MANIFESTO

For Restorative Justice and Human Rights

Restorative Justice Week 2025 | November 18th, 2025

Preamble

Restorative justice offers a vision of justice rooted in dignity, participation, responsibility and repair. This approach aligns closely with both the fundamental principles of human rights and the growing global movement towards people-centred justice. Restorative justice offers a holistic, people-centred approach to justice that grants agency and dignity to those who have suffered or caused harm, and their wider communities addressing the needs of all stakeholders. Restorative justice recognises that harm is relational. It places those affected by harm at the centre. It supports their right to be heard, the right to meaningful participation, and the right to seek remedy. It promotes responsibility-taking by the individual who caused the harm, repair of harm, reintegration, and social cohesion. It protects the inherent dignity of every human being involved.

Despite this, access to restorative justice is not provided equally, leaving many excluded from this path. We strive for an equal and voluntary access to restorative justice for every person, at any time and in any case.

Call

We imagine societies where restorative values, approaches and practices are integral to the protection of human dignity; where individuals and communities can seek repair over retaliation; and where human rights are lived through processes that restore relationships, strengthen social bonds and cultivate peace.

We therefore call for recognising restorative justice as a means to uphold human rights, and for the recognition of access to restorative justice as an inherent component of existing justice-related human rights.

Embedding restorative justice within the human rights framework yields two key benefits:

- **I. Upholding human rights**: It positions restorative justice as a powerful tool for the implementation and realisation of existing human rights, promoting a more inclusive, people-centred, and effective justice system that truly serves the needs of individuals and communities.

- **II. Strengthening global commitment to accessibility to restorative justice**: It reinforces international support for universal access to restorative justice values, approaches, and practices, rooted in the right to fair, equal, and non-discriminatory access to justice. This ensures that access to restorative processes becomes a right for all, not a privilege for a few.

I. Upholding Human Rights

1) Upholding Human Dignity

The principle of dignity is a cornerstone of the human rights' framework, as emphasised in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in Article 1, which declares that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Mainstream justice systems, traditionally focused predominantly on legal guilt and punishment, often fail to uphold and protect the rights and dignity of those who have experienced or caused harm. Restorative justice, by contrast, protects the inherent dignity of every individual. It provides the person harmed with a voice, the person who caused harm a chance to take responsibility, and communities a role in healing.

The United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters[1] affirms this, stating that "restorative justice respects the dignity and equality of each person, builds understanding, and promotes social harmony through the healing of victims, offenders and communities." By aligning with standards such as the Nelson Mandela Rules[2], and equipping individuals who caused harm with interpersonal and emotional skills, restorative justice operationalises these international standards, offering a justice framework that protects dignity and promotes reintegration into society. As a people-centred practice, it also works to overcome systemic barriers to access to fair and equal justice based on a person's race, sex, gender, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or any other status (UDHR, Article 2 and 5).

2) Reinforcing Justice-Related Human Rights

Restorative justice achieves justice in ways that respect and reinforce core rights articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment (UDHR, Article 5); the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law (UDHR, Article 6); the right of equality before the law without discrimination (UDHR, Article 7).

Restorative justice also promotes the right to an effective remedy (UDHR, Article 8) and the right to a fair trial (UDHR, Article 10) by offering a more flexible and individualised approach to justice, ensuring proportionate outcomes tailored to the context of each case. By giving voice to each party involved, it upholds the right to freedom of expression (UDHR, Article 19). Additionally, restorative justice provides a pathway to address systemic challenges such as court delays and backlogs, alleviating pressure on formal systems while promoting timely and effective justice, supporting the duties to the community, respect for the rights and freedoms of others, and meeting the just requirements of morality of public order and general welfare in a democratic society (UDHR, Article 29).

3) Supporting Other Human Rights

As an empirically proven tool for both preventing and repairing harm, restorative justice is an indispensable mechanism for protecting and addressing violations of human rights. These include, but are not limited to: the right to life, liberty and security of person (UDHR, Article 3); the right to own property (UDHR, Article 17); the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (UDHR, Article 18).

4) Specific Applications: The Rights of the Child and Indigenous and Cultural Rights

Restorative justice is widely recognised as a more effective approach for children in contact with the law than retributive systems. The Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 24 on children's rights in the child justice system underscores the importance of restorative justice in this context.[3]

Additionally, many restorative justice practices are rooted in Indigenous justice approaches. By aligning with the principles of cultural integrity, self-determination, and respect for traditional practices, restorative justice offers a culturally sensitive approach that respects diversity and avoids imposing dominant legal frameworks on Indigenous communities.

II. Access to Restorative Justice as an Inherent Right

While restorative justice is a clear means to uphold human rights, current access is limited by restrictive legal frameworks, selective referral mechanisms, and a lack of well-funded, high-quality services and public education. Therefore, universal access to restorative justice must be recognised as a right in order to ensure individuals are entitled to free and equal access to justice. Without providing this access, the rights to access to justice and a fair process cannot be fully achieved.

This Manifesto builds on the Cartagena Declaration [on restorative justice][4], which outlines restorative justice access as a human right.

Issued by the IV. Latin American Congress on Restorative Justice in 2022, the Cartagena Declaration outlines this right as being closely aligned with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, encompassing the rights to dignity and equal treatment, the freedom to participate in the resolution of a conflict through a restorative process, and the right to express oneself and be heard. It calls for the acknowledgement of the restorative approach as a new paradigm for societies that enables the strengthening of social bonds and the construction of a society permeated by a culture of peace.

1. United Nations Economic and Social Council Resolution 2002/12, annex, para 1.
2. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2015). The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.
3. United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019). General comment No. 24 on children's rights in the child justice system.
4. IV. Congreso Latinoamericano de Justicia Restaurativa (2022). Declaracion de Cartagena El derecho humano a la Justicia Restaurativa. Retrieved on November 10th, 2025 from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ClXNLEw8-Y6n84Ekkpn53DjjRuFlQyQC/view.

Call for Action

We call on all actors — including States, human rights institutions, restorative justice practitioners, civil society and academia — to:

- Publicly endorse this Manifesto and the Cartagena Declaration.
- Build formal dialogue between restorative justice and human rights organisations.
- Integrate restorative justice within human rights strategies, standards and instruments.
- Embed restorative justice as a rights-based option at every stage of the justice continuum.
- Initiate, collect and disseminate more empirical evidence and encourage new research and evaluation.
- Invest in high-quality, accessible restorative justice services for all.
- Commission, generate and disseminate robust evidence to inform policy and practice.
- Engage regional and international human rights mechanisms (including the European Union, United Nations, Council of Europe) to promote recognition and implementation.

By

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Australian Association for Restorative Justice
Bidi Koorliny Aboriginal Corporation (Australia)
Critical Restorative Justice School (Brazil)
European Forum for Restorative Justice
International Institute for Restorative Practices (USA)
Institute of Conflict Resolution (Bulgaria)
Institut pro restorativní justici (Czech Republic)
Latin American Forum for Restorative Justice
Leuven Restorative City (Belgium)
Ligand (vzw Oranjehuis, Belgium)
Magliana'80 Cooperativa (Italy)
Moderator - Forum voor herstelrecht en bemiddeling (Belgium)
National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (USA)
Nepal Forum for Restorative Justice
Nessuno Tocchi Caino (Italy)
Oñati International Institute for the Sociology of Law (Spain)
ReStart o.z. (Slovakia)
Restorative Justice Association (Bulgaria)
Restorative Houston (USA)
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