The 17 Sustainable Development Goals — also known as the SDGs or the Global Goals — came into effect on January 1, 2016 following an historic United Nations Summit in September 2015. 193 governments from around the world agreed to implement the Goals within their own countries in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

These new, interconnected goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, while also identifying new priority areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among others.

Although each country faces specific challenges in pursuit of sustainable development, special attention is given to the most vulnerable countries, in particular, African countries, less developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing states. There are also serious challenges within many middle-income countries.

For each of the 17 goals, there is a list of specific targets we aim to reach. The targets discussed in this guide have been summarized for ease of reading. For a more detailed list of all the 169 targets, visit GlobalGoals.org.
**PEACE AND JUSTICE STRONG INSTITUTIONS**

**PROMOTE JUST, PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES**

Peace, justice and the institutions that support and protect the rights of citizens are the foundations of sustainable development. People need to be free of fear from violence and feel safe wherever they go, regardless of their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation. Crime and violence threaten peaceful societies, and even in the world’s greatest democracies, corruption, crime and human rights violations still occur. This goal is all about ensuring our communities, governments and institutions protect and promote inclusion and respect toward people of all backgrounds.

**TARGETS**

- Reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.
- End abuse, exploitation, trafficking, violence and torture against children.
- Promote equal access to justice for all through the strengthening of transparent, inclusive, participatory and responsive legal systems at national and international levels.
- Substantially reduce bribery and corruption in all forms through accountable and transparent institutions.
- Provide a legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030.
- Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

“Justice and peace can only thrive together, never apart.”

**Oscar Arias Sanchez**
Costa Rican Politician & Nobel Laureate
Where did it begin?

- A legal system refers to the processes of dealing with offences and the institutions (courts, police, prisons and lawyers) that enforce and enact these laws. A well-functioning legal system is efficient, protects human rights and promotes inclusion, with comprehensive laws that are easily understood and accessed by citizens.

- Each country has its own legal system, with their own laws and institutions; however, human rights are moral principles that have been understood as inalienable, meaning they can’t be taken away by anyone. An example of a human right is the freedom from unlawful imprisonment, torture or execution.

- Many of the basic ideas that became a part of the human rights movements were developed in the aftermath of the Second World War and the events of the Holocaust, resulting in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.

- Human rights are enforced at international, national and regional levels. If an individual commits a crime, they are dealt with by the police and the judicial system. But what if a state commits a crime? When this happens, the United Nations or a regional court system like the European Court of Human Rights can become involved to maintain or restore peace and security. There is also the International Criminal Court (ICC), which investigates and prosecutes individuals responsible for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Considered a court of last resort, domestic courts still have a primary responsibility to act.

- When countries want to recognize or support a cause, they often sign treaties with other countries or international organizations. Treaties are agreements recognized under international law that hold those that sign them accountable to protect or promote a particular collection of just rights. An example of a treaty is the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

- While human rights and treaties exist to protect the rights of all, many countries and political organizations continue to marginalize, oppress and attack groups either directly through force, or indirectly by not recognizing them or their rights. Amnesty International found that torture and abuse still exists in 81 countries, unfair trials in at least 54 countries and restricted freedom of expression in at least 77 countries. At the same time, many countries are advancing legislation that protects the rights of marginalized communities, such as LGBT and migrant communities.

- Conflicts differ greatly because of their particular histories and causes. However, inequalities within societies and regions, discrimination, competition, and the lack of political, social and economic support are often responsible for conflicts at different levels. Finding common ground, a common agenda and practical solutions are important steps to manage conflict between different groups to bring peace. Strong laws, equitable judicial systems and responsible enforcement are also key to maintaining peace.
2 Why does this issue matter?

- **We need to ensure equal access to justice and legal information for all**
  Without transparent and effective legal systems or representation and protection through laws, conflicts go unresolved and people cannot obtain protection and redress, or compensation for a wrongdoing. When institutions don’t function according to legitimate laws, they can often be inconsistent, abuse their power and fail to deliver public services to all. When legal systems and institutions exclude and discriminate, not only do they violate human rights, but it can lead to political unrest and violence.

- **Justice needs to be timely**
  When people are accused of a crime, but haven’t been found guilty, they can be held in detention until their court date. When judicial systems are inadequate, people can end up spending years detained for a crime they did not commit. Globally, the proportion of people held without sentencing has decreased slightly, from 32 per cent of detainees in 2003-2005 to 30 per cent between 2013-2015.\(^4\) However, improvements still need to be made to improve the efficiency and adequacy of judicial systems and process cases to respect the dignity of their citizens.

- **Laws need to be dynamic and current**
  It is vital that laws are flexible, current and reflect changing social dynamics as well as basic human rights. These are particularly important to protect people who are often taken advantage of, such as women, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) communities and Indigenous populations. LGBTQ rights have been considered human rights by Amnesty International, however, many governments refuse to recognize same-sex relationships, penalizing consensual same-sex individuals with fines, jail terms or the death penalty. In addition, many countries’ laws do not adequately address human trafficking issues.

- **Corruption is still a problem**
  Corruption costs us all. Dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, such as bribery, theft and tax evasion, costs US $1.26 trillion for developing countries per year.\(^5\) Government, institutional and business corruption means we have less money to support sustainable development. This impacts citizens’ trust in their representation. Did you know that the amount of money we lose to corruption could easily be used to lift those living under the international poverty line (of US $1.90 per day above this mark for at least six years)?\(^6\)

- **We need to end violence against children**
  Violence against children, while terrible, does happen. From physical punishment to psychological aggression, trafficking or discrimination, the long term repercussions for children are often grave and damaging. More than half of children between the ages of 1 and 14 were subjected to some form of psychological aggression and/or physical punishment at home. In Northern Africa, this applied to more than 90 per cent of children.\(^8\)
Who and what are affected?

- **Women and children**
  When it comes to trafficking or the illegal trading of humans, women and children are often the most vulnerable to exploitation. Both women and children are often taken advantage of in situations of poverty. Trafficking is a violation of human rights and condemned by international conventions. Policy action and effective security and judicial systems are needed to effectively investigate and prosecute traffickers and help victims.

- **People without ID**
  Having legal documentation, like an ID card or birth certificate, helps ensure your rights are protected and proves you are who you say you are. However, not everyone has one. Many people around the world can’t access political, legal and social services because they don’t have a secure legal identity. Administrative hurdles, discrimination, poverty and limited awareness keep many women and vulnerable groups from securing citizenship or registering their marriage or child’s birth.  

- **Vulnerable populations**
  In many countries and states, discrimination is common against minorities on the grounds of their sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, ability and religion. Anti-discrimination laws ensure the rights of all people to be treated equally. For example, the criminalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people serves as justification to prosecute and punish people solely for their sexual orientation. Laws banning the promotion of LGBTQ exist to punish people from promoting LGBTQ inclusion and their rights.

Many Canadians are proud of our progressive and welcoming stance for new Canadians. However, we must consider the effects of racism, colonialism and other settler impacts within Indigenous communities today. In one compelling article, the author argues that on almost every measurable indicator, Canada’s Indigenous populations have worse outcomes than African-American populations in the USA.

> “Women, who are a majority of the peoples of the earth, are indispensable to the accumulation of the kind of social capital that is conducive to development, peace, justice and civility.”

Mahnaz Afkhami
Iranian-American human rights activist
What needs to be done?

- **Social justice**, or the fair and just relation between the individual and society, is an ongoing struggle for the inclusion and equity of all people within social, economic and political institutions. Promoting opportunities for diversity through social justice movements encourages innovation and improves participation. Promoting social justice in health means providing services that address the particular needs of everyone, such as the homeless and other vulnerable populations.

- In tackling violence, governments, civil society and communities need to improve systems and channels to deliver justice, combat corruption and ensure inclusive participation at all times.

- Policies promoting anti-discrimination, justice and inclusion are essential to representing all humans and their particular identities. Access to capital, freedom of movement and protection from exploitation need legal affirmation to improve the ability for programs to address issues related to poverty.

- Particularly for women and girls, the violence against them is rooted in discrimination, social norms and stereotypes. In order to make an impact in stopping violence, prevention should start early in life and at the root of the cause, through education about respectful relationships and **gender equality**.

- People need to be able to contribute to decisions that affect their lives, without discrimination. Working to improve awareness of human rights legal documentation is essential to accessing necessary services and stopping exploitation.

> "Every time we turn our heads the other way when we see the law flouted, when we tolerate what we know to be wrong, when we close our eyes and ears to the corrupt because we are too busy or too frightened, when we fail to speak up and speak out, we strike a blow against freedom and decency and justice."

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**John F. Kennedy**
Former US President
Malnutrition, unequal access to education and poor sanitation can be caused by corruption at government, business, and community levels.

Decent work, innovation and infrastructure, and economic growth means promoting the inclusion of everyone in the workforce and stopping human trafficking through legal systems.

In order to have sustainable cities and communities, local and national governments need to be transparent and responsive and ensure marginalized populations are heard and recognized.

Partnerships between different institutions and nations are important for promoting and understanding sustainable development and justice, including international treaties. Recognition and respect of existing treaties is necessary in achieving peace and justice collectively.
Consequences of Inaction

- If we fail to promote peace and put an end to violence, we are subjecting vulnerable populations to injustice and the violation of their human rights. By failing to address trafficking, we are denying 800,000 men, women and children per year access to education, healthcare, food security and basic human rights.

- When corruption goes unstopped, public funds are removed from valuable projects and initiatives that support us all. Mistrust of public institutions and businesses lack of transparency can result in violence and civil unrest from.

- If we do not support efforts to ensure everyone has access to justice, people around the world will continue to find themselves without access to effective, accountable institutions or legal standing under the law.

**REFLECTION AND ACTION QUESTIONS**

1. How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?

2. How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?

3. How has this problem changed over time? Where do you see it going in the future?

4. What questions do you still have?

“I there can be no peace without justice and respect for human rights.”

Irene Khan
Bangladeshi lawyer and former Secretary General of Amnesty International