

2nd High-level Meeting of Women Judicial Leaders of Africa – South Africa

Thursday, April 23, 2026 at 9:00 AM

Venue: Sandton Hotel, 5 Benmore Avenue, Benmore Gardens, Johannesburg

- I would first like to warmly thank and congratulate the Honourable Chief Justice of the Republic of South Africa, Mandisa Maya, for convening this 2nd High-Level Meeting of Women Judicial Leaders in Africa and for inviting UNESCO to serve as a knowledge partner.
- UNESCO is honoured to support this timely and necessary gathering, together with our partners, and to build on the momentum created by the successful J20 Summit held in September 2025.
- We are talking about “*Artificial Intelligence, the Digital Frontier & Women’s Rights*”, let me begin by sharing a startling statistic, as per a recent UN study - **nearly one in three women and girls worldwide will experience physical or sexual violence during their lifetime.**
- This is alarming!! We are speaking about some 1.36 billion women and girls, based on a 2026 estimate of the world female population of 4.13 billion (Google). With the widespread and increasing use of digital technology and AI, this staggering number will grow. So...
- My **first message** to you is that: **without safeguards, AI can industrialize violence and discrimination against women** – judicial leadership is essential to set boundaries and standards. Already:
 - Generative AI is being used to produce deepfakes and non-consensual sexual images at scale – UN Women estimates that 90–95% of such content targets women and girls – and chatbots have already been documented giving instructions for stalking, simulated rape and incest, with compounded harms for Black and Indigenous women, migrants, women with disabilities and LGBTQ+ persons.
 - AI systems trained on historical data can also quietly embed discrimination into policing, credit, employment and risk assessment, which later appears as “neutral” evidence in court – as illustrated by the well-known hiring tool that learned to exclude women from engineering roles, or by large language models that associate women with domestic roles up to four times more often than men.
- My **second message** is that **AI is not something for the future, it is already reshaping the experience of justice for women** – it can widen or close the justice gap.
 - Across the world, AI is being used for risk assessment in gender based violence cases, predictive policing, sentencing recommendations and analysis of digital evidence, including in tools such as Spain’s VioGén risk assessment system for intimate partner violence.
 - These tools can help identify patterns of abuse, prioritize protection orders and guide scarce resources to the women and girls who need them most.

- But when AI systems are built on incomplete or biased data, they can underestimate risks, as seen with crisis time interviews in VioGén that miss key details because survivors feel fear, shame or face language and cultural barriers, leading to life threatening errors and automation bias in frontline decision making.
- My **third message** is that **AI can be leveraged as a powerful ally for gender equality in justice – but only if it is designed with, and accountable to, women and survivors.**
 - Purpose built, survivor centred tools show what “good” can look like: Malawi’s Women’s Legal Assistance Tool offers a multilingual, trauma informed chatbot that gives survivors and first responders immediate information on rights, procedures and referral pathways in rural areas where there are fewer than 800 lawyers for 22 million people.
 - In Argentina, AymurAI structures court data on GBV cases to reveal systemic gaps and support reforms, while tools like Sophia in Switzerland and Zuzi in South Africa provide confidential, trauma aware guidance, evidence vaults and referrals for survivors.
 - These examples underline a simple lesson: when AI tools are co created with women’s organizations and survivors, built with a gender lens and subject to strong human oversight, they can expand access to justice instead of replacing human support, and can help courts detect patterns of discrimination that would otherwise remain invisible.

Judicial leaders have a critical role in demanding transparency about training data, insisting on human oversight, applying frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women’s effects based test and UNESCO’s Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, and using tools like UNESCO’s **Guidelines for the Use of AI in Courts and Tribunals** to ensure that AI strengthens, rather than undermines, equality before the law, evidentiary fairness and women’s rights.

Positioning the AI & Rule Law programme:

UNESCO’s Global Judges Initiative and its AI & the Rule of Law programme were created to support judges and judicial actors in navigating the legal, ethical and human-rights challenges posed by AI, including for women’s rights and gender-based violence.

Through this work, we have already engaged tens of thousands of judicial operators in over 160 countries, and developed practical tools such as the Guidelines for the Use of AI in Courts and Tribunals, which set out universal principles of transparency, accountability, human oversight and human-rights protection to guide the responsible integration of AI in justice systems.

Because we know that not every jurisdiction can be reached through in-person activities, UNESCO and the University of Oxford have also developed a free online course – the Massive Open Online Course on AI, Justice and the Rule of Law – to share this knowledge widely and build capacity wherever judges and prosecutors are.



For the first time, this course includes a dedicated module on AI and Women's Rights. My colleague, Ms Bedette van Loggerenberg from the University of Oxford, whom I warmly thank for her leadership on this project, will now present this MOOC in more detail.