PEOPLES PROMISE

to the defense of the Rule of Law



World Law Foundation

THE REYNOLDS FOUNDATION

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01 About the People's Promise

The People's Promise is a global manifesto for the defense of the Rule of Law, developed by the World Law Foundation and The Reynolds Foundation.

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02 Why this matters

Democratic systems worldwide face growing pressure from authoritarianism, populism, systemic disinformation, and the misuse of emerging technologies. The Rule of Law — the principle that no person or institution stands above the law — is the only historically proven safeguard of human dignity, individual freedom, and limited government. Its defense cannot rest with institutions alone.

03 Organizations behind this initiative

The World Law Foundation is an international organization dedicated to promoting and strengthening the Rule of Law across democratic societies globally.

The Reynolds Foundation is a philanthropic institution committed to advancing freedom, democracy, and the protection of individual rights around the world.

04 What it means to sign the People's Promise

The People's Promise extends an open invitation to jurists, legislators, heads of state, business leaders, artists, educators, journalists, civil society leaders, and emerging voices across all sectors and backgrounds.

By signing the People's Promise, individuals make a personal, public, and irrevocable commitment to defend the Rule of Law in every sphere of life, and to place human dignity and freedom above any consideration of political or personal convenience.

Signing the People's Promise reflects a conscious decision to stand against the erosion of democratic norms and institutions, and a commitment to actively help build a culture rooted in accountability, justice, and respect for fundamental rights.



05 Motivation and spirit of the People's Promise

This promise is grounded in the strong conviction that the Rule of Law is not an abstract concept reserved for courts and constitutions, nor a luxury reserved for consolidated democracies, but rather the bare minimum that allows every person to live with dignity, security, and freedom.

Where power is not subject to the limits imposed by law, the protection of the human being depends on the will of whoever holds said power. From that point onward, the grip of totalitarianism threatens to crush human dignity. The Rule of Law is the only historically proven alternative to arbitrariness. No power may be exercised outside the law.

The need for this document in support of the Rule of Law stems from the growing opportunities and threats it faces in a new and ever-changing society and knowledge economy. The tools of abuse of power, corruption, populism, and systemic disinformation are being reshaped by the widespread use of the internet and artificial intelligence, opening new frontiers of challenges that concern us all.

Independent courts, the separation of powers, and a legislature bound by the Constitution are not mere technicalities: they are the mechanisms that prevent politics from becoming an instrument of persecution, privilege, or impunity. Society as a whole must take an active role in defending the Rule of Law: judges, by resisting pressure, legislators, by respecting constitutional limits, journalists, by publishing inconvenient truths, business leaders, by rejecting corruption and creating new opportunities, artists, by protecting freedom of expression, educators, by forming free citizens, and, above all, each individual, by refusing to normalize injustice and arbitrariness.





> Citizens must be aware of the need for the Rule of Law and must defend it. The Rule of Law is sustained, ultimately, by the civic and vigilant culture of a society.
>
> **We must all do our part in defending the Rule of Law!**

06 Control over power: a pillar of the Rule of Law

Under the Rule of Law, the validity of any action taken by public authorities depends on respect for the legal system. This is a core component because it expresses an essential principle: citizens accept that the government has authority to act, but only if its actions comply with the legal limits that must serve as their foundation. These rules, on the one hand, protect human dignity and, on the other, are subject to specific procedures for enactment and action that no public authority may evade, just as no public authority may claim discretionary power exceeding the limits established by the applicable body of law.

In this way, judicial independence also stands as an essential element of the Rule of Law, for an obvious reason: if the government or the legislative power exceeds the boundaries set by the rules authorizing their actions, those actions will be declared null or void. Independent courts are the ones responsible for objectively determining whether the legal limits of political power have been crossed. If the courts lack such independence, or are subordinated to the will of political power, there is a real danger that the fundamental limits of power will be ignored. And if there are doubts as to whether the government or the legislative power has exceeded the limits of its legal authority, the courts must provide a clear and objective response that is respectful of the values underlying those limits in accordance with the Constitution.

In view of the situations presented by many States that aspire to be democratic and governed by the Rule of Law, it is necessary to establish that recognition as such requires adherence to its essential content, grounded in the following principles:

Principles

I **Popular or national sovereignty** proclaimed and upheld in the Constitution.

II **The separation of powers** among the different branches of government, to which the Constitution rigorously and precisely assigns the power to legislate, to execute legal provisions and direct State action, and the power to judge and enforce judgments.

III **The supremacy of the law over the government,** with the legal provisions binding all public servants.

IV **The recognition and enforceability of fundamental rights of citizens** that establish a sphere of freedom for persons that the powers of the State may not violate.

V **The principles of legality and hierarchy of norms,** which embody the supremacy of the Constitution, so that no act of the State, including legislative activity, may contradict it (principle of constitutionality), and the primacy of laws over regulations (principle of legality).

07 Human dignity: the essence of the Rule of Law

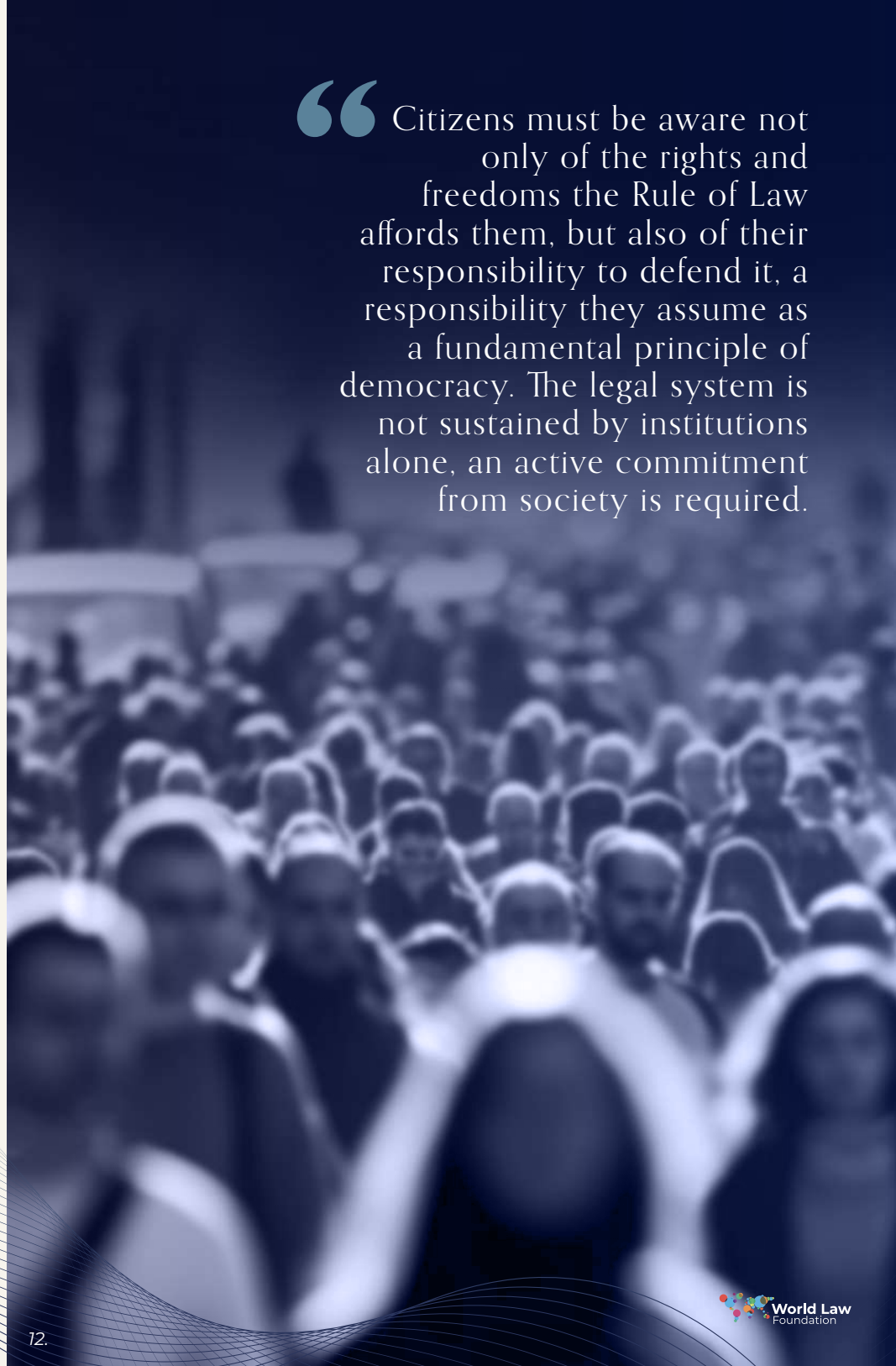
The Rule of Law protects human dignity and individual freedom by requiring, among other things, that laws guarantee respectful coexistence among people, enabling them to live their lives with security and freedom. A person's inner freedom cannot, and must not, be taken away by political power. Citizens have the right to live in freedom, both in practice and before the law, so that their dignity may fully develop, including through political participation.

This requirement gives rise to a series of specific requirements, such as laws being clear, general, publicly accessible, and grounded in the principles of justice, equity, and due process, the existence of an independent and impartial judiciary to which one may turn to resolve disputes concerning their application or interpretation, the guarantee of an effective access to the courts, and proper justification for the discretion held by the bodies responsible for enforcing the law.

If people cannot access the courts, such judicial protection remains largely illusory, undermining the idea that a person can organize their life and that of their families with a clear understanding of the legal consequences of their actions.

The Rule of Law extends beyond mere formal principles, requiring public powers to be exercised reasonably, in good faith, only for their intended purpose, and without exceeding the limits by which they have been recognized and conferred by the legal system. It includes the fundamental principle of equality, such that the laws of the country must apply equally to all, unless objective differences justify a distinction.

Freedom of the press is part of the fundamental right to freedom of expression, but it is also a principle with institutional value for the Rule of Law and democracy. Freedom of the press contributes to public information and the formation of public opinion, counters disinformation, serves as a mechanism of control over public authorities, and contributes to free and informed public debate.



> “Citizens must be aware not only of the rights and freedoms the Rule of Law affords them, but also of their responsibility to defend it, a responsibility they assume as a fundamental principle of democracy. The legal system is not sustained by institutions alone, an active commitment from society is required.

08 Defense of the Rule of Law as everyone's responsibility

Compliance with the law encompasses both the absence of violations of the laws as well as the acceptance of their value as an expression of the general will and as a guarantee of security. But the scope of this responsibility has other dimensions, such as active participation in democratic processes through the exercise of the right to vote and involvement in political and social organizations, the role of controlling and overseeing power, and the protection and promotion of fundamental rights. In short, the Rule of Law is in the hands of citizens. It is not an achievement restricted to certain professional categories and social sectors, but the work of everyone.

The Rule of Law is a collective achievement that must be preserved across all areas of civic life. Society must certainly be concerned with current episodes of democratic deterioration and, even more so, with the existential threat to the Rule of Law posed by fundamentalist, nationalist, and authoritarian movements. But it must equally be concerned with the challenges of digitalization, especially in the form of generative artificial intelligence (AI), which carries undeniable benefits alongside serious risks that demand careful attention, such as the personalization of political messages, large-scale disinformation, the tendency toward polarization of public debate, control over the flow of information and public opinion, and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions, political parties, and the reliability of information.

AI has the potential to improve the quality of democratic systems by strengthening accountability, responsiveness, and the effectiveness of public institutions, helping combat corruption and promoting pluralism and transparency, as well as making democracy more direct and more responsive to the specific needs of each citizen. However, AI can also be used to hinder democratic functioning, reinforcing repressive mechanisms and serving as a tool of manipulation. For a free democracy to exist, society must be able to shape its public opinion freely. By contrast, disinformation produced through traditional or modern media, such as social networks and, above all, the use of AI, poses a clear danger to the core values of the Rule of Law, including the existence of free elections and the absence of voter manipulation.

09 The People's Promise

For all the foregoing reasons, those of us who sign this document affirm and embrace the following people's promise:

- **No one is above the law.** Legitimate power has limits set forth in the Constitution and the laws.

- **The separation of powers guarantees** that no authority, no leader, and no majority may act without oversight.

- **Judicial independence is fundamental** and must serve as the last line of defense against the arbitrariness of power.

- **Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are essential conditions for a free society** and for the truth to be made publicly known.

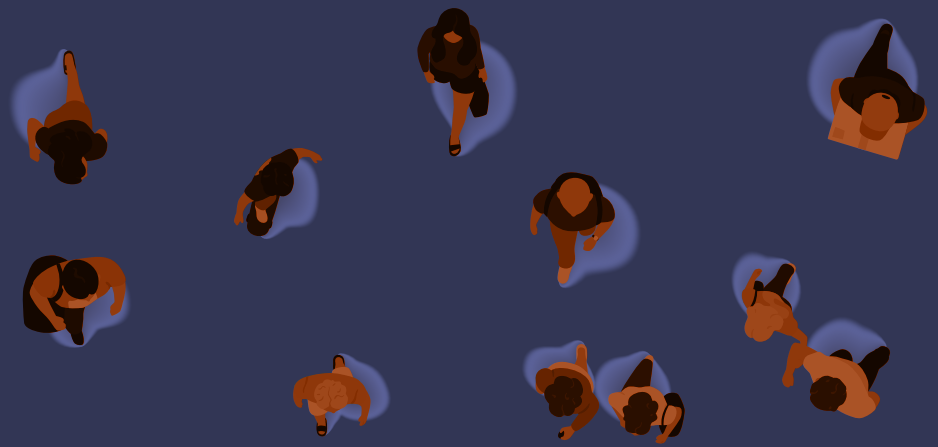
- **Legal certainty, equality before the law, and the right to property** are among the fundamental rights required for a free life.

- **Technology must be placed at the service of human dignity,** and the emergence of mass manipulation, intrusive surveillance, or ideological control must be prevented.

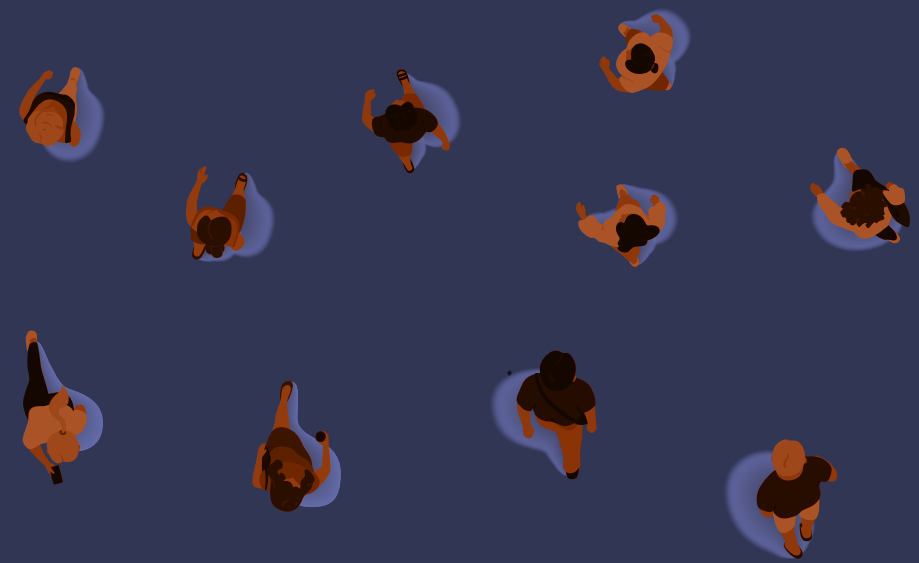
- **Defending the Rule of Law is the responsibility of every citizen,** in their personal, professional, and civic life.

- **We must work continually to raise awareness that the Rule of Law is not a definitive achievement, but a practice that requires, in every generation, the deliberate decision to sustain it.** Its vitality depends on education and social understanding of the importance of maintaining it, and on each person's willingness to act in accordance with its principles: to recognize the primacy of the law and to support the institutions that guarantee freedom for all.

Democracies do not collapse overnight. They erode gradually, through small concessions, complicit silences, and institutions that abandon their purpose. Whoever signs this manifesto consciously chooses not to be part of that process.



We invite jurists, representatives of different institutions, business leaders, educators, artists, public officials, and civil society leaders from all backgrounds and traditions to sign this manifesto as an expression of a personal and irrevocable commitment: **to defend the Rule of Law in their public and private lives and to place human dignity and freedom above any consideration of political or personal convenience.**



To sign this manifesto is to affirm that the Rule of Law is not someone else's responsibility. It is the responsibility and commitment of each one of us to defend it wherever we are: in institutions, in our professions, in the community, and in daily life, so that freedom, dignity, and justice are not achievements of the past, but a living legacy that we pass on to a new generation.



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“People’s promise in support of the rule of law”