarding against political interference, securing adequate resources, and enhancing professional competencies, and promoting a diverse pool of neutrals that reflects the communities they serve.
- Promote transparency through open justice initiatives and public access to court decisions, performance data, and procedural information. Ensure accountability by setting clear performance standards, establishing monitoring and feedback mechanisms, and enabling independent oversight to assess the quality, efficiency, and fairness of justice services, while removing decisions that impact judicial careers from executive control.
- Promote legal empowerment and participatory mechanisms for the co-design of justice services that respond to people's needs. Encourage innovation in justice delivery through simplified procedures, data-driven solutions, and new technologies, while ensuring their use remains ethical, transparent, and aligned with the principles of due process and fundamental rights. Support the development and use of indicators to measure performance, monitor progress, and ensure that justice systems remain effective, equitable, and aligned with the real needs of individuals and communities.

Principle 7: *"Safeguard the independence, integrity, and safety of lawyers and legal professional associations, ensuring they can perform their duties free from harassment, retaliation, or improper interference"*

As guardians of the rule of law and fundamental rights, lawyers ensure that every individual has access to independent legal advice and effective representation before impartial courts. Moreover, professional associations of lawyers, as self-regulatory and independent bodies, uphold professional standards and guarantee the independence of the lawyers from undue influence. When the profession of lawyer is threatened or lawyers' work is obstructed, it is not only their individual rights that are at risk, but also the broader integrity of the justice system, the fundamental right to good administration, and the public's access to fair and independent legal representation.

With the opening for signature of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer, we commit to:

- Ensure that lawyers can perform their professional duties independently and without undue influence, protecting them from harassment, threats, reprisals, or any form of interference by public authorities or private actors, in line with international and regional standards. The physical and professional safety of lawyers should also be guaranteed.
- Support the independence and self-regulatory role of professional associations of lawyers, enabling them to defend the interests of the profession, uphold ethical standards, protect members' rights, and contribute to the proper functioning of the justice system.
- Ensure the protection of clients' rights and reinforce the rule of law by safeguarding their right to confidential client and prospective client communication, secure access to clients and prospective clients, and the freedom to represent them without intimidation.
- Establish fair, impartial, and transparent procedures for disciplinary matters, ensuring that lawyers' rights are protected and that the legal profession remains independent.
- Encourage governments to sign, ratify, and implement the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer as a binding legal instrument to safeguard the independence, security, and integrity of lawyers and their professional associations. Support coordinated international responses to attacks on lawyers and their professional associations, and ensure accountability for such violations.

Principle 8: “Advance the rule of law as a driver of sustainable development, environmental protection, and technological innovation”

The rule of law is essential for achieving broader societal goals, including sustainable development, environmental protection, and responsible technological innovation. By providing legal certainty, ensuring equal and effective enforcement of laws, and guaranteeing fair and impartial justice, the rule of law offers a framework to balance economic, social, and environmental priorities.

To give effect to this principle, we commit to:

- Promote institutional structures that ensure fair access to resources, build transparent and enabling regulatory frameworks, and reinforce accountability mechanisms to support inclusive and sustainable economic development.
- Strengthen legal frameworks and enforcement capacities to uphold environmental rights, support the effective implementation of environmental regulations and climate commitments, and address

environmental harms, while ensuring public participation and access to justice in environmental matters, and safeguarding the rights and safety of environmental defenders and affected communities. Reinforce our commitment to key international instruments anchoring environmental rule of law, including the Aarhus Convention, the Escazú Agreement, and the Paris Agreement, as well as the UN General Assembly's recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

- Ensure that emerging regulatory regimes for the utilization of critical minerals incorporate best practices on equitable distribution of resources, community consultation, contractual law, and corruption risk mitigation.
- Establish clear legal standards and oversight mechanisms to ensure that technological innovation, including artificial intelligence (AI), aligns with fundamental rights, data protection, and ethical standards. Promote equitable access to digital technologies and address governance challenges through robust regulation and effective enforcement. Support the adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on AI, Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law, and implement complementary international standards – such as the OECD AI Principles, UNESCO's Recommendation on AI Ethics, and relevant UN resolutions – to safeguard human rights throughout the AI lifecycle.

Principle 9: “Promote an enabling business environment grounded in the rule of law”

A fair, transparent, and predictable business environment is essential for economic growth, innovation, competitiveness, and social progress. Upholding the rule of law fosters market confidence, attracts investment, and ensures a level playing field for businesses of all sizes, driving productivity and long-term competitiveness.

To give effect to this principle, we commit to:

- Promote clear, accessible, stable, and predictable legal frameworks that reduce arbitrariness, simplify compliance, and ensure the impartial application of laws and regulations, while advancing regulatory simplification, fostering environments that support innovation, improving the ease of doing business, reducing disproportionate burdens on small and medium-sized enterprises, and strengthening the protection and enforcement of property rights. Promote the integration of human rights, environmental and sustainability standards, and due diligence within corporate governance structures to ensure responsible business practices, align with human rights, climate and environmental obligations, and support long-term value creation for communities and future generations.
- Promote robust anti-corruption frameworks to prevent bribery, favoritism, and abuse of power in business operations and public procurement, by enforcing conflict of interest safeguards, strengthening whistleblower protections, enhancing openness in business-government interactions, and ensuring accountability for corrupt practices. Foster a strong culture of compliance and business integrity within the private sector through clear standards, corporate governance practices, and incentives for ethical conduct. Encourage the use of independent, people-centered data in corporate risk assessments and compliance systems to identify legal gaps, corruption risks, and uneven regulatory enforcement.

- Foster multi-stakeholder collaboration in the form of anti-corruption collective action to raise standards of integrity in an industry or market; develop self-regulatory standards for specific sectors; contribute to addressing systemic issues related to corporate bribery and corruption.
- Facilitate timely, affordable, and people-centered access to justice for businesses through independent courts and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that address business needs, resolve conflicts efficiently, and protect economic rights.

Principle 10: *“Foster collaboration, partnerships, and collective action to advance the rule of law”*

Strengthening the rule of law requires coordinated and collaborative efforts across all sectors of society. No single actor can address today’s complex governance challenges alone. Effective rule of law promotion depends on leveraging the complementary strengths, knowledge, assets, and capacities of governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, professional associations, and international organizations.

- Promote coordinated action by leveraging the complementary strengths of governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, and international organizations to advance the rule of law through shared efforts and collective impact.
- Encourage open dialogue, peer learning, and the exchange of ideas, data, and best practices across sectors and jurisdictions to enhance problem-solving, foster innovation, and ensure diverse perspectives inform rule of law initiatives.
- Support the formation of alliances and cross-sector partnerships that mobilize resources and pool resources and expertise, coordinate advocacy, and deliver more effective and sustainable rule of law outcomes at local, national, and global levels.