



On 24 September 2012, the General Assembly of the United Nations held a High-level Meeting on "the rule of law at the national and international levels". This was the first time that Heads of State and Government came together at the General Assembly to discuss the rule of law, highlighting the central place that the rule of law has assumed on the national and international stages.

Heads of State and Government adopted a historic Declaration on the rule of law. For the first time, 193 Member States reached a common understanding on definitional elements as well as setting out the full scope of the rule of law, from the peaceful settlement of international disputes to providing justice for vulnerable groups. The Declaration stressed the inter-relationship between the rule of law and the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, development and human rights. Underscoring this, it called for the rule of law to be considered in the post-2015 international development agenda. In order to develop further these inter-linkages and to strengthen the rule of law at the international and national levels, the Secretary-General has been asked to consult a wide range of stakeholders and report back to the Assembly next year.

The Declaration acknowledges the many voluntary pledges received from Member States aimed at strengthening the rule of law and encourages more pledges to be made in the future. The number of pledges received were beyond expectations as over 40 Member States and Observers used the occasion of the meeting to make over 250 pledges. The submitted pledges can be found at: www.unrol.org. The countries that submitted pledges are: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Maldives, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Romania, Peru, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, the United States of America and Uruguay. Two Observers, the European Union and the International Development Law

Organization also submitted pledges.

At the opening of the Meeting, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on all Member States to commit to the equal application of the law at both the national and international levels. He noted that there should be no selectivity in applying resolutions, decisions and laws. "We cannot allow political self-interest to undermine justice", he added. The Secretary-General also echoed the Declaration, emphasizing that when we strengthen the rule of law, we reinforce all three pillars of the United Nations: peace, development and human rights. The new President of the General Assembly, Mr. Vuk Jeremić (Serbia), suggested that Member States draw inspiration from Montesquieu's words, "there is no nation so powerful, as the one that obeys its laws not from principles of fear or reason, but from passion."

During the Meeting, 69 Member States and Observers took the floor. In closing, two representatives of the civil society, Ms. Louise Arbour, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Crisis Group and Mr. Cherif Bassiouni, the Dean of the International Institute of Higher Studies in Criminal Sciences, also delivered statements at the Meeting. Ms. Arbour highlighted that the rule of law "reflects the idea of equality in a substantive way: not just that no one is above the law, but that everyone is equal before and under the law, and is entitled to its equal protection and equal benefit." Mr. Bassiouni reminded the audience of the role of civil society, and how it strongly supports the efforts of the Secretary-General, and the whole United Nations system, as well as the many governmental, inter-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations that support the rule of law. The statements will shortly be available at www.unrol.org.

A number of side-events on topics such as the peaceful settlement of conflict, women's access to justice, corruption and its impact on economic growth were also held, highlighting the high level of interest from Member States and other stakeholders to discuss thematic issues relating to the rule of law.

For more information on the High-level Meeting in all six official languages of the United Nations, please paste the following URL into your browser: <http://www.unrol.org/doc.aspx?d=3161>.

The event was tweeted live under the hashtag #rol4peace by United Nations entities, civil society representatives present in the General Assembly Hall and other individuals following the live webcast of the event. The event was also streamed live on United Nations Webcast.