

Statement of the Justice Action Coalition on the importance of equal access to justice for all issued during the Second World Summit for Social Development

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Thirty years after the convening of the World Summit for Social Development, we gather once again at a pivotal moment. We recognize the progress that has been achieved, yet we must also acknowledge that it has been slow and uneven. Major gaps and inequalities persist within and among countries.

In this context, access to justice must be guaranteed to every individual as a tool to ensure that their rights are upheld, that they are included in our social, political, and economic systems, and that they are empowered to be part of the change we wish to see in the world. Equal access to justice for all supports the pillars of democratic societies: accountability, strong and trustworthy institutions, social cohesion, inclusive participation, respect for human rights and lasting security.

The evidence is clear: we need access to justice to end poverty, reduce inequality, reach the furthest behind first, create conditions for shared and sustainable prosperity, and promote peace and inclusion.

To harness the full potential of justice, we must place people at its center. People-centered justice, as defined in the 2023 Declaration on the Justice Action Coalition, means placing people and their needs at the core of justice systems. It requires deep and genuine consultation to understand the challenges that women and girls, youth, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants, and those in vulnerable situations face every day. This knowledge must inform appropriate and innovative solutions that are inclusive, responsive, and impactful.

Ensuring equal access to justice for all is critical to the promotion, protection and fulfillment of human rights, and States must ensure equal access to justice for all persons subject to their jurisdiction and equality before the law, recalling that people-centered justice is fully in line with the human rights-based approach to development.

Across regions, real-world innovations are already delivering results in the most challenging contexts. High-impact, low-cost models of justice service delivery,

implemented by grassroots actors and community-based organizations, underline the transformative potential of people-centered justice.

For example, community justice centers help resolve local disputes quickly and fairly, reducing case backlogs and strengthening trust in public institutions. Legal empowerment programs enable women in rural areas across the globe to secure land rights and rebuild their livelihoods after conflict. And paralegal networks and legal aid offices provide millions with affordable legal advice, ensuring that even in remote rural communities or marginalized urban districts, justice is not a privilege but a right.

These experiences show that when individuals and communities are empowered with their rights, resources, and avenues for redress, justice can be truly accessible, affordable, and effective for all, strengthening local stability and preventing the escalation of conflict.

Transforming justice systems in this way is not a secondary matter. It is central to the promise of the 2030 Agenda, and it is indispensable to the goals of this Summit: to accelerate poverty eradication, promote full employment and decent work, and achieve trust in institutions, strong democracies and social inclusion, and ensure that no one is left behind in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. When people understand, use, and have access to the law, then we have succeeded in giving them the tools to be co-pilots in the delivery of rights, improved livelihoods, and policy reform. When we work with people to deliver justice, then our societies are more peaceful and prosperous, our governance is stronger, and our collective ambitions are more easily achieved.

Special priority must be given to women and children, who often bear the greatest burden of poverty and exclusion. Legal empowerment of women and girls unlocks opportunities for families, communities, and entire societies because it strengthens their voice and agency, breaks cycles of discrimination, and drives progress across all dimensions of development. The same is true for young people, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, and persons with disabilities, who must be fully included in shaping the institutions that affect their lives.

The growing recognition of justice's role in advancing social and economic rights, financing for people-centered justice requires a stronger financial commitment to match its importance. National budgets and international assistance too often overlook this essential function. The challenge is twofold: persistent underfunding and the need to improve the allocation of existing resources. How much we invest and how we spend it are both essential and it highlights the need to strengthen our collective capacity to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and meet the commitments of the Doha Political Declaration.

To address this, the Justice Action Coalition has developed a Justice Financing Framework to guide country-level justice financing and budgeting. It equips justice-sector leaders with practical guidance on identifying sustainable revenue sources, setting clear priorities, and improving the effectiveness and value for money, so that resources translate into better outcomes for everyone.

We therefore call for strengthened and more effective investments in social development, including justice, at national, regional, and international levels. This includes enhanced international cooperation, South-South and triangular cooperation, and the mobilization of predictable and sustainable resources.

The task before us is urgent but achievable. Justice is the foundation upon which peaceful, inclusive and equal societies are built. It empowers individuals to claim their rights, resolve their disputes fairly, and participate fully in their communities and democracies. It strengthens social contracts and fosters trust in public institutions. And it is indispensable for achieving the fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable future that our peoples demand and deserve.