Recommendations for Integrating Human Rights into Anti-Corruption Frameworks

Working Group on Human Rights & Corruption[1] of the Global Civil Society Coalition for the UNCAC Submission to CoSP11

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Introduction

Corruption and human rights violations are closely linked, even though they are often treated separately. Corruption weakens institutions, undermines the rule of law, and erodes public trust, affecting people's ability to enjoy their fundamental rights. Human rights frameworks, in turn, help monitor the real-world consequences of corruption, especially for individuals and communities most exposed to abuses of power. Addressing corruption without considering human rights creates gaps that can weaken the legitimacy and effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts.

In our policy guidance on *Systemic Integration of Human Rights in Anti-corruption Frameworks*,[2] developed in collaboration with the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, we emphasized that the two fields are complementary and should be implemented together. The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, the UN Charter, and the UNCAC already provide the legal basis for interpreting obligations in ways that reinforce one another. UN bodies have repeatedly recognized the need for coherence across systems. Interpreting UNCAC in isolation leads to inconsistencies and weaker protections.

We therefore encouraged States Parties at CoSP11 to reference human rights obligations and align anti-corruption measures with existing standards.

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[1] The Global Civil Society Coalition for the UNCAC's Working Group on Human Rights and Corruption comprises almost 240 members, from civil society organizations, activists, academia and other stakeholders. This platform serves to foster discussions, exchange knowledge, and share experiences among experts on human rights and corruption. Additionally, the Working Group provides a space for the coordination of advocacy efforts and the advancement of international and regional laws and policies in this regard. UNCAC Coalition. "Human Rights and Corruption," accessed 20 November 2025.
https://uncaccoalition.org/get-involved/working-groups/human-rights-and-corruption/.

[2] UNCAC Coalition. "Systemic Integration of Human Rights in Anti-Corruption Frameworks: A Policy Guide," accessed on 21 November 2025. https://uncaccoalition.org/systemic-integration-of-human-rights-in-anti-corruption-frameworks/.

The recommendations below outline practical steps to integrate human rights into anti-corruption policy at national and international levels.

Recommendations

Institutional alignment

Systemic integration requires sustained coordination between institutions working on corruption and human rights. In many settings, anti-corruption bodies and human rights institutions operate independently, resulting in fragmented responses and inconsistent standards.

States should apply the principle of systemic integration[3] when interpreting and implementing the UNCAC, ensuring that anti-corruption measures align with relevant human rights treaties. At the international level, stronger cooperation between UNODC and OHCHR would reinforce coherence through joint expert processes, technical exchanges, and collaborative development of guidance and conceptualisation.

National anti-corruption authorities and national human rights institutions should adopt cooperation agreements to share findings, indicators, and areas of concern, solutions and collaboration. Cross-referencing UNCAC and human rights obligations should be encouraged in National Action Plans, as well as in national reports to international review mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review, UN human rights treaty bodies, and the UNCAC Implementation Review Mechanism.

Judicial Integrity

Judicial integrity is essential for anti-corruption enforcement and human rights protection. Without an independent and accountable judiciary, corruption cases cannot be effectively pursued, nor can the rights of defendants, victims, and the public be protected. Weak judicial institutions encourage impunity, while politically influenced judiciaries can weaponize anti-corruption processes against opponents or activists.

States should therefore ensure that judicial selection, oversight, and disciplinary mechanisms comply with international standards on judicial independence.[4] Incorporating UNCAC Article 11 into judicial accountability frameworks must be done to protect judges from arbitrary

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[3] Article 31 of "Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties," done at Vienna on 23 May 1969, entered into force on 27 January 1980, United Nations Treaty Series no.1155: 331, https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1_1_1969.pdf.

[4] OHCHR. "Basic *Principles on the Independence of Judiciary*," adopted 6 September 1985. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-independence-judiciary.

removal or politically motivated discipline, undermining judicial independence.[5] Safeguards must be in place to ensure that judicial reforms or disciplinary actions are not used as tools for political influence.[6]

Protection measures should also extend to judges who expose corruption or resist undue interference, consistent with the guidance of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers. Judicial training programs should address the connection between human rights and corruption, including how corruption cases impact broader democratic governance and public trust.

States should ensure reasonable timeframes in corruption proceedings[7]. In addition, authorities must refrain from using anti-corruption investigations or criminal processes to subject politically active individuals and groups to prolonged or indefinite legal proceedings. Such practices undermine due process, distort political competition and democratic processes, and may amount to political persecution.[8]

Civic space

An open civic space is essential for effective anti-corruption efforts. Human rights defenders, journalists, community leaders, whistleblowers, and civil society organizations play vital roles in exposing corruption, monitoring government performance, and advocating for accountability. Yet in many contexts, these actors face criminalization, reprisals, smear

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[5] OHCHR. "A/HRC/44/47: Independence of judges and lawyers - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers," published 23 March 2020. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc4447-independence-judges-and-lawyers-report-special-rapporteur.

[6] *"44. Disciplinary sanctions, including suspension or removal, may be imposed on individual judges in ways that undermine human rights and democratic values, for example when judges are disciplined for work to uphold the human rights of groups experiencing social opprobrium. Judges may also be disciplined in apparent reprisal for their opinions in high-profile electoral cases or when speaking on issues related to the functioning of the judiciary. In a case in the United States of America, the Special Rapporteur received allegations that a judge was investigated for speaking out against racial injustice within the legal system.*
45. Cases in which judges have allegedly been removed from office for objecting to legislative amendments, 85 for imposing convictions in political corruption cases 86 or for challenging corruption in international courts were described in submissions for the report.87 In some instances, such removal allegedly occurred without due process."
Margaret Satterthwaite, "Safeguarding the independence of judicial systems in the face of contemporary challenges to democracy: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Margaret Satterthwaite," A/HRC/56/62, Human Rights Council, 21 June 2024. https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/62.

[7] Paragraph 76 in: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, "Corruption and Human Rights in the Americas: Inter-American Standards," OEA/Ser.L/V/II, 6 December 2019. https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/CorruptionHR.pdf.

[8] Paragraph 178 in: *Caso Andrade Salmón vs. Bolivia*, Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, (1 diciembre 2016). https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_330_esp.pdf.

campaigns, and regulatory restrictions designed to limit their work. These trends directly undermine the objectives of UNCAC Article 13 and weaken oversight systems.

States should therefore guarantee safe conditions for all individuals and organizations engaged in anti-corruption work. Non-governmental organizations should not be subject to burdensome or discriminatory registration requirements; registration systems should be declarative, simple, and non-restrictive.[9] Any limitation on civic activities must comply with international human rights standards on legality, legitimate aim, necessity, and proportionality, as required under instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. [10]

Laws governing associations, media, protest, and access to information must include safeguards to prevent their misuse against civil society organizations working on corruption. This is especially critical in contexts where corruption-related protests have been met with disproportionate force or where civic mobilization around corruption cases is treated as a security threat.[11]

Institutional arrangements should also support meaningful participation. States should incorporate transparency, non-discrimination, and participation in national anti-corruption strategies, oversight mechanisms, and in processes associated with the Implementation Review Mechanism. Independent oversight bodies should be empowered to investigate violations against civil society actors and provide effective remedies.[12] Administrative dissolution of associations should only occur through a final, independent judicial decision with full due process guarantees.[13]

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[9] Basis: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 22; American Convention on Human Rights Article 16; United Nations, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders," A/64/226, 4 August 2009. https://docs.un.org/en/A/64/226; *Luis Miguel Sirumbal Ramos y 8.438 ciudadanos y Congresistas de la Republica del Perú (demandantes) c. Congreso de la República (demandado),* Tribunal Constitucional del Perú, *Decisión N.º 00009-2007-AI / 00010-2007-AI (acumulados)*, párr. 95, 2007, (29 agosto 2007). https://www.tc.gob.pe/jurisprudencia/2007/00009-2007-AI%2000010-2007-AI.html.

[10] Basis: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 22(2); American Convention on Human Rights Article 16(2); Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 25; *López Lone v. Honduras,* Inter-American Court on Human Rights (2015).

[11] See how the UNCAC provisions can be used as a strong basis to continue improving the human right to access to information here: https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/UNCAC-Guide-FInal.pdf.

[12] "Inter-American Convention Against Corruption", adopted at the third plenary session, March 29, 1996. https://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/docs/inter_american_treaties_B-58_against_Corruption.pdf.

[13] Basis: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 22; American Convention on Human Rights Articles 8 and 16; Human Rights Council. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kai," A/HRC/23/39, 24 April 2013. https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/23/39.

Artificial Intelligence (AI), Anti-Corruption and Human Rights

AI and digital technologies can help improve transparency, detect corruption risks, and strengthen oversight. However, unregulated or poorly designed AI systems can also entrench discrimination, obscure decision-making, and be intentionally abused for the private benefit of entrusted powerholders.[14]

States should place human rights and anti-corruption principles at the center of all AI-related laws, policies, and regulatory frameworks.[15] Algorithmic governance should be treated as both a human rights issue and an anti-corruption concern. Digital systems must not introduce new corruption risks or create opaque decision-making environments. Strong protections should be in place to ensure the integrity of data used in public systems.[16]

AI regulations must be aligned with UNCAC obligations and international standards on digital rights. Human rights and corruption impact assessments should be required before the adoption of new technologies, with regular reviews throughout the system's lifecycle.[17] Training datasets should be representative and inclusive to prevent the reinforcement of structural inequalities. Public and private actors deploying AI should be required to implement safeguards and continuous monitoring to detect and mitigate discriminatory outcomes and potential corrupt uses.

Certain high-risk uses of AI require strict limits. Fully automated decision-making should not be used in contexts affecting rights, including criminal justice, judicial case assignment, procurement monitoring, social protection systems, or whistleblower screening. AI systems used in public administration must be explainable and auditable, and any decision affecting rights must be accompanied by a clear, accessible justification.

States should prohibit AI systems designed to obstruct transparency, for example, tools that manipulate public records, filter access-to-information requests, or automate political censorship. Conversely, public-interest AI tools that help detect corruption risks, such as

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[14] Transparency International. "Addressing Corrupt Uses of Artificial Intelligence," 2025. https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/addressing-corrupt-uses-of-artificial-intelligence.

[15] UNESCO. "Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence," adopted on 23 November 2021. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137/PDF/381137eng.pdf.multi.page=1&zoom=auto,-16,842.

[16] "The Toronto Declaration: Protecting the right to equality and non-discrimination in machine learning systems," 2018. https://www.torontodeclaration.org/declaration-text/english/.

[17] This aligns with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (Principles 17–21), which require human rights due diligence, including continuous evaluation and mitigation of risks linked to technological developments.

irregular procurement patterns or conflicts of interest, should be supported, preferably through open-source approaches that allow civic oversight.

Before procuring or deploying AI in sensitive areas such as law enforcement, defense, or public finance, States should assess technologies according to their human rights and corruption risks. High-risk systems should be strictly regulated or subject to moratoriums. Systems used in workplace monitoring, fraud detection, or public complaints mechanisms must not expose whistleblowers, civil society actors, or victims to profiling or retaliation.

Accessible and independent remedies must be available for individuals or groups affected by discriminatory or harmful AI decisions.[18] In the health sector and similar areas, States should conduct transparent, inclusive impact assessments prior to deployment and throughout use. [19] These processes should involve civil society organizations, public-interest groups, and representatives of marginalized communities to ensure that decisions reflect public needs and values rather than solely technical or commercial priorities. [20]

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[18] Such mechanisms must be available prior to deployment and throughout the system's operation, in line with Article 2(3) of the ICCPR and Article 25 of the American Convention on Human Rights, which oblige States to guarantee judicial and administrative remedies to protect individuals against rights violations.
[19] Page 105 of: World Health Organisation. "Ethics and Governance of Artificial Intelligence for Health: WHO guidance," 2021. https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/341996/9789240029200-eng.pdf?sequence=1.
[20] Ibid.