

Accelerating the 2030 Agenda's Implementation:

Spotlight on Sustainable Development Goal 16 and Providing Access to Justice for All

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

June 7, 2023

1:15-2:30pm

Quaker House: 247 East 48th Street

On June 7 the Quaker United Nations office held a discussion titled 'Spotlight on SDG 16: Providing Access to Justice for All', which was convened ahead of the High-Level General Assembly debate on "Equal Access to justice for all: advancing reforms for peaceful, just and inclusive societies". QUNO organized this discussion with the aim of exploring how justice is defined through unpacking reproductive and environmental justice, looking at who is being denied access to justice, new initiatives and what is needed to fulfill the promises of the 2030 Agenda so that the UN can fulfill its promise of leaving no one behind. The discussion examined the current state of play globally, barriers and setbacks to accessing justice for all. Equal access to justice, protection under the law and fair systems are key to both the rule of law, the full enjoyment of human rights by all, reducing inequalities and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

Panelists provided historical context for reproductive justice and environmental justice, while also reflecting on current global challenges and developments to both. Reproductive justice was coined in 1994 by a group of Black American women with four pillars: the right to full personal bodily autonomy, access to and availability of healthcare, to have or not have children – acknowledging the historical and ongoing context of forced pregnancies and abortions on indigenous and marginalized people, and the right to raise children in a safe and healthy communities. Environmental justice was founded through grassroots movements including the 'not in my backyard' campaign, and formally recognized in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and further in the Rio Declaration principles, that all people have the right to a safe and healthy environment, access to justice, information and participation in decision making.

Key themes that emerged from the discussion are as follows

There is a need for multifaceted approach and synergies to create justice for all, through emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and functional approach. The diverse range of speakers provided fresh perspectives that went beyond traditional UN silos, fostering fruitful and thought-provoking discussions. The importance of combining legal, social and political efforts through dialogue and cohesion was highlighted. This theme recognizes that addressing systemic inequalities requires collaboration and coordination across different sectors and stakeholders. Panelists highlighted the importance of including local, national and international voices for transparency and synergies to create lucrative outcomes for setting standards and legislation that recognizes the interlocking nature of crises and systemic inequalities that hinders an individuals or marginalized groups unequal access to justice.

The role of international institutions in providing access to justice is paramount to addressing issues related to equal access to justice for all. The UN is an important tool for Member States to mobilize resources, share best practices, and work on capacity building and development of their institutions to ensure that equal access to justice is provided to all members of society, especially those who in the past have found themselves to be disregarded through discriminatory laws. The significance of international cooperation and the collective effort of member states to achieve justice for all cannot be understated, especially given the current geopolitical and polarized world. For smaller states and developing countries, international frameworks and rule of law are one of the best and sometimes on. Sources of protection. Lack of access to justice should be seen as a global problem, without justice sustainable peace cannot be achieved. There is a need for Member States and UN agencies to speak and act with coherency to ensure accountability. Acknowledging the need for cooperation among member states and the importance of the UN as a platform for global cooperation and collective efforts should be further leveraged towards achieving justice for all.

The topics of gender equality, intersectionality and providing justice for all, centered on the issue of reproductive justice emphasizing that it goes beyond the right to abortion and includes various aspects such as the right to safe environments for raising a child, the right to bodily autonomy, and the right to gender identity. It is important when considering the intersectionality of reproductive justice, that it not only recognizes the individual, but that reproductive justice is interconnected with other issues such as environmental degradation, gun violence, and affordable healthcare. Issues that are highly relevant to equal access to justice often remain in siloed from a wider conversation that encompasses all aspects of equal access to justice. The concept of reproductive justice as presented during this discussion displayed its intersectionality with various other social issues before the UN in separate fora. There is an urgent need to look beyond the narrow focus on abortion and consider the full range of services required for sexual and reproductive health. This broader perspective brought a fresh and comprehensive argument to the UN discussions broadening the scope for where issues of reproductive rights can be discussed outside of the traditional discussion on women's rights.

Data collection and measurement on ensuring equal access to justice remains insufficient. The importance of addressing this gap cannot be stressed enough. Data collection should go beyond traditional methods. The importance of evidence-based decision making and monitoring progress towards achieving equal access to justice for all is key to the realization of accessing justice in every corner of the world. The need for improved data collection on access to justice was raised during the event. acknowledging the existing gap in data and recognizing the importance of addressing this issue, it was emphasized that the need to understand how people access justice in different contexts and to identify any gaps in the supply of justice will lead to the achievement of access to justice for all. The event also emphasized the role of international institutions such as the UN in facilitating data collection through coordination and cooperation at the country level should be strengthened.