

COMMONWEALTH LAW MINISTERS DECLARATION ON EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Colombo, Sri Lanka, 7 November 2019

Inspired by the Commonwealth principles on rule of law as set out in the Charter and the collective Commonwealth rule of law pronouncements, including the *Strategies for Enhancing Democracy by Eliminating Legal Barriers to Development* and the *Aso Rock Commonwealth Declaration on Development and Democracy*;

Inspired further by the Statement of Commonwealth Heads of Governments on the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda;

Recalling that Law Ministers in 2014, agreed that there is a link between the rule of law and sustainable development, which ought to be strengthened, and that the rule of law should be integrated into the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda;

Recalling the collective effort of Commonwealth member countries and the global community in seeking to promote access to justice for all by 2030 as emphasised in Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development;

Recognising the various obstacles and challenges encountered by the peoples of the Commonwealth to the attainment of access to justice as envisaged by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, including cost, the effect of poverty, access to legal aid, complex legal language, limited legal capability, corruption, geographic inaccessibility and the lack of confidence in the justice system; and

Recalling and building on the SDG pledge of leaving no one behind on the journey to a ‘just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world’ in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.

We as Commonwealth Law Ministers shall endeavour to:

1. Ensure the adoption of a broad understanding of access to justice that looks beyond access to dispute resolution mechanisms only and focuses on equality of outcomes;
2. Facilitate, where appropriate, the assessment of legal needs and the barriers to access to justice in our countries;
3. Use people-friendly approaches to address those barriers, including the use of technology to provide access to legal services as well as enhanced delivery of justice services;

4. Leverage the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting, Commonwealth Senior Officials of Law Ministries Meeting and their Working Groups to promote access to justice and rule of law across the Commonwealth;
5. Further utilise the fact that our countries share the common law and a common language, system of governance and values, inter alia, to build consensus and share experiences and best practices on rule of law issues and enhance access to justice for the peoples of the Commonwealth; and
6. Provide collective leadership to ensure that in the last decade of Agenda 2030, access to justice and rule of law as encapsulated in SDG 16 is delivered.