

Manila Statement on Judicial Integrity for South and South-East Asia

21 November 2025

We, the Chief Justices, Justices, and senior members of the judiciary of South and South-East Asia, gathered in Manila, Philippines, on 20 – 21 November 2025 for the High-Level Meeting on Judicial Integrity for South and South-East Asia:

Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which enshrine in particular the principles of equality before the law, of the presumption of innocence and of the right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law;

Recalling also the United Nations Convention against Corruption, which in its article 11 obliges States Parties, in accordance with the fundamental principles of their legal systems and without prejudice to judicial independence, to take measures to strengthen integrity and to prevent opportunities for corruption among members of the judiciary, including rules with respect to the conduct of members of the judiciary;

Recalling also the Principles of Judicial Conduct and the Measures for the Effective Implementation of the Bangalore Principles and the Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary;

Recognizing that judicial integrity is essential in sustaining public trust, ensuring access to public service, protecting and promoting human rights;

Recognizing that the erosion of judicial integrity in one can erode the integrity of all;

Recognizing also that the rule of law curbs corruption and restrains the abuse of power;

Acknowledging with appreciation the significant and ongoing efforts undertaken by judiciaries within our jurisdictions and across the region to uphold the rule of law, strengthen judicial integrity, and enhance access to justice;

Acknowledging the outcomes of the Regional Dialogue on Corruption and Human Rights, held in October 2024 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, which highlighted the critical role of judicial integrity in safeguarding human rights;

Acknowledging also the work carried out by the Global Judicial Integrity Network under the auspices of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, as well as other international and regional judicial forums that contribute to the strengthening of judicial independence, impartiality and integrity;

Mindful of the fundamental role of the judiciary in upholding human rights, and in ensuring the respect of the international obligations subscribed to by States in ratifying Human Rights instruments;

Resolving to strengthen our collective resilience and foster judicial practices dedicated to the highest ethical standards;

Hereby jointly affirm our commitment to the following principles and actions:

On upholding judicial independence

1. *Affirming* that judicial independence is a prerequisite to the rule of law and a fundamental guarantee of a fair trial;
2. *Recalling* that it is the duty of all governmental and other institutions to respect and observe the independence of the judiciary;
3. *Recalling* the Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary and the importance of avoiding any restrictions, improper influences, inducements, pressures, threats or interferences, direct or indirect, from any quarter or for any reason that would affect the independence of the judiciary;
4. *Condemning* all kinds of harassment, attacks, and interference against judges and courts;
5. *Condemning* the misuse of laws and processes which affect the independence of the judiciary;

6. To safeguard judicial independence, *pledging to*:

- a. *Uphold and strengthen* constitutional and legal safeguards for independence, including the security of tenure, adequate resourcing and financial autonomy, institutional independence, and protection against threats, interferences and pressures, direct or indirect;
- b. *Safeguard and promote* methods of judicial selection to protect against judicial appointments for improper motives;
- c. *Enhance* accountability mechanisms and integrity frameworks that uphold decisional independence, due process, and maintain public trust; including the use of recusals, guidance on the use of social media, and codes of conduct for the judiciary, court officials and personnel;
- d. *Enhance* regional cooperation and networks of mutual support;

On building trust and access to justice

7. *Affirming* that judiciaries which are representative, fair, and accessible can support confidence in judicial institutions;

8. To build trust in the judiciary and enhance access to justice, *pledging to*:

- a. *Promote* transparent, objective, fair and representative judicial appointments, including for staff, senior appointments and leadership;
- b. *Promote* merit-based career progression through transparent pathways;
- c. *Prevent* instances of implicit bias and *enhance* fairness in judicial decision-making, including through guidance on social media;
- d. *Foster* ethical leadership, including by enhancing judicial training and education;
- e. *Promote* transparency in judicial decision-making processes, including public access to decisions, subject to exceptions based on domestic laws and rules on privacy and confidentiality;

On responding to emerging threats against judicial integrity

9. *Acknowledging* that judiciaries face increasingly sophisticated and converging threats which can undermine judicial integrity and decision-making, including transnational organized crime, corruption networks, political interference, and cybersecurity risks and physical and online threats;
10. *Recalling* that publicly slandering and vilifying judges for decisions and rulings that are considered unfavorable, publishing information about them online and inciting attacks against them can affect the independence of the judiciary, especially when it comes from individuals in public office or constitutes harassment.
11. To protect judicial independence, safety, and wellbeing, *pledging* to:
 - a. *Defend* against political and institutional pressures which aim to influence judicial decision-making;
 - b. *Safeguard* judges and judicial institutions from the threat of criminal and corruption networks, including by deepening cooperation with law enforcement authorities, and institutionalizing safety and preventive measures;
 - c. *Mitigate* digital and cybersecurity threats, including by building secure data systems, establishing clear protocols, and providing adequate training;
 - d. *Address* challenges linked to the use of social media, including through clear guidelines and policies;
 - e. *Mitigate* threats of online harassment, falsification of court documents, and reputational attacks;
 - f. *Bolster* institutional resilience, including by promoting mental health and wellbeing;
 - g. *Enhance* domestic and cross-border cooperation to combat emerging threats against judicial integrity;

On harnessing digital transformation in the judiciary

12. *Acknowledging* the need to balance the benefits of technology use in the judiciary with safeguarding judicial discretion, due process, public trust, confidentiality and data privacy, and human rights and the rule of law;

13. In considering the application of artificial intelligence (AI) use in the judiciary, *recalling* the right to a fair trial, and the need for fair, independent, and transparent judicial decision-making;
14. *Recognizing* the importance of transparency regarding the use of AI by the judiciary, particularly in the framework of judicial processes, to maintain public trust;
15. *Resolving* to:
 - a. *Advance* the digital transformation of court systems, including, for example, e-filing, digital case management, and speech to text, when appropriate and in compliance with human rights law;
 - b. *Consider* and *mitigate* risks posed by the use of open source or publicly available AI models, including risks of bias, false information, and confidentiality;
 - c. *Adopt* an oversight role and responsibility in the deployment and use of digital technologies and AI systems in the judiciary;
 - d. *Develop* judicial guidance on the use of technology and AI in the judiciary that aligns with the principles of judicial independence, accountability, fairness, and in a manner which maintains accuracy, confidentiality and data privacy;
 - e. *Provide* training and education on emerging technologies and on their risks and benefits, including of AI to the judiciary and staff, to ensure that they are only used when they comply with international standards;
 - f. *Facilitate* regional knowledge and experience sharing on emerging technologies and on their risks and benefits, including of AI to the judiciary, as well as guidelines for their use;
 - g. *Recognize* the potential for the differentiated use of AI systems, including for civil, criminal, and administrative cases, and *ensure* that such use remains, in all cases, ethical and in accordance with the rule of law;
 - h. While recalling that the right to a fair trial necessarily entails a human judge, *explore*, under the leadership of the judiciary, the application of AI use in the

judiciary, without compromising fair, independent, and transparent judicial decision-making;

- i. *Understand* the risks posed by the use of AI systems in specific legal tasks, including legal drafting and research, *avoid* reliance on the use of AI systems for such tasks, and *ensure* human review and verification;

On advancing open justice

16. *Affirming* that transparency reinforces accountability and public confidence in the judicial system;

17. *Acknowledging* the challenges caused by disinformation, taking into account the freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom of press;

18. To advance open justice, *committing* to:

- a. *Enhance* public access to judicial information, proceedings, and the outcome of judicial decision-making, subject to exceptions based on domestic laws and rules on privacy and confidentiality;
- b. *Facilitate* meaningful access to justice, including, where appropriate, digital solutions and adequate representation;
- c. *Foster* engagement with media and the public to build their understanding of judicial processes;
- d. *Uphold* measures to balance transparency with the protection of sensitive data, including by adhering to data protection, privacy, and cybersecurity standards.

We hereby adopt this Manila Statement as a testament to our shared vision. We commit to translating these principles into concrete action within our jurisdictions and to working collaboratively across the region. We call upon the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and all international partners to support us in this endeavour.

Adopted in Manila on this 21st day of November, 2025.