

*UIA – International Association of Lawyers*

## **Resolution on Sustainability and the Role of the Legal Profession**

**The General Assembly of the UIA - International Association of Lawyers - held in Rome on 25 October 2023 on the occasion of the 67th Congress:**

*Recognizing* the universal character of the UIA in bringing together Bars and Lawyers and their Professional Associations, while respecting the diversity of legal systems and cultures, as well as defending human rights, its commitment to take all measures necessary to promote respect for the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality,

*Recalling* that the Mission and Objectives of the UIA as a global and multicultural organization include promoting and defending the “Rule of Law”, understood as referring 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<sup>1</sup> and which includes the promotion of an international law based on effective and predictable rules providing legal certainty to the relations between States and compliance with such international norms and standards as well as the promotion of domestic legislation respectful of human rights and articulated in accordance with the principles and requirements of the Rule of Law,

*Recognising* that achieving sustainable development is one of the most urgent and important international issues and one of the greatest challenges with which people, societies, and States are confronted,

*Recognising* that due to this importance and urgency, the protection of the environment has been explicitly enshrined in the scope of various international and regional Human Rights treaties and instruments, such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), or the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1988), whilst as regards the Council of Europe, an evolutionary jurisprudence of the ECtHR makes it possible to extend the protection of human rights to the protection of the environment, through the protection of the rights to life, private life and family, property and others,

*Recognising* the Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact and the United Nations 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as universal calls to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and improve the lives and prospects of everyone,

*Recognising* the relevance of ESG – Environment, Social and Governance – as factors available to investors for measuring and assessing a company’s overall sustainability performance,

*Recalling* that “The rule of law has a critical role to play in the achievement of sustainable development,” as highlighted in the 2022 Progress Report towards the Sustainable Development Goals UN Secretary-General Report,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of the “Rule of Law” adopted by the UIA Governing Board in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 11-Feb-2017

<sup>2</sup> Report of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council at its 2022 session, 5–7 and 11–15 July 2022 -E/HLPF/2022/7, at

*Conscious* that climate change, loss of biodiversity, water management, and the need for a circular economy are matters of urgency and intersect with SDGs, and that, together with other forms of unsustainability, such as poverty, hunger, inequality, discrimination, illiteracy, or lack of quality education, disproportionately impact the vulnerable segments of the population, such as women, children, displaced persons, persons with disabilities,

*Recognizing*, as do the SDGs, that sustainability and human health and well-being are dependent on the health of the planet, including that of the flora and fauna that inhabit it, and that sustainable development, in its three dimensions (social, economic and environmental), and the protection of the environment, including ecosystems, contribute to and promote human well-being and the full enjoyment of all human rights, for present and future generations,

*Recalling* the UN General Assembly resolution of 26 July 2022 which recognizes the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right,

*Reaffirming* the responsibility of the legal profession to serve as a standard bearer for justice through the law, and that lawyers play a central role as intermediaries between the public and the courts in administering and promoting justice throughout the world,

### **Adopted the following Resolution:**

The UIA calls upon States and public and private institutions to create and implement laws, policies, and practices that promote sustainability – “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” – especially considering the needs of those who are, or will be, disproportionately impacted by different forms of unsustainability.<sup>3</sup>

The UIA urges all lawyers:

- To educate themselves on human rights, its national and international development, and specially the SDGs, the Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact, ESG factors, and how threats to sustainability impact their lives, their practices, their clients, and the world in general,
- To assume their essential role in advising clients of the importance of the SDGs, the Ten Principles and ESG factors,

The UIA calls upon all Bar Associations, Law Societies, and legal educational institutions:

- To promote the legal profession’s consideration of sustainability as strictly related to the promotion and protection of human rights and the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms and offer services to clients and members that wish to enhance the sustainability of their policies and practices,
- To facilitate dialogues to create solutions to the crises posed by climate change, loss of biodiversity, water management, and the need for a circular economy,

Furthermore, the UIA resolves:

- To view its internal practices through the lens of sustainability and, where practicable, institute policies that reflect that view,
- To raise awareness of the SDGs among its members and actively support the United Nations and other institutions in their efforts to achieve the SDG agenda,
- To develop best practices for lawyers and law firms that include the Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact, the SDGs, and ESG factors.

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<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/450/45/PDF/N2245045.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>3</sup> See the United Nations definition of sustainability, at <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability>.