

**Grassroots  
Justice  
Network**

## Introduction

Across Africa, millions of people seek the resolution of the justice problems that matter most in their lives, from land disputes and family matters to access to services and protection of environmental rights. However, for many, justice systems remain distant, costly, or difficult to navigate. A significant justice gap persists, particularly for women, youth, displaced populations, and marginalized communities. Closing this gap is not only a matter of fairness, but also a foundation for preventing conflict, sustaining peace, and building resilient societies. When people trust that their disputes can be resolved fairly and peacefully, grievances are less likely to escalate into violence. Building on the work of the [African Alliance for People-Centered Justice](#) and drawing inspiration from the successful [Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on People-Centered Justice](#) in 2024, the African Regional Forum on People-Centered Justice will convene a diverse set of stakeholders to chart a path forward for people-centered justice in Africa.

The forum will be held alongside the [85th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) (ACHPR). The 2025 African Union (AU) theme of the year is "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations". The forum will create a unique platform to elevate African experiences, promote collaboration, and strengthen political commitment toward accessible, inclusive, and responsive justice systems. A key outcome will be the promotion for an Administrative Resolution by the African Alliance for People-Centered Justice on advancing People-Centered Justice in Africa.

## Background and Rationale

Justice lies at the heart of social cohesion, human rights, sustainable development, and peace. By enabling communities to resolve disputes constructively, address grievances early, and ensure fair access to rights and resources, [people-centered justice plays a direct role in preventing conflict and supporting peacebuilding efforts](#). It also underpins community resilience in the face of shocks, whether political, social, economic, or environmental. [People-centered justice is pivotal in addressing the multifaceted global crises we face today](#). The UN Secretary-General has emphasized that "access to justice for all and effective, inclusive, and accountable institutions are critical enablers for other SDGs." Despite this recognition, the goal of achieving universal access to justice remains underprioritized, underfunded, and inadequately addressed within the broader SDG framework. The UN Secretary-General's "[Our Common Agenda](#)" (2021) and "[New Vision for the Rule of Law](#)" (2023) reaffirmed justice as an essential dimension of the essential role of the rule of law, human rights, justice, and security in renewing the social contract, committing to a people-centered approach to the rule of law and justice.

The African Union 2063 Agenda states that "Africa shall have a universal culture of good governance, democratic values, gender equality, and respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law". The African Governance Architecture includes a dedicated cluster focusing on constitutionalism and the rule of law. The [2003 Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa](#) (2003) by the African Commission on human and people's rights are a key demonstration of continental efforts on making justice more accessible and effective. The African Union, in its [Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063](#) (2024–2033), emphasizes the promotion and protection of citizens' rights, and the entrenchment of justice and the rule of law, supported by a whole-of-society and whole-of-government

approach. It also emphasized the need to support children's access to justice, including through the development and strengthening of child-friendly justice systems.

Yet the goal of ensuring access to justice for all, a cornerstone of SDG 16 and Agenda 2063, remains elusive for many. Specifically, progress towards SDG 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, is slow, with some targets related to access to justice even reversing. There continues to be a decline in civil justice, with billions of people lacking meaningful access to justice. Without strong, trusted, and inclusive justice systems, unresolved grievances can fuel cycles of instability and erode the resilience of communities to withstand crises. This concerning "Justice Gap" and overstretched justice mechanisms create a significant demand and supply gap, with the need for justice services far exceeding the available resources and capacity to deliver them. As a result, many people, especially those from vulnerable and marginalized communities, are unable to access the justice they need. Everyday justice issues, such as those related to land use, environmental harm, debt, family relationships, employment, and access to basic services, disproportionately affect women, as well as marginalized and vulnerable communities, exacerbating challenges related to social inclusion, health, education, and livelihoods. While women have roughly the same number of unmet justice needs as men, the nature of these needs often reflects women's experiences of disadvantage, exclusion, discrimination, and violence.

People-centered approaches to justice recognize that justice systems must respond to the needs, experiences, and realities of individuals and communities, particularly those historically marginalized. When designed with conflict prevention and peacebuilding in mind, these approaches can transform justice systems into platforms for dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation, reinforcing stability at the local and national levels. Customary and informal justice mechanisms, community-based initiatives, mobile justice services, and grassroots legal empowerment efforts are critical components of the broader justice ecosystem. There is an urgent need to recognize, strengthen, and scale these efforts, building resilient and inclusive pathways to justice that leave no one behind. The forum offers an opportunity to consolidate African leadership, share evidence and innovations, and mobilize collective action.

## Forum Description

This one-day forum on people-centered justice in Africa will bring together a diverse range of stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society organizations, legal practitioners, researchers, donors, and representatives from marginalized communities, for a day of interactive dialogue and shared learning. The event will feature a mix of keynote addresses and panel discussions designed to surface practical solutions, highlight innovative approaches, and strengthen collaboration across sectors. With an emphasis on inclusion and meaningful engagement, the forum aims to deepen understanding of people-centered justice approaches and foster collective strategies to advance equitable and effective justice systems in Africa. Special attention will be given to exploring how justice reform and community-based approaches can act as preventive tools against conflict, build trust in institutions, and strengthen social resilience.

A key outcome of the forum will be the promotion of an Administrative Resolution by the African Alliance for People-Centered Justice on advancing People-Centered Justice in Africa, articulating shared commitments, strategic priorities, and concrete actions to advance justice for all. The event will also mark the launch of the Africa Regional Report on People-Centered Justice, offering fresh insights and evidence to inform policy and practice across the continent. Through these milestones, the forum will help strengthen networks and partnerships, mobilizing knowledge, resources, and coordinated support for people-centered justice initiatives. By connecting justice to peacebuilding and resilience goals, the forum will also position people-centered justice as an essential pillar of sustainable peace and stability in Africa.

## Forum Objectives

- Mobilize high-level political commitment to advance people-centered justice approaches across Africa.
- Facilitate the exchange of promising practices and innovations that strengthen access to justice, promote inclusion, prevent conflict, build resilience, and uphold human rights.
- Promote the generation and use of justice data and evidence to inform policy development, programming, and resource allocation.
- Strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships and regional collaboration among governments, regional bodies, civil society, CIJ actors, the private sector, and development partners.
- Promote the adoption of an Administrative Resolution setting out a shared vision, strategic priorities, and collective actions to advance people-centered justice across the continent.
- Launch an African Regional Report on People-Centered Justice.

## Forum Agenda

<b>08:30–09:00</b>	<b>Registration and Welcome Tea/ Coffee</b>  Participant registration and informal networking over refreshments
<b>09:00–09:30</b>	<b>Opening of the Forum</b>  <b>Welcome Address</b> Official opening of the forum, an overview of the African Alliance for People-Centered Justice and the shared purpose of the day.  <b>Framing the Conversation</b> Highlighting the importance of people-centered justice in advancing peace, resilience, and development, and outlining the opportunities for collaboration.
<b>09:30–10:45</b>	<b>Plenary 1: AU and Regional Mechanisms</b>  <b>High-Level roundtable moderated by Pathfinders:</b> <i>“Leveraging AU and Regional Mechanisms to Strengthen Access to Justice for All”</i>  This discussion will explore how the AU and regional bodies such as ACHPR, ECOWAS, EAC, and SADC can be instrumental in expanding access to justice, especially for vulnerable and marginalized communities. It will focus on aligning regional legal instruments with national justice policies, promoting cross-border cooperation, and sharing best practices to ensure equitable justice delivery across African states. The session will also engage with the AU’s 2025 Theme of the Year “Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations” and consider how this resonates with the broader agenda on people-centered justice. Finally, the discussion will highlight how effective regional cooperation on justice supports conflict prevention, fosters peaceful dispute resolution, and strengthens institutional resilience across borders.

<b>10:45–11:00</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea Break</b>
<b>11:00–12:15</b>	<p><b>Plenary 2: Data, Research, and Evidence on Justice</b></p> <p><b>Interactive roundtable moderated by HiIL:</b> <i>“From Numbers to Needs: Using Data to Build People-Centred Justice in Africa”</i></p> <p>This session will emphasize the importance of data, research, and evidence in shaping effective, transparent, and equitable justice systems. It will explore best practices for collecting and utilizing data, strengthening research capacity, and fostering evidence-based policies that enhance justice administration across African countries. It will also highlight ongoing work by members of the African Alliance for People-Centered Justice in collecting and using data on people-centered justice. By grounding decisions in robust evidence, justice actors can more effectively identify early warning signs of conflict, address underlying grievances, and design interventions that strengthen peacebuilding and societal resilience.</p>
<b>12:15–13:30</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>
<b>13:30–14:45</b>	<p><b>Plenary 3: Ensuring No One is Left Behind: Justice for Children</b></p> <p><b>Panel discussion moderated by Terres de Hommes:</b> <i>“From Vulnerability to Voice: Realizing Justice for Children in Africa”</i></p> <p>This session will explore how to advance justice for children within people-centered justice efforts in Africa. It will bring together key stakeholders to discuss practical approaches for making justice systems more accessible, protective, and responsive to children’s rights. The session will highlight innovations, challenges, and opportunities to strengthen child-sensitive justice, with a focus on participation, protection, and legal empowerment. Special emphasis will be placed on the role of child-sensitive justice systems in preventing cycles of violence, fostering reconciliation, and equipping young people with the resilience to contribute to peaceful and inclusive societies</p>
<b>14:45–16:00</b>	<p><b>Plenary 4: Advancing Diverse Pathways to Justice</b></p> <p><b>Panel discussion moderated by UNDP:</b> <i>“Building Bridges—Promoting Diverse Pathways to Justice through a People-Centered Approach”</i></p> <p>This topic will highlight the importance of inclusive, culturally sensitive justice practices specific to the African context. It will encourage the sharing of good practices, innovative models, and community-led initiatives that advance equity, reconciliation, and social cohesion across diverse African communities. It will invite discussion on grassroots initiatives that prioritize the voices and needs of underserved communities, fostering equitable and accessible justice systems. In doing so, it will underline how such approaches can diffuse tensions, build mutual trust, and serve as vital mechanisms for conflict prevention and community resilience.</p>
<b>16:00–16:15</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea Break</b>

<b>16:15–17:00</b>	<p><b>Forum Closing</b></p> <p><b>Closing Remarks and Launch of the People-Centered Justice Report,</b></p> <p>Closing reflections on the day’s discussions and officially launching the People-Centered Justice in Africa Report by the African Alliance for People-Centered Justice, highlighting its key findings and recommendations.</p> <p><b>Promote the Adoption of an Administrative Resolution on People-Centered Justice, Commissioner of the African Commission for Human and People’s</b></p> <p>Promoting the adoption of the Resolution on People-Centered Justice, marking a collective commitment to advance justice as a foundation for sustainable development and equity in Africa.</p>
<b>17:00–18:00</b>	<p><b>Networking Reception</b></p> <p>Informal opportunity for participants to connect and share experiences</p>