

21 Lessons from an Expert Discussion on Artificial Intelligence (AI), Governance, and People-Centered Justice

Meeting Summary

5 February 2026

Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies, in its capacity as Secretariat of the Justice Action Coalition, together with the Oxford Institute of Technology and Justice, and the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of Costa Rica and Denmark hosted an [Expert Discussion on Artificial Intelligence \(AI\), Governance, and People-Centered Justice](#) on February 5th, 2026.

This hybrid meeting brought together over 200 representatives from government, the legal field, international organizations, private sector, and civil society to explore two interconnected issues: **1) How can the justice sector support a more equitable, inclusive, and enforceable AI governance, and 2) how can AI help to deliver better justice outcomes for people.**

A full recording of the expert discussion is available online:



Opening Remarks

Fernando Marani, Program Director for Justice, Inclusion, and Equality opened the meeting by emphasizing the important timing of this discussion amidst the announcement of the 40-person United Nations Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and the ongoing planning of the first Global Dialogue on AI Governance (July). He encouraged participants to think about the role that justice can play in AI governance stating, **“rules and principles are important, but in the end, AI governance will live or die in courts, tribunals, and the broader legal systems.”** It will be judges, legal aid providers, lawyers, the court staff, and community justice workers who will turn rules into reality through enforcement. Ultimately, if access to justice is not part of the design of AI governance, then governance will not meaningfully improve people’s lives.

In preparation for the second part of the expert discussion, Marani also emphasized growing global expertise at the nexus of AI and access to justice. Without cohesive and clear guidance, however, he highlighted the risk of embedding existing problems into new technologies that may make systems faster, but not necessarily fairer. This could exacerbate the global gap of 5.1 billion people without meaningful access to justice. Alternatively, people-centered justice could offer a guiding framework for this new age of AI justice because it starts with understanding people’s real problems to inform outcome-oriented, innovative, and cost-effective justice solutions.

Panel 1: Justice for AI

The first panel of the expert discussion focused on the current state of AI governance and the role that the justice actors, as implementers of rules and guarantors of rights, can play to localize an inclusive and equitable AI revolution. Panelists included:

- **Alfredo José Pizarro Campos**, Minister Counselor, Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the UN
- **Kate Fox Principi**, Lead on the Administration of Justice, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- **Iain Levine**, former Member of the Human Rights Policy Team, Meta
- **Anoush Rima Tatevossian**, Senior Associate, Stakeholder Engagement, The Future Society
- **(Moderator) Nate Edwards**, Program Officer, Justice for All, Pathfinders, Center on International Cooperation at New York University

Over the course of the discussion, the following ideas emerged.

The role of justice and people-centered justice in AI governance

1. **Justice actors were more involved in AI governance around 7 years ago, but that participation has waned.** With actual AI laws now established, legal expertise is urgently needed again to guide implementation and interpretation.
2. **Justice actors will be among the first to see gaps in AI governance policy design, and can operate as an early-warning system** to understand the types of rights violations that are taking place as a result of AI adoption.
3. **People-centered justice frames AI governance as an outcome-oriented implementation challenge.** Ultimately, effective and inclusive AI governance can only be realized when it is designed with people's experiences in mind.
4. **The judiciary has a dual role in AI governance: assessing AI systems' compliance with human rights law and acting as guardians of human rights,** including by ensuring the judiciary's own use of AI is accountable to human rights frameworks.
5. **Voluntary commitments are great, but everyday people feel anxiety around everyday accountability and avenues to redress.**

Global Dialogue on AI Governance

6. **Institutional agreements alone cannot confer legitimacy when billions of people experience governance as remote and technocratic — which is why justice must be foundational to the Global Dialogue on AI Governance.** People-centered justice inverts the usual power dynamic by demanding that frameworks begin with people's actual problems and treat those affected as participants in shaping solutions, not subjects to be regulated.
7. **Justice offers normative continuity across technological rupture.** People-centered justice provides a way for both the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue on AI Governance to maintain moral and legal coherence as technology continues to transform power relationships.
8. **Women sit at the intersection of two compounding failures — justice systems that deny them equal access and AI systems that amplify those same biases.** How the Global Dialogue on AI Governance and the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI treat women's experiences will

be the defining test of whether these bodies genuinely address how power operates, or simply manage technology on behalf of those who already hold it.

- 9. A human rights framework should be used in regulatory design as human rights law constrains the power of the state to protect individual needs and interests.** It can provide a means to define the harm that AI should avoid. In comparison to ethics, the application of human rights law obligates states to participate.

Engaging the private sector:

- 10. The number of people that technology companies influence in terms of exercising rights and putting rights at risk is bigger than any individual government.** It is in the application of justice and human rights that we will see the ability to ensure AI technology is ethical, promotes human flourishing, and that harms are minimized. If justice is to ensure accountability of AI systems, one of the most crucial contributions it can make is to reinforce the principle that humans remain responsible for AI and AI systems.

- 11. Justice and human rights actors have to engage private technology companies and make a business and innovation-centric case for human rights due diligence and rights-respecting regulations.** Innovation depends on trust. Without trust, products will not be well-received and will not succeed. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights is an important framework for having this conversation with the private sector, especially when it comes to putting practices in place that ensure technologies are rights respecting.

Panel 2: AI for Justice

The second panel of the expert discussion focused on the current challenges and opportunities that artificial intelligence presents to the justice sector. Experts shared innovations on AI and justice, opportunities for the future, and the challenges that they face. They also discussed how AI governance gaps are impacting the delivery of equal access to justice for all. Panelists included:

- **Frederico Franco Alvim**, Head of Coordination for Combating Disinformation of the Supreme Court of Brazil
- **Philip McGrath**, Senior Governance Specialist, The World Bank
- **Maya Markovich**, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Justice Technology Association; Vice President at AAA-ICDR Institute (American Arbitration Association)

- **Mariane Piccinin Barbieri**, Policy Analyst, Justice and Rule of Law, Public Governance Directorate, OECD
- **Katarina Sydow**, Adjunct Professor at NYU School of Law and External Legal Advisor to the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers
- **(Moderator) Lodovica Raparelli**, Head of Research and Projects, Oxford Institute of Technology and Justice

Over the course of the discussion, the following ideas emerged.

Opportunities for AI use in justice systems

- 1. AI in justice has moved from the margins of legal debate to the center of it.** AI promises efficiency, consistency, and access to justice, but it also raises concerns about transparency, accountability, and the right to a fair trial. What makes AI in justice systems sensitive is it operates in a space where power, rights, and human dignity are directly at stake. Introducing AI into the justice sector forces us to ask hard questions – who does AI serve in justice systems? Does it expand access to justice or risk deepening existing inequalities? Justice actors are grappling with these questions in real time. We need to build capacity of justice actors to make decisions about AI.
- 2. AI adoption in justice is real, growing, and uneven.** AI is already being used by justice workers whether or not there are policies and regulations. Doing nothing is in itself, a governance failure. Across 200+ OECD country cases, AI is being used to enhance efficiency in case handling and administrative tasks, improve service delivery, and track judicial outcomes alignment with broader policy objectives. Meanwhile the World Bank identifies six areas where AI is being applied in civil justice systems through use cases:
 - I. Addressing inefficiencies in court administration** (i.e. India, Tanzania, Azerbaijan, Philippines);
 - II. Supporting judges to reduce judicial workload** (I.e. Germany, Brazil, Argentina);
 - III. Access to justice for justice seekers** through AI-supported legal information tools, guided procedural pathways, retrieval-based question and answers, human-in-the-loop assistance models (United Kingdom, Portugal, USA);
 - IV. Privacy and data protection and publishing judgements** including automated anonymization and redaction (Italy, Argentina)
 - V. Augmenting the use of alternative dispute resolution and online dispute resolution**, including algorithmic negotiation and the generation of settlement options as well as guided mediated pathways (Canada, Singapore, Australia);

- VI. **Advanced data analytics and AI for judicial effectiveness and reform** that focuses on system reform (Kenya, India, France)

Challenges and Limitations of AI use in Justice Systems

3. **Most AI initiatives in justice remain fragmented pilots focused on efficiency and disconnected from broader strategic reform which undermines opportunities for scaling and learning.** Many projects lack overarching governance frameworks, are not connected to people-centered justice reform agendas, and are hampered by poor data infrastructure and insufficient in-house technical capacity. Countries beginning their AI journey should start with high-benefit, low-risk applications and build evidence that promotes scaling and identifies best practices. They need to align AI use with broader people-centered justice reforms, and focus on using technology to achieve overall justice outcomes.
4. **AI is only as good as the data and capacity that go along with it.** Courts struggle with poor data and human capacity, data quality, and incomplete databases without proper IT infrastructure and a lack of in-house technical expertise to use AI systems. These gaps interfere with AI readiness. Justice systems need to invest in internal capacity, data governance, infrastructure and a skilled workforce.
5. **Many justice seekers face a choice not between an AI-enabled justice tool or no justice help at all, not between an AI tool or a lawyer.** Justice tech entrepreneurs are essential but under-supported partners in building justice tools that help to close the access to justice gap. Justice tech startups are often founded by people with lived experience of legal system failures. These people need to be included in the justice ecosystem as key stakeholders. Governance frameworks should not prevent someone far from power from doing good. We need to bridge grassroots innovation with mainstream policy discourse.

Risks of AI use in justice systems

6. **When it comes to AI use, the line between 'assisting' and 'replacing' human judges raises key risks, particularly when it comes to the right to a free and an independent trial.** Even apparently administrative AI use — summaries, chronologies, judgment rewrites — can alter substantive decisions when errors or omissions take place. Judges globally share universal anxiety and under-preparedness to know when and how to adopt AI tools while facing pressure to make use of the technology.
7. **An uncritical trust of algorithmic outputs is what the UN Special Rapporteur describes this as the 'myth of verification': judges are unlikely to have the time or technical knowledge to critically interrogate AI outputs, and automation bias means they will tend to defer to algorithmic**

recommendations. AI is most appropriate for binary, easily verifiable tasks. It is least appropriate for predicting or recommending case outcomes and raises questions about what “correct” decisions in justice systems mean.

8. One of the ways judiciaries serve the needs of people is to hold powerful people to account.

Judiciaries using AI tools need to ensure they do not transfer power to the state or private actors. To uphold judicial independence, judiciaries need to make their own decisions about when to use AI and how. Tools should not be imposed upon them.

Dis/Misinformation Impacts on Electoral Systems:

9. AI brings risks to electoral systems such as the weaponization of disinformation. In today’s communication ecosystem we have a large presence of automated agents participating in the public sphere, algorithmic interference in what information people receive, overexploitation and minimization of data for personalized content, and images, audios, and videos that change our proof of reality. With AI it is easier and cheaper to produce disinformation, increase immunity for bad actors through anonymity and cross-border operation, and it enables invisible mass communication.

10. Electoral institutions must guarantee not only electoral integrity but the public perception of integrity — because disinformation can decouple institutional quality from social trust. AI can also be deployed offensively to counter these harms, including automatic detection of political violence, deepfakes, and gender-based electoral harassment. It can be used to operationalize political campaigns, strengthen civil society, and ultimately strengthen electoral systems.

Closing Remarks

At the closing of the meeting, Fernando Marani emphasized that the window for action on AI governance is now. The role of the justice sector is key as it sits between people and governments and facilitates public trust. If people see AI is being used without proper governance and regulations, this trust will disappear. Good regulation can support innovation while also addressing the concerns people have when using technology. Global AI governance should be built upon frameworks that we already have – 50 years of international human rights law. The justice sector and the international human rights sector need to be given a seat at the table at this year’s Global AI Governance Dialogue.

If you would like to further discuss the contents of this meeting summary, Pathfinder’s Emerging Technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Justice initiative or the Justice Action Coalition, please reach out to Nate Edwards, Program Officer with the Pathfinders Justice for All program at the Center on International Cooperation at New York University (nate.edwards@nyu.edu).