

## **Launch of ‘Transitional Justice, a Strategic Tool for People, Prevention and Peace’**

### **Statement by Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**New York, 11 October 2023**

Excellencies, Colleagues,

We live in a world marked by low levels of trust, rising social fractures, a loss of shared truth, increased levels of grievance, power imbalance, inequality and other forms of marginalization. Such dynamics are all the stronger in societies that grapple with legacies of conflict and large-scale human rights abuse.

In such contexts, we cannot afford for the potential of transitional justice to remain underutilized. This new Guidance Note promotes transitional justice as a strategic and transformative policy tool that can help fractured societies build just, inclusive, and sustainable futures. Its positive impact derives from its ability to empower victims as rights-holders and reaffirm their dignity, enhance levels of trust in communities, increase societal inclusion, and help identify root causes of abuse for a transformative prevention agenda.

By doing so, transitional justice can contribute to peacebuilding, prevention, healing, and reconciliation. The Guidance Note helpfully positions transitional justice in this broader policy landscape and emphasizes the importance of linkages in practice, in the way we, the United Nations, support transitional justice processes.

This new Guidance Note seeks to capture the complexity of dealing with legacies of large-scale violations and their long-term consequences on societies. It underscores the multidimensionality of transitional justice and challenges practitioners not to blindly copy-paste existing models, but to strive for tailored responses to unique conditions.

The Guidance Note distils five overall features of UN support that can significantly enhance the chances of success. These relate to how its assistance promotes compliance with international norms; how it encourages strategic and innovative solutions that are fit for purpose and take a long-term perspective; how it empowers victims and adopts a transgenerational lens; how it advocates for a gender-responsive approach; and how it seeks to support a broader transformative project that addresses structural causes of conflict.

These “key features” have been informed by the expertise of UN practitioners across the globe (over 200 colleagues in over 40 duty stations). For example:

- ⇒ On Colombia we heard how a strong focus on strengthening the voices of civil society and victims who had not been previously heard (such as older persons and Colombian youth) resulted in greater levels of inclusion and thus a more tailored set of recommendations on prevention.
- ⇒ Colleagues in the Democratic Republic of Congo shared perspectives on the interplay between national and provincial initiatives, and how consultative and victim-centred approaches can contribute to bottom-up strategies and greater overall coherence in a transitional justice process.
- ⇒ Colleagues in Kosovo explained how a focus on empowering the families of missing persons, the creation of a civil society knowledge platform and the provision of mental health and psycho-social support can help depoliticize a sensitive issue and build trust within communities.
- ⇒ And colleagues in The Gambia offered perspectives on effective UN collaboration and linking transitional justice support to wider reform agendas.

These are just some examples to illustrate the range, diversity and richness of information that underpins the Guidance Note.

The Guidance Note includes 25 specific operational recommendations across three areas for action by UN colleagues towards strategic, integrated, innovative and people-centred transitional justice work.

- ⇒ A first area relates to greater institutional understanding of transitional justice and its linkages with other policy areas. Transitional justice is a shared responsibility within the United Nations that requires cross-organizational support and effective coordination.
- ⇒ A second aspect relates to innovation in the design and implementation of transitional justice work, including through joint analysis, design and planning, as well as the development of support strategies.
- ⇒ A third area asks us to consistently strive for tangible and transformational impact for people and communities, including through a consistent focus on user-friendly process design and the adoption of a transgenerational, gender, and mental health perspective.

As such, the Guidance Note challenges us to be creative and ambitious, while remaining pragmatic and conscious of complexities.

My Office is proud to have supported the development of this new Guidance Note and looks forward to working with colleagues across the UN to implement it.

Thank you.