

Defending Peace Through Law: Why the International Association of Judges Was Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize

At the end of January 2026, the deadline expired for nominating candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize. Members of national parliaments are among those entitled to submit nominations, and I chose to use this opportunity to highlight an issue that often receives less attention in public debates on peace and security: The decisive role of courts and judges in preserving peace through the rule of law.

My nomination focused on two institutions: The International Association of Judges (IAJ), which brings together judges' associations from across the world, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. This article explains why the work of the IAJ deserves international recognition, and why judicial independence must be seen as a cornerstone of peace.

Public discussions about peace frequently center on diplomacy, humanitarian aid, or military deterrence. These are important elements. Yet, sustainable peace is not only achieved by ending violence; it depends on establishing trust in institutions that ensure justice, accountability, and lawful resolution of disputes. Where law collapses, violence tends to follow. Where legal institutions function, conflicts are more likely to be addressed within a framework of rights and obligations rather than through force.

Courts and judges play a central role in this process. Independent courts protect constitutional order, secure human rights, and hold governments accountable. They provide peaceful mechanisms to resolve disputes between citizens, between citizens and the state, and ultimately between states themselves. Without credible judicial institutions, democratic systems weaken, corruption spreads, and political conflicts more easily escalate into instability and violence.

The importance of judicial institutions becomes particularly visible in post-conflict societies. History shows that reconciliation and long-term stability require accountability for atrocities and serious violations of international law. Judicial proceedings, whether national or international, help societies confront past crimes while reaffirming that even the most powerful actors are subject to law. Without such accountability, grievances persist and cycles of violence often continue.

During a parliamentary visit to Rwanda some years ago, I was reminded of the devastating consequences when law and institutions collapse. The genocide in 1994 led to unimaginable human suffering. But the international and national judicial processes that followed also demonstrated the essential role of courts in rebuilding trust and enabling reconciliation. Justice alone cannot heal societies, but without justice, healing becomes far more difficult.

Today, the relevance of these lessons is again evident. Armed conflicts continue in several parts of the world, and serious violations of international law remain a pressing concern.

When wars eventually end, the international community must be able not only to condemn crimes but also to investigate, prosecute, and judge them in accordance with law. Courts and tribunals provide mechanisms through which responsibility can be established, contributing to both justice and deterrence.

At the same time, judicial independence faces growing challenges in many countries. Even within democratic regions, we see attempts to weaken courts, intimidate judges, or politicize judicial appointments. In more authoritarian contexts, judges who insist on applying the law impartially may face dismissal, harassment, or even imprisonment. When courts lose independence, citizens lose protection against abuse of power, and trust in public institutions erodes.

In this increasingly complex environment, the work of the International Association of Judges is of particular importance. Founded in 1953, the IAJ unites national associations of judges from around the world with the common objective of safeguarding judicial independence and strengthening the rule of law.

The value of this international network should not be underestimated. Judges often work within national systems and may feel isolated when facing political pressure or institutional challenges. International cooperation helps strengthen professional standards, promotes mutual understanding, and provides solidarity when judicial independence is threatened. By connecting judges across borders, the IAJ contributes to the development of shared principles that reinforce legal certainty and democratic governance globally.

Importantly, the IAJ does not represent political interests. Its mission is professional and institutional: to protect the independence necessary for judges to apply the law impartially. This independence is not a privilege for judges themselves; it is a guarantee for citizens that their rights will be protected and that disputes will be decided fairly.

Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to an organization representing judges worldwide would also send a broader message about the foundations of peace. Peace is not only negotiated at conference tables or secured through international agreements. It is maintained daily in courtrooms where legal conflicts are resolved without violence, where rights are upheld, and where authorities are reminded that their power is limited by law.

Recognizing the work of judges and courts would underline that peace depends on institutions capable of delivering justice. It would highlight the importance of defending judicial independence in a time when it is under pressure in several parts of the world. And it would acknowledge the many judges who, often without public attention, carry out essential work under difficult circumstances to protect democratic principles and human rights.

The nomination therefore sought to draw attention to the broader idea that rule of law institutions are essential prerequisites for peaceful societies. By honoring organizations

like the International Association of Judges, the international community would affirm that law remains one of the most powerful tools for preventing conflict and resolving disputes peacefully.

Peace ultimately depends on trust — trust between citizens, trust in institutions, and trust between nations. Courts and judges help create and sustain this trust by ensuring that conflicts can be resolved through law rather than violence. For this reason, highlighting their contribution to peace is both timely and necessary.

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