



The Justice Imperative

A Global Citizen Call To Action

Global Citizen & Pathfinders for
Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies

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PATHFINDERS
FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES
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"Since the invasion, more than 4,000 people have sought legal help from us through hotlines and at centers for displaced people across the country. My colleague works at a center in Kramatorsk, just a few miles from the frontline. Seven days a week he arrives at 8am to find a queue already forming and the phones are already ringing. For the next 12 hours, he will sit in the cold, the heating and water supply having stopped weeks ago, and help people to find answers and solutions to their urgent justice needs. 'How can I leave the country if I've lost my passport?' 'How can I receive my pension if I'm internally displaced?' 'Can I be fired from my job under martial law?' 'Where can I get help to rebuild my house which was damaged by shelling?' The safety and well-being of entire families can hinge on the answers to these questions."

Yevgen Poltenko, Executive Director of the Legal Development Network (LDN) in Ukraine

Introduction

Through Global Citizen's advocacy work over more than a decade, one fact has become strikingly clear: we as humanity are living through a **Global Justice Crisis**. Even before the trauma of the last two years, two-thirds of humanity — over five billion people — lacked access to justice, including the ability to own property, start or engage in business, or access public services or social safety nets.¹ Of those, more than **253 million people** live in a situation of extreme injustice, without legal protection at all² — internally displaced, stateless, or living in modern slavery, existing on the margins and without recourse to remedy. And this crisis can be seen at all levels, from the most local to the most global.

Sustained, systemic injustice deeply undermines societal trust. It fragments communities, diminishes human capital, and increases the risk of violence within and between groups. It hardwires inequality into every aspect of society and the economy. In countries with high levels of non-conflict-based violence, the disruptions to human capital and production can accumulate to as much as 20% of their annual GDP.³ The cost of conflict worldwide — through lost wages, reduced health, and the cost of seeking redress — is estimated to be 12.4% of global GDP.⁴

Even before the pandemic, the 'old normal' was riddled with injustice. Countries and institutions that collect and disclose data pertaining to crime and violence still have little data on individuals' experiences of seeking justice within the existing system.⁵ All too often, crimes go unreported, and people are confronted with a justice system that can retraumatize them, fail to deliver justice, and preclude them from seeking justice in the future.⁶ These ongoing injustices have only been made worse by the crises we face — from ongoing conflict and war across the globe, inequitable responses to the COVID-19 pandemic both between countries and within them, to the continuing environmental degradation which affects the poorest the most.⁷

At the global level, we see a parallel justice crisis. **The world is crying out for renewed multilateral efforts toward justice** — yet international institutions and systems have not achieved the collective action they aspire to. When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called out the failure of the UN Security Council over the war in Ukraine, he said "today is the time to transform the system, the core of which is the United Nations."⁸ We agree with President Zelenskyy that a recommitment to the ideals of international cooperation — founded on the principles of justice and fairness and grounded in the fundamental freedom and equality of all people — is required. To make these ideals a reality we need to create new ways for activists, civil servants, private sector actors, innovators, and young people to work together across borders towards common goals.

From the local to the global and from the lives of individuals to the institutions of governance, these examples point to an urgent need to build **a new type of global collaboration** that is hopeful, energizing and — above all — much more effective in achieving fair outcomes for all and tackling systemic barriers. Realizing justice is crucial to building trust between people and institutions at all levels. People want solutions and solidarity, not competition and exploitation.

How Do We Approach Justice?



Photo by MASSVIDA/The Fund for Global Human Rights

The existence of poverty is an issue of injustice. Achieving justice for all, in law and in practice, is at the heart of our work to end extreme poverty, defend the planet, and demand equity. In 2022, Global Citizen launched our [End Extreme Poverty NOW](#) campaign, outlining four key areas that require collective, transformative action: breaking systemic barriers, protecting the environment, empowering girls, and defending advocacy and civic space.⁹ Across each of these important focus areas runs a uniting concept of justice and equity – for the natural world, between governing countries and institutions, and between and amongst people in our global community.

We know that Global Citizens, the members of our global movement, understand the crucial linkages between these global challenges – and they have made it clear that justice is the key to overcoming them, **taking more than two million actions in 2021** to raise their voices in support of a more equitable and fairer world.¹⁰ Justice and equity for all are at the core of our vision for a world free of extreme poverty. Global Citizens are ready to join the fight by engaging leaders and demanding that they uphold their responsibilities.

What does this mean in practice? It means tackling the issues that can lead so many people living on the margins to fall back into poverty. When individuals break the law, the punishment will fit the crime – no one should land in jail for not being able to pay a simple fine. Poverty itself will not be criminalized or penalized, as it is today in so many countries. Solutions to people's disputes over land, housing, with families and neighbors are prioritized over solutions that work for companies and bureaucracies. It means people's real economic hardships – made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic¹¹ – would be considered when addressing debt and consumer issues. It means eliminating discrimination in access to public services like transport, healthcare, and internet access.

There is a new kind of people-power that can be seized upon. In every country in the world there are people fighting for justice despite the negligence of their governments. They are helping others and working hard to make society more fair, they are innovating, and they are creating more sustainable economies. To harness this power, institutions must be inclusive of and responsive to the people they serve.



Legal Empowerment Fund

People-centered justice is key to understanding personal experiences within the justice system, how people interact with it, and why attempts at justice policies either succeed or fail to promote sustained change. Global Citizen was proud to showcase the launch of the [Legal Empowerment Fund](#) (LEF) at Global Citizen Live in September 2021. The LEF was launched through collaboration between the Fund for Global Human Rights, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Namati, and is supported by the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. Its goal is to provide urgently needed support to grassroots justice defenders and organizations fighting to help people understand and claim their rights.¹²

Reducing discrimination and bolstering participation in legal processes are crucial first steps to empowering people to make positive impacts in the fight against poverty and climate change. It is here that the LEF, formed as a bold new initiative to close the global justice gap, comes into play. Initiatives like the Legal Empowerment Fund are a critical step towards creating a future where all people can enjoy equal protections and remedies under the law. Through supporting grassroots justice groups with renewable and long-term core funding, the LEF will enhance access to justice and push forward systemic change by putting the law in people's hands – critical steps in the fight for justice for all.

#GlobalCitizenLive saw @mottfoundation @hewlett_found announce the launch of the Legal Empowerment Fund & commit \$20M, + \$5M from @globalnamati to help grassroots activists tackle systemic injustice– an important step forward for people-centered justice movements.

A Common Agenda for Justice



Photo by Mathias Reding

In a time where trust in both national and global institutions continues to fall, the United Nations continues to generate broad support.¹³ [The United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda¹⁴](#) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remain the best blueprint we have at a global level to bring all stakeholders together to address our common challenges. The pledge enshrined in the SDGs to build “a just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met”¹⁵ must be delivered upon. SDG16, which calls for “peaceful, just and inclusive societies”¹⁶ recognizes that justice and respect for human rights is essential for people to truly benefit equitably from the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development.

The creation of the United Nations SDGs in 2015 was a monumental feat for the international community. Yet more than six years into implementation, the gains have been uneven across the globe, investments have not been sustained and many individuals and communities continue to be left too far behind. The COVID-19 pandemic has wiped away nearly all the progress of the last six years,¹⁷ and has disrupted the social contract on a global scale.¹⁸

To deliver on the promise of ensuring equal access to justice for all, a group of international activists, experts, governments, civil society, and private sector actors have come together to set the course. The [Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies](#)' Task Force on Justice emphasized that justice systems need to work for all, not just for the few.¹⁹ Justice is not about buildings, procedures, lawyers and courts. It is a value that needs to be realized in people's daily lives. Access to justice is about people being able to resolve and prevent their justice problems, to participate fully in society and have a fair chance in the economy.

[Our Common Agenda](#), issued by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in September 2021, reflects on this progress and reiterates the centrality of justice in delivering on the promise of the SDGs.²⁰ This embrace of people-centered justice is welcome – and demonstrates that leaders understand the challenges we face and how to address them. What is now required most of all is taking the next step, where leaders put their money where their mouth is and roll up their sleeves to do the hard work of making this a reality, by fundamentally transforming the justice systems they oversee.

They can only succeed if they empower all those working for justice and make justice systems - in the broadest sense of the word - more inclusive and representative.

Building on SDG16, Our Common Agenda calls for a new vision of the rule of law that seeks to address the disconnect people feel from institutions that serve them by putting people at the center of justice systems. This will support nations, communities, and people in rebuilding their social contract as a foundation for sustaining peace. By engaging public participation, institutions can deliver what people need most, and build on the SDGs. Distrust is fueled by inequality and corruption, and so this Agenda, this renewed social contract must have, at its core, justice.

Justice Action Coalition

To close the widening justice gap, we need bold action and ambition, political will and collaboration between different stakeholders championing equal access to justice for all. The [Justice Action Coalition](#) responds to this need. Created in 2021, the coalition is a multi-stakeholder, high-ambition coalition of countries and organizations working to close the global justice gap and achieve measurable progress in justice outcomes for people and communities by the second SDG Summit in 2023.²¹

The Justice Action Coalition, as a successor to the Task Force on Justice, collaborates to:

- Promote people-centered justice in domestic and international agendas and speak up for access to justice as part of the global debate on the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Promote and mobilize political and financial support for equal access to justice for all, including in conflict-affected and fragile countries.
- Join forces to influence international strategies and priorities, including at the UN, World Bank, OECD, and regional organizations such as the European Union, ECOWAS and others.

In 2021, the coalition, including 16 ministers from a diverse group of countries and global partners, sent a joint letter to the UN Secretary General on "[Reimagining social contract: A call to put people at the center of justice](#)".²²

In 2022, the coalition will launch the Justice Appeal, calling for a pivot to people-centered justice and measurable progress on SDG16's promise of justice for all, ahead of the 2023 SDG Summit.

The Justice Action Coalition is convened by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the g7+ Secretariat, The Elders, and the Pathfinders.

How We Move Forward Towards Justice Together

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person."

Eleanor Roosevelt

Intentional and sustained investment in people-centered justice provides cascading benefits for society. Providing universal access to basic justice services is relatively inexpensive compared to other human development indicators. Yet justice is still severely underfunded, with only 1.5% of official development assistance in conflict-affected nations directed at justice issues.²³ The cost of providing universal access to basic justice systems is estimated to range from USD \$20 to USD \$190 per capita on an annual basis across low to high income countries, respectively – less expensive than estimates around providing universal health care and education.²⁴ For countries at risk of falling into conflict, investing USD \$1 in access to justice can yield USD \$16 saved from reduced risk.²⁵

There are clear pathways to closing the justice gap and putting people at the center of justice.

- First, **people must be empowered to effectively resolve the justice problems that they face.** This requires renewed investment in legal empowerment, an approach that treats communities as agents of change, transforming their knowledge, capacity, and confidence to solve justice problems on their own.²⁶
- Second, **justice systems must provide people-centered justice services that accommodate diversity, meet people where they are and respond to their needs.** This can mean implementing 'no wrong door' policies, whereby a justice-seeker can be empowered and supported throughout their justice journey.
- Third, **justice systems must collect and share more – and better – data,** to understand the individual experiences of justice seekers, their decision-making processes, and the extent to which they were able to resolve their problem and achieve a fair outcome.

Good data also shines a light on blind spots in the justice system, the people that never ask for support and the problems and conflicts that remain unresolved.



Oluwaseun Ayodeji Osowobi

*Stand to End Rape Initiative
(STER)*



Jhody Polk

*Legal Empowerment and Advocacy Hub
(LEAH)*

Grassroots Justice Champions

Through the [Stand to End Rape Initiative](#) (STER),²⁷ [Oluwaseun Ayodeji Osowobi](#) is providing victims of gender-based violence justice a holistic range of services such as general advice, legal aid and representation, medical support, and health services empowerment in an impartial and non-discriminatory way across Nigeria.²⁸ STER looks at violence against women and girls from every angle. Oluwaseun Ayodeji is working to provide justice services to women so they thrive without the fear of violence, and to prevent violence by facilitating community engagement and dialogues and creating local guidelines with local systems. In March 2021, STER won the 2020 SDG Action Award for their work in eliminating sexual harassment in tertiary institutions. Oluwaseun Ayodeji also won the 2020 Global Citizen Prize: Nigeria Hero award.

[Jhody Polk](#) has moved from being incarcerated for seven years in a United States prison to leading a movement to give incarcerated people better representation and treatment.²⁹ In 2018 she launched the Legal Empowerment and Advocacy Hub (LEAH), the first participatory defense hub in the state of Florida. LEAH is the home of the Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative which supports incarcerated law clerks and jailhouse lawyers — individuals on the inside who are working to provide better legal representation for themselves and their peers.³⁰ LEAH also works with vulnerable, isolated, and incarcerated communities to educate them about the criminal justice system and human rights.

A Call to Action

Global Citizen is ready to play our part by amplifying the voices of Global Citizens and by working with partners and stakeholders to articulate a new vision of justice in the context of our campaigning — one that centers on people, protects their interests, resolves their justice problems, leads to fair outcomes and delivers on their expectations.

We will continue to call on all stakeholders, particularly governments and the private sector, to join us in the promotion of people-centered justice across the following key areas:

Put people at the center of justice systems.

We need new and renewed commitments to put people's justice problems at the center of justice systems, resolve justice problems with fair, open, inclusive, relevant and timely justice solutions that respect human rights, empower people to tackle the root causes of injustice, access justice services and achieve fair outcomes and enable them to participate fully in society and the economy. This includes legal empowerment – helping people understand the law, investing in legal aid and supporting innovative solutions to empower individuals and communities to participate in justice.

Address poverty alleviation through a justice lens.

In order to ensure justice for all, we must inspire better collection and use of justice data – with a focus on ensuring fair outcomes and greater accountability of systems to the people they serve. We must increase innovation in the justice sector by providing new ways to address problems and reduce bureaucracy and complexity. And, we must improve justice journeys for those engaging with the justice system from the point of entry through to resolution of their problems. This means access to people-centered justice services with accelerated and simplified processes, alternative pathways to justice and one-stop service provision for those in need.

Support civic space and enhance partnerships to repair the social contract.

We must use the experience of the last two years to better prepare for the future. International processes which require the deep partnership of civil society to succeed, from the most recent COP26 on climate to the decisions of the G7 and G20, are failing to engage people in the way they must to engender change. By focusing on making people partners in delivering justice – not just objects of institutions and laws, but participants in their shaping and execution – we can foster the collective will and energy to tackle the globe's most pressing challenges together.

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