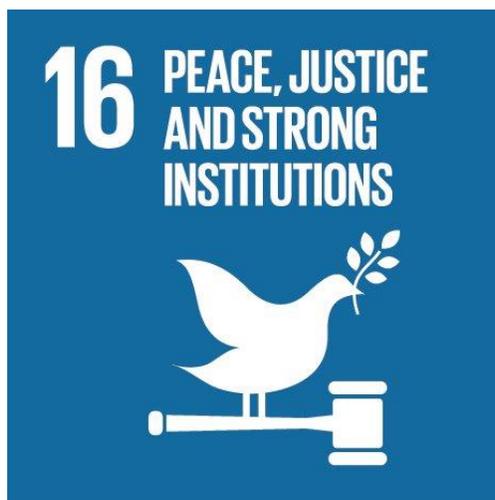


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ESTABLISHING THE WHITE HOUSE LEGAL AID INTERAGENCY ROUNDTABLE

September 28, 2015

Courtesy of [Lisa Foster, Director of the Office for Access to Justice](#)



“Providing meaningful access to justice is a national responsibility and a moral charge. I am delighted by President Obama’s action to expand legal aid resources for Americans in need, and excited for all that the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable will achieve as it works to advance opportunity, promote equality, and ensure justice for all.” – Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch

What do 20 federal agencies, the United Nations, and civil legal aid have in common? Plenty, according to President Obama who recently issued a [presidential memorandum](#) formally establishing the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable (LAIR). The presidential memorandum was announced by Roy Austin Jr., Deputy Assistant to the President for Urban Affairs, Justice and Opportunity as well as Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations at an event held on the eve of the UN’s Sustainable Development Summit in New York. The event highlighted the inclusion of Goal 16 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 16 calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, for access to justice for all and for the building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. With Goal 16, the international community has recognized that access to justice is essential to sustainable development and necessary to end poverty.

As the memorandum points out, LAIR is comprised of 20 federal agencies working together “to help the most vulnerable and underserved among us. . . By encouraging Federal departments and agencies to collaborate, share best practices, and consider the impact of legal services on the success of their programs, the Federal Government can enhance access to justice in our communities.” Included in LAIR’s mission is to assist the United States with implementation of Goal 16.

Initially conceived of and staffed by the Department of Justice’s [Office for Access to Justice \(ATJ\)](#) in 2012, LAIR’s accomplishments and ongoing activities include:

- more than two dozen grants involving reentry, access to health care, citizenship, homeless veterans and other federal priorities have been clarified to allow legal services that further program goals;
- more than two dozen webinars and other presentations to federal grantees, the civil legal aid community and federal agency staff about how legal aid advances federal priorities;
- new training and technical assistance opportunities;
- new research about civil legal aid;
- launch of [LAIR Toolkit](#) on ATJ's website, an online resource guide containing useful information about civil legal services, and how those services can help advance a broad array of Federal objectives;
- international engagement by highlighting LAIR's efforts through activities related to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the United States by the United Nations Human Rights Council, such as a civil society consultation on access to justice in April 2014 and reporting of LAIR efforts as examples of domestic human rights activities in the United States' 2015 UPR submission; and
- the 2014 Government Service Award from the National Legal Aid & Defender Association.

In her [speech](#), Ambassador Power said: "Access to legal services matter, and it is what can make the difference . . . for tangible individuals with faces and families; in a victim of domestic violence obtaining a restraining order; a homeless veteran getting housing assistance - ten more of whom become homeless in American every day; and a working mom receiving child support. . . . That is why the presidential memorandum . . . that President Obama signed today - which makes permanent an effort to increase access to services for the poor across 20 government agencies - is so important."

Roy Austin said: "It has been a privilege to co-chair the LAIR with Associate Attorney General Stuart Delery. The presidential memorandum recognizes the important work of our federal agencies to identify programs that help the vulnerable and underserved achieve improved outcomes and more efficiently reach their goals by incorporating civil legal aid partners."

ATJ looks forward to continuing its work in this area and engaging with our federal partners to help the most vulnerable and underserved among us.

Component(s):

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