**The rule of law**

The rule of law refers to a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency

The **rule of law** is a [legal maxim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_maxim) encompassing legal principles that are widely considered to be the "foundation of a civilized society".

While the rule of law has been described as "an exceedingly elusive notion" giving rise to a "rampant divergence of understandings", a dichotomy can be identified between two principal conceptions of the rule of law: a formalist or "thin" and a substantive or "thick" definition of the rule of law. Formalist definitions of the rule of law do not make a judgement about the "justness" of law itself, but define specific procedural attributes that a legal framework must have in order to be in compliance with the rule of law. Substantive conceptions of the rule of law go beyond this and include certain substantive rights that are said to be based on, or derived from, the rule of law.