



Contribution by Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to the 2026 Rule of Law Report - European Commission

Rule of law and human rights

The ‘rule of law’ is a concept at the heart of the United Nations’ mission. It refers to a principle of governance which is consistent with international human rights standards ([S/2004/616](#)). There is no rule of law within societies if human rights are not protected and human rights cannot be protected in societies without a strong rule of law. This interlinkage is reiterated by the UN Secretary-General in his [New Vision for the Rule of Law](#):

“Human rights and the rule of law are mutually reinforcing – the advancement of the rule of law is essential for the protection of all human rights, and human rights are central to the rule of law.”

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), also known as UN Human Rights Office, is the main human rights entity of the UN to protect and promote all human rights for everyone everywhere. The High Commissioner for Human Rights leads OHCHR. He is the principal human rights official of the United Nations.

OHCHR is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realization, by all people, of all human rights. As part of its mandate, OHCHR works to mainstream human rights to strengthen the rule of law ([Management Plan 2024 - 2027](#)).

Established in 2009, OHCHR Regional Office for Europe (ROE) aims to advance the protection and promotion of human rights in the European Union and its Member States. ROE works to mainstream international human rights standards to strengthen the rule of law in the EU by engaging in and contributing to the European Commission’s Rule of Law Report. ROE furthermore promotes the UN human rights mechanisms and processes by giving their work visibility at the regional level.

OHCHR’s contribution

The current submission consists of a compilation of findings and recommendations contained in reports of UN human rights monitoring mechanisms including treaty-based mechanism (international human rights treaties), and Charter-based mechanism (special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council). It further draws on statements and reports by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner’s office (see diagram on the next page).

In line with the scope of the European Commission’s Rule of Law Report, this contribution covers 27 Member States of the European Union and four candidate States, namely, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

UN human rights monitoring mechanisms

The below human rights bodies review the following nine core United Nations human rights treaties:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

Treaty-based mechanism

Treaty monitoring bodies

- Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESRC)
- Human Rights Committee (CCPR)
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Committee Against Torture (CAT)
- Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW)
- Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT)
- Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED)

UN Charter-based mechanism

UN Human Rights Council

A subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly and the main intergovernmental body in the UN responsible for human rights.

Special Procedures

Independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective.

Universal Periodic Review

State-led mechanism that conducts a peer review of the human rights situation of each UN Member State

Human Rights Council-mandated Investigative Bodies

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides expertise and support to all of the different human rights bodies.

Human rights and rule of law (4 pillars of Rule of Law Report)

Pillar 1: Justice System

There is no true respect for the rule of law without a judicial power guaranteeing compliance therewith. Judges guarantee compliance with laws and with it the reality of democratic coexistence. The duty to promote equality among all persons, especially to ensure that everyone has the right to access justice on an equal basis with others, rests with the judiciary. Guaranteeing access to justice is indispensable to democratic governance and the rule of law, as well as to combating inequality and exclusion.

Respecting the rule of law through fostering the separation of powers and the independence of justice ensures protection of human rights. The judiciary is the ultimate guarantors of human rights. However, at the same time, judges, prosecutors and lawyers are subject to attacks and violations of their rights, including threats, intimidation, external interference in conducting their professional activities, arbitrary detention, prosecution, and killings. These attacks threaten the impartiality and independence of the judiciary and the legal profession and in turn, deter their role as guarantors of human rights and the rule of law.

For more info:

- [Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary](#)
- [Human rights in the administration of justice: a manual on human rights for judges, prosecutors and lawyers](#)
- [International principles and guidelines on access to justice for persons with disabilities](#)
- [General Recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice \(CEDAW/C/GC/33\)](#)
- [Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers](#)

Pillar 3: Media Freedom

Free, independent, plural and diverse media are a core component of the right to freedom of expression, a cornerstone of democratic societies and plays an essential role in strengthening the rule of law. Journalists and the media are crucial to ensure transparency and accountability for public and governmental authorities.

For more info:

- [OHCHR and the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity](#)
- [Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression](#)
- [General comment No.34 on Article 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression \(CCPR/C/GC/34\)](#)

Pillar 2: Anti-corruption

Corruption has a destructive effect on State institutions and it undermines the functioning and legitimacy of institutions and processes, the rule of law and ultimately the State itself. In particular, corruption effects on the capacity of States to respect, protect and fulfil human rights particularly of those persons and groups in situation of vulnerability and marginalization.

Corruption pose a major challenge to many societies as they divert public revenues and cripple public budgets that should provide healthcare, housing, education, and other essential services, they undermine States' ability to meet their minimum core obligations and their pre-existing legal obligations to maximize all available resources to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

For more info:

- [Corruption and human rights | OHCHR](#)
- [OHCHR Key messages on the negative impact of corruption in the enjoyment of human rights](#)

Pillar 4: Checks and Balances

Civic space is the environment that enables civil society to play a role in the political, economic and social life of our societies. In particular, civic space allows individuals and groups to contribute to policy-making that affects their lives, including by: (1) accessing information; (2) engaging in dialogue; (3) expressing dissent or disagreement, and (4) joining together to express their views. An open and pluralistic civic space that guarantees freedom of expression and opinion as well as freedom of assembly and association, is a prerequisite for making development and peace sustainable.

For more info:

- [OHCHR and protecting and expanding civic space](#)
- [Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders](#)
- [The Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#)



France: Inside the contribution

- **Period of contribution: January – December 2025**
- **Contents of contribution and additional information:**
 - The UN Committee against Torture adopted its concluding observation on France ([CAT/C/FRA/CO/8](#)) at its 82nd session and the report was published on 22 May 2025.
 - The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to France ([FRA 12/2025](#), in French only) dated 30 September 2025 on the administrative ban on entry into the territory imposed on Mr. Abbas Aroua a recognised activist and human rights defender, on the basis of a “note blanche” (intelligence memorandum). A [response](#) was received (2 December 2025).
 - The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to France ([FRA 10/2025](#), in French only) dated 22 September 2025 on the proposal to dissolve the Collectif Urgence Palestine, pursuant to paragraphs 1, 6, and 7 of Article L.212-1 of the Internal Security Code. A [response](#) was received (24 November 2025).
 - The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to France ([FRA 11/2025](#), in French only) dated 8 September 2025 on the assault against Mr. Joseph Akaravong, a human rights defender and Laotian activist in exile, which appears to be a case of transnational repression on French territory. Mr. Akaravong is said to have been attacked in Pau, France, by an unidentified individual, under circumstances that raise concerns about possible links to agents of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic or individuals acting with the consent or support of the Lao authorities. A [response](#) was received (20 October 2025).
 - The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to France ([FRA 3/2025](#), in French only) dated 28 February 2025 on allegations of human rights violations in connection with counter-terrorism measures used in the context of France’s organization of the 2024 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPG).
- **Summary of information which could be of particular relevance to the Rule of Law report:**
 - Under pillar 1 on justice system, relevant findings and recommendations (quality of justice) were issued by UN human rights mechanisms.
 - Under pillar 4 on checks and balances, relevant findings and recommendations (the enabling framework for civil society) were issued by UN human rights mechanisms.
- **Forthcoming relevant information (January – May 2026):**
 - The UN Committee on Enforced Disappearance will consider the State Party report from France ([CED/C/FRA/AI/2](#)) in a future session ([date to be confirmed](#))
- **Resources:**
 - Rule of Law in Europe | [OHCHR](#)
 - Country page on [France](#)
 - [Universal Human Rights Index \(UHRI\)](#) allows you to explore over 230.000 observations and recommendations made by the international human rights protection system (treaty bodies, special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review)

There is no true respect for the rule of law without a judicial power guaranteeing compliance therewith. Judges guarantee compliance with laws and with it the reality of democratic coexistence. The duty to promote equality among all persons, especially to ensure that everyone has the right to access justice on an equal basis with others, rests with the judiciary. Guaranteeing access to justice is indispensable to democratic governance and the rule of law, as well as to combating inequality and exclusion.

Respecting the rule of law through fostering the separation of powers and the independence of justice ensures protection of human rights. The judiciary is the ultimate guarantors of human rights. However, at the same time, judges, prosecutors and lawyers are subject to attacks and violations of their rights, including threats, intimidation, external interference in conducting their professional activities, arbitrary detention, prosecution, and killings. These attacks threaten the impartiality and independence of the judiciary and the legal profession and in turn, deter their role as guarantors of human rights and the rule of law.

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Quality of justice - training of justice professionals

While noting the information provided by the State Party that general training in human rights, ethics and professional conduct is regularly provided by the National School for the Judiciary and other specialized institutions for police officers and gendarmes, prison staff, judges, prosecutors, immigration officers, border guards and members of the armed forces, the Committee finds it regrettable that it has received little information on specific training relating to the provisions of the Convention. It is also concerned about the fact that forensic physicians and medical personnel dealing with detainees do not receive comprehensive and ongoing training on the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol), as revised, to enable them to detect and ascertain the physical and psychological effects of torture. In addition, it finds the lack of information on systems for evaluating the effectiveness of existing training programmes regrettable (art. 10). ([CAT/C/FRA/CO/8](#), para. 46)

The State Party should:

(a) Develop initial and in-service training programmes to ensure that all State agents, in particular law enforcement officers, members of the security forces, judicial officials, prison staff, immigration agents, military personnel and others who may be involved in the custody, interrogation or treatment of persons subjected to any form of arrest, detention or imprisonment, are well acquainted with the Convention, especially the absolute prohibition of torture, and that they are fully aware that violations will not be tolerated and will be investigated and that those responsible will be prosecuted and, on conviction, appropriately punished;

(b) Ensure that all relevant staff, including judges, prosecutors and medical personnel, are specifically trained to identify and document cases of torture and ill-treatment, in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol, as revised; ([CAT/C/FRA/CO/8](#), para. 47)

Pillar IV: Checks and Balances

Civic space is the environment that enables civil society to play a role in the political, economic and social life of our societies. In particular, civic space allows individuals and groups to contribute to policy-making that affects their lives, including by: (1) accessing information; (2) engaging in dialogue; (3) expressing dissent or disagreement, and (4) joining together to express their views. An open and pluralistic civic space that guarantees freedom of expression and opinion as well as freedom of assembly and association, is a prerequisite for making development and peace sustainable.

For more info:

- [OHCHR and protecting and expanding civic space](#)
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The enabling framework for civil society - Rules and practices having an impact on the effective operation and safety of human rights defenders (transnational repression)

The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to France ([FRA 11/2025](#), in French only) concerning the assault against Mr. Joseph Akaravong, a human rights defender and Laotian activist in exile, which appears to be a case of transnational repression on French territory. Mr. Akaravong is said to have been attacked in Pau, France, by an unidentified individual, under circumstances that raise concerns about possible links to agents of the Lao People's Democratic Republic or individuals acting with the consent or support of the Lao authorities:

- M. Joseph Akaravong est un militant écologiste et défenseur des droits humains, qui a travaillé dans le passé avec plusieurs organisations non-gouvernementales régionales asiatiques, promouvant l'autonomisation des communautés afin de faire progresser les droits humains, la justice sociale et la paix.
- En raison de ses activités, il aurait commencé à subir des actes de harcèlement dès 2014, lorsqu'il a été contraint de démissionner de l'Université bouddhiste de Champasak, en lien avec son engagement contre l'expulsion de plus de 400 foyers dans la province de Champasak. Ces habitants auraient été soumis à des pressions pour céder leurs terres en vue de la construction du barrage d'Attapeu.
- En 2022, M. Akaravong a obtenu l'asile en France, où il a continué à dénoncer la situation des droits humains en République démocratique populaire Lao via ses réseaux sociaux, ce qui aurait suscité l'intérêt soutenu des institutions étatiques laotiennes pour ses activités à l'étranger.
- Le 14 juin 2025, M. Joseph Akaravong a été attaqué par un homme non identifié alors qu'il marchait dans les rues de Pau, une ville du sud-ouest de la France. L'agresseur l'a poignardé à au moins trois reprises à la poitrine et à la gorge, avant de prendre la fuite. M. Akaravong a été hospitalisé en urgence et opéré. Son état s'est stabilisé dans la soirée du même jour. La police française a ouvert une enquête.
- Le 25 juin 2025, Meta (Facebook) a suspendu le compte de M. Akaravong, coupant ainsi un canal essentiel par lequel il pouvait mener son action de sensibilisation auprès du public. Le compte a été rétabli après une semaine. Meta avait déjà suspendu le compte privé de M. Akaravong le 9 août 2022, pour une durée de 29 jours, puis de nouveau le 25 octobre 2022, pour 15 jours. À chaque fois, M. Akaravong avait partagé des informations sur l'évolution politique en 3 RDP Lao. Ces suspensions pourraient être liées à des demandes de la part des autorités laotiennes.

The enabling framework for civil society - Rules and practices having an impact on the effective operation and safety of human rights defenders

The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to France ([FRA 12/2025](#), in French only) concerning the administrative ban on entry into the territory imposed on Mr. Abbas Aroua, a recognised activist and human rights defender, on the basis of a “note blanche” (intelligence memorandum):

- M. Abbas Aroua, né le 12 novembre 1962 en Algérie, est un citoyen Algérien résidant actuellement en Suisse. M. Aroua est un physicien médical et Privat-Dozent à la Faculté de biologie et de médecine de l'Université de Lausanne.
- Militant et défenseur des droits humains reconnu, M. Aroua a fondé plusieurs instituts et fondations visant à promouvoir la paix et prévenir la violence au Moyen-Orient et en Afrique du Nord. M. Aroua coopère régulièrement avec le Département fédéral des Affaires étrangères (DFAE) suisse par le biais d'une de ses fondations.
- En 2004, M. Aroua a fondé Alkarama, une organisation non-gouvernementale de défense des droits humains basée à Genève. Alkarama vise à soutenir des individus du Moyen-Orient et d'Afrique du Nord qui sont soumis ou à risque d'être soumis à des exécutions extra-judiciaire, des disparitions forcées, des actes de torture ou des détentions arbitraires, y compris en portant ces affaires devant les instances internationales. En 2007, M. Aroua a fondé le mouvement Rachad qui lutte pour un changement politique non violent, la démocratie, l'état de droit et la bonne gouvernance en Algérie.
- Le 19 mai 2023 au matin, alors qu'il rentrait en Suisse d'une mission officielle au Mali menée par sa fondation en coopération avec le Bureau de coopération suisse au Mali du Département suisse des Affaires étrangères, M. Aroua aurait été détenu à l'aéroport de Roissy Charles de Gaulle, à Paris, où il était en transit. Les autorités françaises lui auraient notifié une interdiction administrative d'entrée du territoire (IAT) décidée par arrêté du ministre de l'Intérieur et des Outre-Mer en date du 22 septembre 2022.
- Les autorités françaises auraient empêché M. Aroua de prendre son vol de retour en direction de Genève et aurait tenté de le renvoyer au Mali. M. Aroua les aurait informées qu'il résidait en Suisse et que son visa d'entrée unique au Mali avait expiré concomitamment à la fin de sa mission, et qu'il risquait par conséquent d'être expulsé du Mali vers l'Algérie où il encoure des risques sérieux de violations graves de droits humains, y compris la torture et la détention arbitraire. Pourtant, les autorités françaises lui auraient réservé une place sur un vol en direction du Mali le lendemain, le 20 mai 2023. Ce n'est que grâce à l'intervention de la Croix Rouge française que M. Aroua aurait été en mesure de rentrer en Suisse le 19 mai 2023.

A [response](#) was received from the Government of France.

The enabling framework for civil society - Rules and practices having an impact on the effective operation and safety of civil society organisations

The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to France ([FRA 10/2025](#), in French only) concerning the proposal to dissolve the Collectif Urgence Palestine, pursuant to paragraphs 1, 6, and 7 of Article L.212-1 of the Internal Security Code:

- Urgence Palestine a été fondée en octobre 2023 en tant que coalition de « citoyens, associations, syndicats et organisations et mouvements politiques mobilisés pour l'autodétermination du peuple palestinien »¹. Ses objectifs déclarés comprennent la promotion d'un cessez-le-feu immédiat, la fin de l'occupation et du régime d'apartheid présumé, la mise en œuvre de boycotts et de sanctions contre l'État d'Israël, et la cessation de la complicité du gouvernement français dans les violations du droit international.
- Le 16 mai 2025, le ministre de l'Intérieur a confirmé publiquement l'intention du gouvernement de dissoudre Urgence Palestine par décret du Conseil des ministres, à la suite d'une notification officielle émise le 28 avril 2025 à l'encontre de trois organisations. Celles-ci auraient eu jusqu'au 9 mai pour soumettre leurs observations.
- Le 12 juin, les deux autres organisations auraient été dissoutes par décrets du Conseil des ministres. Aucune décision n'aurait encore été prise à l'encontre d'Urgence Palestine. Dans la lettre d'intention de dissoudre les organisations, le premier argument du ministère de l'Intérieur est le suivant : « avant tout, votre organisation tient un discours apologétique concernant les attentats terroristes perpétrés par l'organisation terroriste Hamas le 7 octobre 2023, incitant ainsi directement à la commission d'actes terroristes. »

A [response](#) was received from the Government of France.