

CONCEPT NOTE · SIDE EVENT TO JUSTICE MATTERS 2026

The High-Level Judicial Dialogue:

Building People-Centered Justice Across Africa and Ibero-America

DATE	6 May 2026	TIME	14:00 – 16:00 CET
VENUE	HiiL Office · Van Bylandt Huis, Benoordenhoutseweg 46, The Hague	LANGUAGES	English · Spanish (simultaneous)

Organized in partnership with:



01 · STRATEGIC CONTEXT

A World Under Pressure — and the Cost of the Justice Gap

The world is experiencing a period of profound instability. Rising inequality, protracted conflicts, democratic backsliding, climate-induced displacement, and rapid technological change are putting unprecedented pressure on justice systems. Across regions, unresolved legal problems ranging from land disputes to employment grievances, and administrative injustices are eroding social cohesion, weakening trust in institutions, and undermining stability and security. At the same time, justice systems are failing to meet people’s justice needs at scale.

An estimated **5.1 billion people** lack meaningful access to justice, including **1.5 billion** whose legal problems remain wholly unresolved — representing not only a normative concern but a systemic risk to development, stability, and public trust.

These challenges are compounded by a broader erosion of the rule of law. A majority of countries have experienced declines driven by rising authoritarianism, weakened fundamental rights, and reduced judicial independence.

Too often justice is treated as a downstream response to crisis. In practice, it is foundational: an essential component of institutional infrastructure for peace, resilience, and inclusive growth. When disputes cannot be solved fairly, quickly, and affordably, grievances accumulate. This fuels informality, economic insecurity, and, in some contexts, political instability and violence. Strengthening justice systems is therefore not only a rule-of-law imperative, but an investment in stability and security.

People-Centered Justice, Open Justice, and Stability

Judiciaries across Africa and Latin America face a persistent paradox: despite significant investments in infrastructure, digitization, and training, the justice gap remains wide. People-centered justice offers a practical framework to address this challenge. It starts from the justice problems people actually experience and focuses on how courts can resolve them more fairly, efficiently, and with durable outcomes.

For judiciaries, this does not require expanding mandates or compromising independence. It calls for strategic reorientation from institutional supply to human demand, ensuring that courts are responsive to the disputes that most directly affect people's lives and livelihoods. In practice, this includes prioritizing high-impact case types, simplifying procedures, using data and user insights to guide decision-making, and measuring success by users' satisfaction.

Judges are uniquely positioned to address everyday disputes that, if left unresolved, can escalate into broader social tensions. By focusing on effective resolutions, courts can move beyond reactive roles to become problem-solving, preventive, and trust-building institutions. This is also central to stability and security. Courts are often the last formal avenue for disputes resolutions. People-centered justice enables earlier and more effective interventions by the judiciary by simplifying pathways to justice and focusing on disputes most likely to escalate.

Evidence shows that fewer than one-third of people's most impactful justice problems are resolved through formal systems. Closing the justice gap requires a stronger focus on the most common and consequential disputes, supported by evidence-based practices that deliver timely, fair, and affordable outcomes. In doing so, courts reinforce both their legitimacy and their independence.

Open justice reforms address a core democratic challenge: courts exercise significant authority but often operate with limited visibility. Greater transparency in decisions, processes, budgets, and performance enhances accountability, reduces arbitrariness, and strengthens public trust.

Participation further strengthens this agenda by bringing user perspectives into judicial systems. Structured engagements, through consultations, court user councils, community justice forums, and inclusive service design can help to identify barriers such as cost, language, distance, and discrimination improving both access and outcomes.

People-centered and open justice are mutually reinforcing: both shift the focus from institutions to users, translating rule-of-law commitments into measurable improvements in how justice is delivered and experienced.

Africa and Latin America: A Peer Exchange

Cross-regional learning is most effective when it connects judiciaries operating under comparable conditions. Africa and Latin America provide such a peer context, with shared challenges and complementary strengths. Both regions face similar challenges: high volumes of justice problems, limited resources, declining public trust, and growing demand for accessible and responsive courts. At the same time, both regions have developed distinct and complementary approaches:

AFRICAN JUDICIARIES

Experience in community-proximate justice, plural legal systems, and innovative mechanisms to reach remote and marginalized populations.

LATIN AMERICAN JUDICIARIES

Advanced open justice reforms: transparency, accountability, participation, and the strategic use of judicial data, technology, and specialized courts.

The dialogue is designed as a horizontal, judge-to-judge exchange focused on implementation, identifying shared principles and scalable innovations, and laying the foundation for a sustained inter-regional judicial learning community.

Purpose and What This Dialogue Will Deliver

The Dialogue aims to create a high-level judicial space for collective reflection on how courts can strengthen stability and public trust through people-centered justice. Specifically, it seeks to:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify reforms with demonstrated measurable institutional and societal impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore how evidence and justice-needs data can guide judicial leadership and institutional strategy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Articulate the contribution of accessible dispute resolution to economic resilience and conflict prevention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster a durable cross-regional judicial learning community extending beyond the event.

The dialogue is expected to produce strengthened cross-regional relationships and networks among judiciaries, and a platform for sustained collaboration, research, and knowledge exchange on people-centered justice, with this inaugural session laying the groundwork for an ongoing inter-regional judicial community.

An Invitation to Reposition People-Centered Justice

At a time of growing instability, judiciaries are central to maintaining trust, resolving conflict, and supporting social and economic resilience. By focusing on the justice problems that most directly affect people's lives, courts can move beyond adjudication to play a more preventive and stabilizing role in society.

This session brings together seven judges, three from Africa and four from Latin America, to examine how people-centered justice can strengthen stability, security, and trust in justice institutions. Rather than a traditional panel, the session adopts a dialogue-driven format that privileges judicial experience, reflection, and comparative learning across regions facing similar institutional and societal pressures.

This event, convened on the sidelines of Justice Matters 2026, is ultimately an invitation to position people-centered justice as a core judicial function in an increasingly fragile world.

Session Agenda

6 May 2026, 14:00–16:00 CET · Simultaneous English–Spanish interpretation

14:00 – 14:05

OPENING

Welcoming Remarks and Framing

Fernando Marani

Program Director, Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (CIC-NYU)

14:05 – 14:10

OPENING

Opening Remarks

Anneke Zwetsloot

Senior Policy Officer, Security and Rule of Law, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

14:10 – 14:20

REGIONAL

Messages from the Regional Alliances

Maria Fernanda Rodriguez

Senior Fellow (CIC-NYU) — Secretariat Lead, Ibero-American Alliance for Access to Justice

Themba Mahleka

Associate Director, Pathfinders (CIC-NYU) — Secretariat Lead, African Alliance for People-Centered Justice

14:20 – 14:40

PART I

People-Centered Justice and the Strategic Use of Data

Brazil - Hon. Justice Jaceguara Dantas da Silva

National Council of Justice & Justice of the Court of Mato Grosso do Sul

Uganda - Hon. Justice Lillian Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza

Justice of the Supreme Court of Uganda

14:40 – 15:00

PART II

Open Justice, Transparency, and Institutional Legitimacy

Costa Rica - Hon. Justice Gerardo Rubén Alfaro

Justice of the Criminal Appeals Court & Director of Restorative Justice

Nigeria - Hon. Justice Kate Ogunsanya

Justice of the High Court of Ogun State

15:00 – 15:20

PART III

Integrating Formal and Informal Justice Pathways

Kenya - Hon. Justice Diana Rachel Kavedza-Mochache

Justice of the High Court of Kenya

Mexico - Hon. Justice Mariela Ponce

Justice of the Supreme Court of Justice of Querétaro State

15:20 – 15:45

PLENARY

Questions and Answers

15:45 – 16:00

CLOSING

Closing Remarks

Hon. Magistrate Alexandra Sandoval

Colombia - *Judge of the Amnesty and Pardon Chamber & Coordinator, Gender Commission, Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP)*

Fernando Marani

Program Director, Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (CIC-NYU)
