

Salzburg Statement on *The Rule of Law*

The rule of law is not sustained by courts, governments, or lawyers alone. All members of society have a role to play in respecting, protecting, and promoting it in their communities and beyond. It depends on citizens, institutions, communities, businesses, civil society, and public officials who insist that rules be public, fairly applied, and capable of holding power to account.

In June 2026, the Salzburg Global Cutler Center for the Rule of Law, in partnership with the International Bar Association, convened the second cohort of the International Law Fellows Network in Salzburg, Austria. Over the course of several days, we, a cohort of rising leaders in international law, considered our responsibility in addressing a fundamental question of our time: how to safeguard the rule of law as a core principle of free, fair, and just societies.

This Salzburg Statement reaffirms the definition of the rule of law set forth by our predecessors in *The Salzburg Statement on the Critical Role of Lawyers in Safeguarding the Rule of Law*, published in 2025. Building on this work, we emphasize three critical components of that definition that are under strain today: publicly promulgated laws, equal application and enforcement, and independent adjudication.

As Salzburg Global Fellows, we invite lawyers and non-lawyers alike to share the responsibility of sustaining the rule of law by joining us in a collective commitment to:

1. *Promote understanding and education about the rule of law*
2. *Engage in the public arena and with diverse communities*
3. *Use your voice to advocate for the rule of law*
4. *Protect and foster just and transparent public institutions*
5. *Support the development of the rule of law, even when the path is long and uneven.*

These commitments must move from aspiration into daily practice - in our personal lives, professional settings, public debate, and institutional work. Each of us has the capacity to make the rule of law more visible, understandable, and resilient. By doing so, we help preserve the trust on which fair societies and effective international cooperation depend.

These commitments may mean demanding transparency when a local authority makes decisions about planning or public spending. They may mean correcting misinformation about courts or legal processes publicized by bad actors. Or they may mean holding a public body to its own published rules - and challenging it when those rules are quietly set aside.

The Commitment of the Salzburg Global International Law Fellows

While these responsibilities belong to all, they carry distinct professional and ethical weight for lawyers and legal professionals. We advise clients, shape institutions, interpret obligations, draft rules, litigate claims, and teach future lawyers. We help determine whether law restrains power or becomes its instrument.

That role requires ethical courage. It requires us to guide clients to honor the rule of law and the principles underpinning it; to reflect regularly on whether our work is consistent with our professional obligations, ethical responsibilities, and stated commitment to the rule of law; and to protect spaces for constructive dissent and ethical accountability when legal, governmental, academic, or corporate practice risks undermining the rule of law.

As Salzburg Global Fellows, we commit ourselves to exercising this responsibility. Building on the shared commitments above, we urge our peers and colleagues in the legal field to join us in the following:



Find out more about the Salzburg Global session on "The Future of the Rule of the Law in a Fractured World."

1 Promote understanding and education about the rule of law.

- Stay informed about legal developments, emerging risks, international obligations, and threats to the rule-of-law challenges at home and internationally.
- Support rule-of-law education in law schools, bar associations ([like IBA's Rule of Law video series](#)), professional organizations, and local communities.
- Use plain and accessible language to explain legal concepts, democratic governance, and why the rule of law matters.

2 Engage in the public arena and with diverse communities.

- Speak up when the rule of law is threatened. Use the credibility and influence of the legal profession to raise awareness of threats when the rule of law is threatened and of practical reforms when possible.
- Foster inclusive, honest, and informed discussion about how the global legal order is changing and what this means for society and people's lives.
- Build networks across borders and across diverse professional communities with others who share a commitment to the rule of law.

3 Use our voices to advocate for the rule of law.

- Foster cross-border cooperation and mutual learning. Respect differences without abandoning shared principles.
- Make the case to the public for reforms and initiatives that strengthen the rule of law.
- Promote a constructive, forward-looking narrative focused on shared aspirations, resilience, and continuous improvement.
- Hold the line when our employers, institutions, or work environments retreat from rule-of-law principles.
- Refuse to use legal expertise to help public or private actors evade accountability, hollow out legal institutions, or turn legal form into a shield for abuses of power.

4 Protect and foster just and transparent public institutions.

- Defend the independence, impartiality, and integrity of courts, judges, lawyers, and other institutions essential to the rule of law.
- Oppose improper internal and external interference with those institutions, regardless of whether particular legal outcomes align with personal, political, or professional interests.
- Use appropriate professional, institutional, and legal means to hold public institutions accountable when they disregard the rule of law.

5 Support the development of the rule of law, even when the path is long and uneven.

- Recognize that countries and legal systems begin from different historical and institutional positions and face different challenges in strengthening the rule of law.
- Highlight achievements, success stories, practical solutions, and incremental progress alongside challenges and risks.
- Build public confidence by showing that the rule of law is not only a constraint on power but a shared civic project that can improve lives.

Call to Action

We make this commitment as International Law Fellows, but we do not make it alone. We call on lawyers and legal professionals around the world to join us: to explain the rule of law clearly, defend it courageously, practice it ethically, and help rebuild public confidence in the idea that rules can and must apply equally to all.

This Statement reflects a consensus among Salzburg Global Fellows who attended the Salzburg Global International Law Fellows Network session on "The Future of the Rule of the Law in a Fractured World" in June 2026.

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