



Press Release

Working Toward Equal Access To Justice For All: **The Legal Aid Network Launched In Sudan**

Khartoum, Tuesday March 14 --

The Legal Aid Department of the Ministry of Justice, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the People's Legal Aid Center (PLACE) launched yesterday the first Legal Aid Network in Sudan. The event marks the end of an intensive one-week workshop that brought together 136 community paralegals, also known as legal mediators, and lawyers from Kassala, Damazin, Lagawa, Dilling, Kadugli, Abyei, and Khartoum. The launch of the Legal Aid Network in Sudan marks the adoption of a common platform for the Sudanese paralegals and lawyers who provide legal assistance to the communities across the country.



Stressing the importance of this event, UNDP Country Director, Mr. Jerzy Skuratowicz said: "Establishing the Legal Aid Network in Sudan is essential in the broader context of training trainers on Human Rights and offering legal aid services, especially to the poor and vulnerable groups. As we want to build on this achievement to expand our collaboration, we invite other national legal organizations to join the Network".

“The launch of this Network is a starting point for the establishment and strengthening of the relationship between UNDP Sudan, the Department of Legal Aid of the Ministry of Justice, and the civil society organizations working in this field. God willing, we will work together so that the principles of rule of law will reach every citizen. We support the principle that states that “the rule of law includes not only the written law, but also the whole pattern of established rule of action and behavior”. The Legal Aid Department is the national mechanism entrusted with making the constitutional and legal texts regarding the right of citizens to a fair trial and access to justice a concrete reality for all”, said Mr. Yousif Mohamed Ahmed Elsaim, Senior Legal Counsellor, Department of Legal Aid, Ministry of Justice, addressing the ceremony.

The Legal Aid Network in Sudan is made up of 14 Justice and Confidence Centers (JCC) established by UNDP, IRC and partner organizations. The launch of the Network is the outcome of concerted efforts that took over two years since the establishment of the first JCC in November 2004 in Darfur. It has since been extended to Kassala, Blue Nile, Kordofan, South Kordofan states, and Abyei.

A Justice and Confidence Center is an independent community-based organization, registered under the Sudanese laws that govern welfare organizations. Each center is made up of up to 25 Sudanese paralegals working on a voluntary basis with lawyers to provide pro-bono legal aid and mediation services as well as legal materials and information. In addition to conducting confidence-building activities, the centers are also active in raising awareness on rule of law and Human Rights and establishing community-based Human Rights groups. These activities have received great support and enthusiasm from the communities through a large participation and interaction in all locations.

In collaboration with the Legal Aid Department of the Ministry of Justice, the Legal Aid Network aims at supporting the paralegals in building their technical capacities to provide legal assistance and mediation services, to share their experiences, best practices and lessons learned, and to engage with the Legal Aid Department in the strengthening and promotion of the legal aid system in Sudan. The purpose of the Legal Aid Network is also to bring together all stakeholders involved in legal aid activities in Sudan.

The one-week workshop also contributed to strengthening the collaboration with the Legal Aid Department and discussing the opportunities and challenges of the legal aid system in Sudan. The participants were briefed on the Sudanese Interim National Constitution and the Bill of Rights; the Sudanese legal system; the criminal, Sharia’a and common law; the role of paralegals and legal aid techniques; the role of and challenges faced by the Legal Aid Department of the Ministry of Justice. The paralegals also received a practical training of trainers on Human Rights and were provided with an overview of key principles on NGO administration and management.

Addressing the ceremony attendees, the IRC Protection Coordinator, Mr. Sebastiaan Der Kinderen, and the Director of PLACE, Mr. Rifaat Makkawi, reiterated the commitment of their respective organizations to continue empowering the Network’s drive toward achieving access to justice for all.

Through the Justice & Confidence Centres, the Legal Aid Network provides communities with free legal assistance, especially the poor and vulnerable groups, including women and internally displaced persons (IDPs). After several training sessions, the paralegals offer various forms of legal and human rights education, advice and assistance to and refer cases to local lawyers. The Network offers assistance with both civil and criminal cases, including the representation in formal court proceedings as well as providing advice and assistance concerning administrative matters. For UNDP, IRC and organization partners, the ultimate goal is to contribute to equal access to justice for all and foster the reconciliation and confidence process between returnees, local communities and the Sudanese authorities.

The human rights outreach activities conducted by the JCCs encourage all Sudanese stakeholders to play an active role in the process of confidence building and to promote a culture that respects the rule of law. Unlike the conventional human rights trainings, awareness-raising workshops draw on traditional and indigenous conflict resolution, cultural and religious values. Legal awareness-raising helps people understand that they are entitled to claim remedies against infringements of their rights.

For more information on the Legal Aid Network, and UNDP Rule of law programme in Sudan, please contact:

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