

STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, GENERAL DISCUSSION (ITEM 3)

United Nations Headquarters

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Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) greatly appreciates this opportunity to address the Commission. As the only intergovernmental organization with an exclusive mandate to further the rule of law, IDLO is present in all regions of the world promoting law and justice. At the heart of our endeavor is inclusion: that everyone regardless of gender be equal before the eyes of the law, and enjoy their human rights.

Despite the enormous progress that women and girls have made in many fields such as education, science, law and sport – the stark reality is that the world remains a very unequal and unfair place for millions of them. Even more worryingly, as our Director-General, Irene Khan, warned on International Women’s Day, we now see a global backlash against women’s rights.

The sobering reality is that in many countries, women are not treated equally by the law itself.

Laws subjugate women to their male relatives and restrict their rights and freedoms, including on fundamental issues as to what they can own; whom they can love, marry or divorce; where they may go with whom; and even what they can and cannot wear. According to the [World Bank](#), in 90 % of the world’s economies (155 out of 173) women face legal discrimination.

In [Kenya](#), IDLO has worked with the Government to advance the implementation of gender equality principles and provisions contained in the Constitution. In [Tunisia](#), we are supporting the Ministry of Women, Family and Childhood to improve its legal drafting capacities with a specific focus on new laws on gender.

From the bedroom to the battlefield, violence against women remains one of the greatest scourges of our times. It is a reality for 35% of the world’s women. And very often it is the inadequacy of the laws and the apathy of institutions that allow gender-based violence to flourish. Many women have no option but to turn to informal, customary justice systems,

where they often encounter prejudice. Few women can look to formal courts for justice; they are often too expensive, too remote or too complex.

Since 2002, IDLO has been working in [Afghanistan](#) to improve justice sector delivery, including for survivors of gender-based violence. We have worked to develop and strengthen the elimination of Violence against Women units in the Attorney-General's Office that prosecute violence against women cases and have also supported shelters in the country to offer better services, including safety and support, to victims of violence.

Our work to enhance the efficiency, transparency and accountability of Criminal Court E, the specialized court designated to deal exclusively with sexual offenses, is an important step in supporting the authorities in [Liberia](#) to improve access to justice and protection mechanisms for victims of sexual and gender based violence.

In [Mongolia](#) we are working with the government to combat domestic violence through improved mechanisms, coordination and capacities of justice sector and other relevant actors.

On the eve of this session of the Commission, IDLO was proud to convene a [High-Level Roundtable on Women and Legislative Reform](#) with the University of Pennsylvania's Law School (Penn Law), UN Women, UNESCO and the UN Sustainable Development Goals Fund, and IDLO. Leading women jurists, legislators, policymakers and advocates who have engaged in legislative and policy drafting in their countries gathered to analyze the unfinished business of transforming laws on the books to laws in practice. We look forward to sharing the lessons learned with the Commission.

When women do not have the same legal rights and privileges as men to work, travel, earn or carry out a business, this affects not only the lives of women but the economic competitiveness of a country.

The Commission has heard of the transformative difference the economic empowerment of women can make. Legal empowerment is just as important.

Laws and institutions are more responsive when people are empowered. That is why, alongside our institution-building work, we work also to promote legal empowerment so that rights holders can be equipped with the knowledge and tools to engage with those who administer the laws and institutions. Rights awareness, access to information and social mobilization are key components of our legal empowerment strategies. They are also powerful tools for bringing about greater transparency and accountability of institutions.

Legal discrimination disempowers women but laws alone do not empower women. For many poor women – having an income is key to empowerment because it gives them the freedom to control their lives.

Global surveys reveal that although women make up a large proportion of the world's agricultural labor force, they have consistently less access to and control over land and productive resources. Land rights for women are a key part of the equation. A woman's right to access land constitutes a powerful tool for her economic empowerment. Control over land and other productive assets enables them to generate an income, feed themselves and their families, and ultimately, break down systemic barriers to food insecurity. IDLO's [report *Women, Food, Land: Exploring Rule of Law Linkages*](#) looks at the challenges that affect women's food security and land rights. It also lays out a roadmap to using the rule of law to overcome them.

In summary, IDLO sees that a legal and regulatory framework that is gender-sensitive and responsive enables women to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from economic opportunities. Changing discriminatory laws and adopting gender-responsive ones, whether they are labor laws and policies, social protection programs, or agricultural and land administration systems, is important to bring about greater economic participation of women.

However, building gender-responsive legal and justice institutions is just as important.

In its 72 years of existence, the International Court of Justice has had 106 judges. Only one of them has been a woman.

Improving women's ability to work in justice institutions is essential – not only to ensure that women enjoy democratic freedoms and equality of opportunity in the workplace, but also to ensure that the specific interests of women are represented and advanced in justice institutions. Without women in the justice sector, the fairness of judicial outcomes for women, and their access to justice, are compromised. Access to justice is not just a right by itself, but it also enables women to claim their equal rights to work, social security, to be free from violence, as well as to seek redress for violations of these rights.

This is why during the United Nations General Assembly in September 2012, IDLO pledged to analyze the legal barriers to women's access to justice and to work to ensure women's increased participation in the justice system. IDLO is also a proud partner of the [Gqual campaign](#) for gender parity in international representation.

As part of its Africa Initiative, IDLO is undertaken specific measures to strengthen the rule of law as a concrete basis on which to promote sustainable development, including gender equality.

Chair, Distinguished delegates,

The international community has an unprecedented opportunity with the SDGs.

Gender equality and the rule of law are complementary and mutually-reinforcing. These principles are cross-cutting across the Sustainable Development Agenda. SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 16 which looks at peace, justice, rule of law and institutions, are indispensable to each other. While SDG 5 facilitates the achievement of accountable, equitable and inclusive institutions, SDG 16 ensures that the legal and policy frameworks recognized and protect women's rights.

The 2030 Agenda's vision of leaving no one behind is ambitious and it means ensuring that women and girls remain at the heart of our efforts if we are to move the SDGs from a slogan to reality.

The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) enables governments and empowers people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity.