



High-level panel on

“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”

Monday, 18 May 2026, 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Economic and Social Council Chamber, United Nations Headquarters, New York

CONCEPT NOTE

The President of the General Assembly will convene a high-level panel on “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” in accordance with General Assembly resolution 79/177.

Background

The General Assembly has recognized in various resolution¹ the important role of Ombudsman and mediator institutions in promoting and protecting human rights, fundamental freedoms, promoting good governance, and respect for the rule of law. It has encouraged Member States to consider the creation or the strengthening of independent and autonomous Ombudsman and mediator institutions, consistent with the principles on the protection and promotion of the Ombudsman institution (the Venice Principles).

The Venice Principles are the first independent international standards dedicated specifically to Ombudsman institutions. They were adopted by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)² and acknowledged by the General Assembly³. They complement existing standards, such as the Paris Principles⁴, by providing practical guidance on how to create and maintain effective Ombudsman institutions worldwide.

The General Assembly has also encouraged Member States to ensure that Ombudsman institutions have a strong legal basis, sufficient resources, and broad powers. This includes adequate funding, a wide mandate covering public services, and the authority to investigate complaints, address maladministration, and report findings effectively. These measures support their independence, efficiency, and credibility in promoting human rights and good governance.

¹ GA resolutions 63/169 of 20 March 2009, 65/207 of 21 December 2010, 67/163 of 20 December 2012, 69/168 of 18 December 2014, 71/200 of 19 December 2016, 72/186 of 19 December 2017, 75/186 of 16 December 2020, 77/224 of 15 December 2022, and 79/177 of 17 December 2024.

² Principles on the Protection and Promotion of the Ombudsman Institution (“The Venice Principles”, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 118th Plenary Session (Venice, 15-16 March 2019)

³ GA resolution 75/186 of 16 December 2020. The Venice Commission counts 61 members: the 46 Council of Europe member States, plus 15 others.

⁴ Endorsed by GA resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993.

The General Assembly further encouraged Ombudsman and mediator institutions to operate in accordance with relevant international instruments, including the Paris and Venice Principles, to strengthen their independence and capacity to support Member States in promoting human rights, good governance and respect for the rule of law.

The Paris Principles define the minimum standards for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), including some Ombudsman institutions, to ensure their credibility and effectiveness.

Objectives

The high-level panel will provide an opportunity to discuss and share best practices on how the Venice Principles can strengthen Ombudsman institutions and help them respond to challenges affecting their independence and autonomy. It will also explore how these principles can support the creation of an enabling environment in which Ombudsman institutions can effectively carry out their mandate, including their role as national human rights institutions, in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as good governance and the rule of law.

Guiding questions

Participants are invited to share their experiences and reflect on best practices and persisting challenges by addressing the following guiding questions:

- How can the Venice Principles help create an enabling environment that will allow Ombudsman institutions to perform their mandates more effectively at the national and international levels?
- What are some of the main recurrent challenges that Ombudsman institutions face with regard to their independence and autonomy, and how can the Venice Principles help to prevent or mitigate such challenges?
- What are the barriers that may hinder the implementation of the provisions of the Venice Principles that seek to ensure the independence of these institutions?
- What steps could Member States take to ensure that Ombudsman and mediator institutions have constitutional and legislative frameworks compliant with the Venice Principles, as well as the necessary financial and administrative independence and stability?
- How can it be ensured that international and regional standards, such as the Paris Principles and the Venice Principles, complement and strengthen each other?
- What are the potential impacts of emerging challenges (such as AI and global crises) on the independence and autonomy of Ombudsman institutions, and how can the Venice Principles be used to mitigate these negative impacts?
- How can the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights better support the establishment of independent Ombudsman and mediator institutions in accordance with the Venice Principles and the Paris Principles?
- Can you share examples and good practices of how Ombudsman and mediator institutions have contributed to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16?

Format

The high-level panel will take place in person on Monday, 18 May 2026, from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., in the Economic and Social Council Chamber at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The panel will consist of an opening segment and an interactive panel discussion. To allow a maximum number of participants, the time limits for statements at the interactive panel discussion will be three minutes for individual delegations and five minutes for statements made on behalf of a group of States, which will be strictly enforced by means of automatic microphone cut-off.

The interactive panel discussions will not have a pre-established list of speakers. Participants wishing to take the floor are invited to press the microphone button.

A detailed programme will be circulated in due course.

The United Nations Webcast services will provide live streaming coverage of the high-level meeting in all 6 official languages as well as on-demand coverage (recorded video) in English and original language, through the UN Web TV website at: <http://webtv.un.org>.

Participation

Participation in the high-level panel will be open for Member States and Observers of the General Assembly, the United Nations system, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC.

Outcome

As mandated by General Assembly resolution 79/177, the President of the General Assembly will prepare a summary of the discussion for transmission to all Member States.

Accessibility arrangements

Delegations are requested to inform the Secretariat of the accessibility requirements of their delegates in order to facilitate participation in meetings. Upon request, adjustments can be made to seating arrangements with a view to enabling the participation of persons with disabilities. For individual requests, please contact the Meetings Support Section of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (email: accessibilitycentre@un.org; phone: 212 963 7348/9) no later than three working days prior to the meeting.
