

Stronger together: justice for victims of corruption

A common roadmap to advance victims' rights in corruption cases

📅 16 October 2025 ⌚ 16:00 – 17:00 (CET) 🗣️ Zoom ([register here](#))

Introduction

Citizen participation, collective rights, and the recognition of victims of corruption can be transformative when incorporated into legal systems.

These goals become attainable through coordinated civil society action, which can drive litigation, expand legal standing, and secure reparations to ensure that stolen assets are returned for the benefit of affected communities.

This roadmap is the result of joint efforts by groups that united to advocate for the legal standing of NGOs in corruption cases.

Find in this concept note:

▶ Roadmap ▶ Main narrative points

NGOs globally are encouraged to join the effort, initiate cases, and reach out for support, raise awareness at the CoSP, and continue advocacy in 2026 and beyond.

Background

Corruption undermines human rights, erodes democratic institutions, and directly harms individuals and communities.

Yet, in most legal frameworks, victims of corruption remain invisible and without standing, excluded from proceedings that profoundly affect their rights and lives, and which remain exclusive to state institutions or individually harmed victims. This is a narrow approach that fuels impunity, and blocks the return of stolen resources to society. Recognizing victims of corruption as active participants in the justice process is both a legal imperative and a democratic necessity. Since 2020, the UNCAC Coalition, building on the work of Juanita Olaya and the Coalition's Working Group on Victims of Corruption, has advanced awareness about the rights of victims, the need for reparations, and the importance of civil society participation in litigation. In recent years, these efforts have expanded to emphasize a human rights-based approach to anti-corruption, connecting the UNCAC with human rights instruments and mechanisms, and reflecting growing debates at international fora.

Although major gaps still persist, human rights mechanisms have already paved the way. In 2019, the IACHR issued its landmark report *Corruption and Human Rights: Inter-American Standards*, affirming the centrality of victims, the responsibility of states, and the need for adequate reparations. This framing has since informed innovative litigation strategies across Latin America, where CSOs and victims' groups are demanding recognition as parties in corruption cases and ensuring that asset recovery benefits affected communities.

Three recent cases in Latin America illustrate both the challenges and the opportunities for advancing victims' rights in corruption proceedings. In Mexico, the Javier Duarte case, presented by TOJIL before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2020, challenges the exclusion of victims and civil society organizations from participating as parties in a major corruption trial. This petition raises fundamental questions about access to justice, democratic participation, and the collective right to live in a corruption-free environment. In Peru, the corruption cases involving the Qali Warma social program marked a breakthrough when the Supreme Court recognized Proética as an injured party, reaffirming that NGOs can legitimately intervene when corruption harms collective rights and social interests. Equally important is an Argentinian case, which sets a positive precedent in the region.

Unlike the resistance seen in Mexico and Peru, the Argentine judiciary showed openness: a judge admitted Poder Ciudadano as a litigant in a corruption investigation involving high-level officials. By upholding the legitimacy of an NGO to act, even without being directly involved in the events, the judiciary demonstrated that civil society participation can be recognized without obstruction, providing a good example for justice operators across the region.

The UNCAC Coalition is supporting the struggles of Tojil and Proetica thanks to the legal support of the Vance Center. The Coalition filed an amicus curiae in the Peruvian case, underlining the broader regional and international implications of recognizing collective standing in corruption proceedings, and will submit an amicus curiae in October 2025 to the IACHR in the Duarte case, providing a historic opportunity to strengthen international standards on victims' rights.

Together, these cases demonstrate the transformative potential of law when it incorporates citizen participation, collective rights, and the recognition of victims of corruption. They also show how coordinated civil society action can drive litigation, expand legal standing, and secure reparations that ensure stolen assets are returned for the benefit of affected communities.

Main narrative points

As part of the roadmap, we will present and advocate for five overarching narrative points that cut across cases, regions, and advocacy spaces:

Bridging human rights and anti-corruption frameworks to advance victims' rights



Applying the broader definition of victimhood under international standards



Enabling civil society to fulfill their role in advancing a more inclusive justice



Defining clear criteria for civil society participation in anti-corruption cases



Understanding the dual nature of harm from corruption



Providing remedies, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition



Rationale for a collective roadmap

To seize current momentum, we have developed a comprehensive, multi-stage advocacy roadmap (October–December 2025). This roadmap is designed to expand legal recognition of victims of corruption and consolidate an international movement.

The roadmap combines:

Litigation



Advancing precedent-setting cases with amicus support

Public mobilization



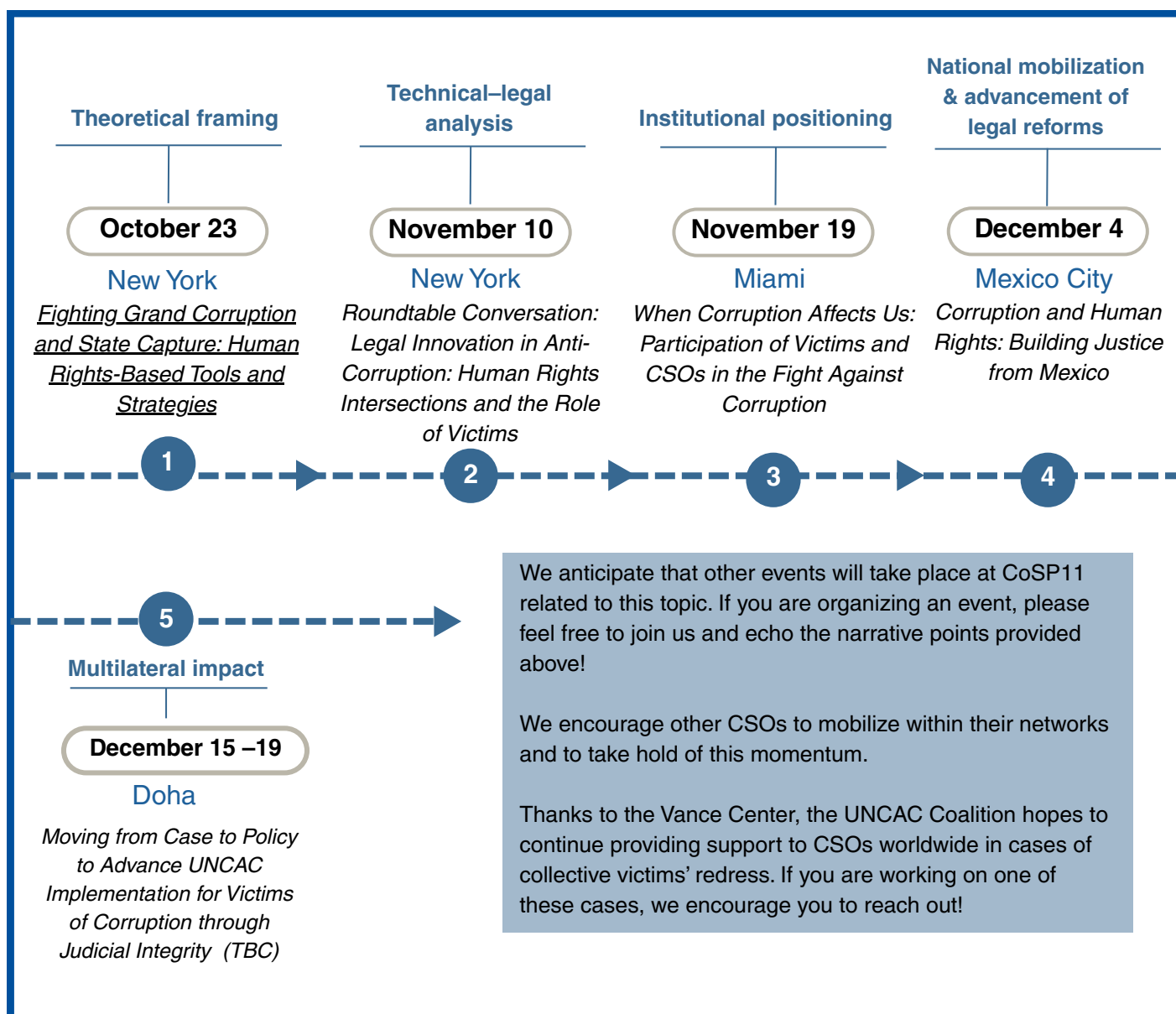
Engaging NGOs, media, and communities

Multilateral advocacy



Influencing debates at the IACHR, CoSP11, etc.

Between October and December 2025, five strategic events will anchor this roadmap:



Let's keep this momentum growing in 2026 and beyond!