



PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

3 June 2026

Excellency,

Further to the conclusion of the high-level panel on the theme “The importance of complying with the Venice Principles for Ombudsman institutions to strengthen the institutions’ independence and autonomy and create an enabling environment to perform their mandate nationally and internationally”, which was held on 18 May 2026, I have the pleasure to circulate herewith the summary of the meeting, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 79/177. The summary was prepared with support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Annalena Baerbock", is positioned above the printed name.

Annalena Baerbock

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

High-Level Panel on the theme “The importance of complying with the Venice Principles for Ombudsman institutions to strengthen the institutions’ independence and autonomy and create an enabling environment to perform their mandate nationally and internationally”

18 May 2026, United Nations Headquarters, New York

Summary

I. Introduction

The high-level panel on the theme “The importance of complying with the Venice Principles for Ombudsman institutions to strengthen the institutions’ independence and autonomy and create an enabling environment to perform their mandate nationally and internationally”, convened by the President of the General Assembly, was held on 18 May 2026, at United Nations Headquarters in New York in accordance with General Assembly resolution 79/177.

II. Key messages from the high-level panel

Participants in the high-level panel delivered the following key messages:

- Participants reaffirmed the central importance of independent Ombudsman and oversight institutions as essential safeguards of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
- It was emphasized that Ombudsman and other mediator institutions are not auxiliary mechanisms but core components of accountable governance and resilient democracies.
- There was broad consensus that the Venice Principles provide a global framework for ensuring the independence, mandate and functioning of Ombudsman institutions, while the Paris Principles establish minimum standards for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). The two frameworks were repeatedly described as complementary and mutually reinforcing.
- Interventions from Member States focused on reported progress and challenges in strengthening legal and institutional safeguards, ensuring genuine operational independence, and adapting national frameworks in line with the two complementary sets of principles.
- The main challenges identified across panelists’ remarks include political interference, financial constraints, narrow mandates, reprisals against those who lead or cooperate with these institutions, and limited accessibility for vulnerable populations, including persons in remote areas and persons with disabilities.
- Emerging issues related to artificial intelligence, digital governance and conflict settings were also identified as shaping the future of mediator and oversight institutions.

III. Opening segment

During the opening segment, statements were made by H.E. Ms. Annalena Baerbock, President of the General Assembly, and Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights.

The President of the General Assembly focused her speech on the importance of independent Ombudsman institutions in protecting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. She outlined how the Venice Principles provide international standards to safeguard the independence and effectiveness of these institutions, especially in times of increasing political pressure, digital transformation, and declining public trust. The President of the General Assembly also emphasized the need to strengthen legal protections, funding, and accountability mechanisms so Ombudsman institutions can continue defending individuals' rights and ensuring government accountability.

The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights emphasized that Ombudsman and mediator institutions face systemic constraints including narrow mandates, political pressure, lack of resources, reprisals, and limited reach to remote and vulnerable communities. She highlighted OHCHR initiatives to operationalize the Venice and Paris Principles, including joint monitoring by Ombudsman institutions in Central America on migrant protection gaps, support for data collection in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and human rights-based police training in Timor-Leste. She also linked this work to SDG targets 16.3, 16.6, 16.7 and 16.10, and invited Ombudsman and mediator institutions to join the Global Alliance for Human Rights.

IV. Interactive panel discussion

The interactive panel discussion brought together Ms. Nadine Mailloux, President of the International Ombudsman Institute, Ombudsman de Montréal, Ms. Angie Cruickshank Lambert, Defensora de los Habitantes de la República de Costa Rica and Mr. Rafael Bustos Gisbert, member of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. The discussion was moderated by Ms. Ann Syauta, Chief of the Intergovernmental Affairs, Communications and Outreach Section, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The discussion focused on the growing pressures faced by Ombudsman institutions and the implications for democracy, accountability, and the rule of law. Panelists emphasized that threats to institutional independence increasingly take indirect forms, including politicized appointment procedures, budgetary restrictions, and administrative obstruction, gradually weakening oversight mechanisms without formally dismantling them. They stressed that an Ombudsman institution unable to investigate government actions independently loses its essential role as a guarantor of accountability.

The need for stronger constitutional and legislative safeguards, including protection of institutional budgets, transparent appointment procedures, and mechanisms such as peer review to strengthen compliance with the Venice Principles was also highlighted. Panelists also pointed to the increasingly difficult environments in which many Ombudsman institutions operate, particularly in contexts marked by poverty, insecurity, displacement, and political pressure, where they often remain one of the few accessible state institutions.

The discussion further addressed emerging challenges related to artificial intelligence and digital governance. One panelist referred to the Venice Commission's updated Rule of Law Checklist (2025), which incorporates safeguards related to checks and balances and AI governance, underscoring that Ombudsman institutions are becoming increasingly important in monitoring the lawful, transparent, and accountable use of artificial intelligence in public administration.

Panelists noted that automated decision-making systems may create new risks for human rights, access to services, and administrative fairness, further reinforcing the need for strong and independent oversight institutions. The Venice and Paris Principles were therefore presented not only as legal standards, but also as essential frameworks for strengthening democratic oversight and institutional resilience in a rapidly changing governance environment.

V. Member States' interventions

In the ensuing debate 18 delegations took the floor with questions and comments for panelists.

Delegations reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening independent Ombudsman institutions as essential mechanisms for accountability, human rights protection, and democratic governance, in line with the Venice and Paris Principles. They also expressed support for enhanced international cooperation, institutional reforms, and greater oversight capacity to address emerging challenges related to political pressure, digitalization, and artificial intelligence.

The following main issues were addressed by Member States:

Institutional Independence and Accountability

Statements delivered during the discussion highlighted the broad relevance of Ombudsman institutions across the interconnected pillars of peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development. Delegations emphasized that the Venice Principles provide practical safeguards for institutional independence, including guarantees related to appointment procedures, tenure security, operational autonomy, and financial independence. Attention was also given to the dual role played by many institutions, which simultaneously function as Ombudsman offices and National Human Rights Institutions under the Paris Principles.

Across regions, speakers pointed to continuing challenges affecting the effectiveness and credibility of oversight institutions. These included resource constraints, delayed or politicized appointments, budgetary pressure, and difficulties ensuring that public authorities implement Ombudsman recommendations in practice. At the same time, many delegations highlighted ongoing legal and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening transparency, accessibility, independence, and alignment with international standards.

Human Rights, Inclusion and Governance

Several interventions linked strong Ombudsman institutions to public trust, social cohesion, and inclusive governance. Participants emphasized the importance of regional cooperation, technical assistance, peer learning, and capacity-building initiatives to reinforce institutional resilience and improve public service oversight. Speakers also underlined the role of Ombudsman institutions in addressing discrimination, promoting equality, strengthening citizen participation, and supporting human rights-based governance approaches.

Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence

Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence emerged as cross-cutting themes. Delegations noted that digital technologies can improve accessibility and efficiency but also create risks for transparency, equality, due process and public trust. Ombudsman institutions were presented as important actors in monitoring the human rights implications of AI and digital governance, promoting safeguards and ensuring that innovation remains consistent with human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

International Standards and Cooperation

Delegations referred to the accreditation process guided by the Paris Principles as an important benchmark for credibility and independence, while underscoring the need to strengthen implementation of the Venice Principles. They called for stronger international cooperation, technical assistance, peer learning, regional networks and exchange of good practices, including to support institutions operating in conflict, emergency or politically constrained environments.
