

Guiding the Improvement and Capacity Building of the International Human Rights System with the Global Governance Initiative

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Abstract: *Strengthening international human rights governance is a key objective in the agenda of global governance. At present, the international human rights mechanisms are plagued by an interweaving of old and new problems, showing signs of “dysfunction.” The existing international human rights system is in urgent need of optimization, and its governance capacity requires immediate enhancement. Aligned with international human rights governance in both values and goals, the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) has not only set out the direction, principles, and pathways for reforming international human rights governance, thereby empowering it, but also laid the groundwork for addressing the twin challenges of ‘systemic imbalance and capacity deficiency’ in the international human rights mechanisms. The five core tenets of the GGI — upholding sovereign equality, upholding international rule of law, upholding multilateralism, upholding a people-centered approach, and upholding results-oriented actions — will empower and provide specific guidance for the reform and efficiency improvement of the international human rights governance system.*

Keywords: global governance initiative ♦ international human rights governance ♦ international human rights mechanisms

At present, human society is undergoing transformations unprecedented in scale and scope. Global challenges and opportunities are increasingly intertwined, and the field of international human rights governance is also confronted with a series of deep-seated contradictions and dilemmas. The rise of unilateralism and protectionism has undermined the foundations of multilateral cooperation on human rights; the absence of rules in emerging areas of human rights governance has made it difficult to address challenges brought about by rapid technological change; and the limited discursive power and influence of developing countries in international human rights governance

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have led to imbalances in the governance structure. These issues not only constrain the sustainable development of the international human rights cause but also highlight the urgent need to upgrade the international human rights system and strengthen its governance capacity. Against this backdrop, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has put forward the Global Governance Initiative and called on all parties to firmly uphold the purposes and principles of the *Charter of the United Nations*, follow the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits in global governance, and work toward building a more just, reasonable, inclusive, and universally beneficial international human rights governance framework.¹ In 2025, the “*Recommendations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development*” further emphasized, “We will continue to pursue economic development as our central task, with high-quality development as our main focus, reform and innovation as the fundamental driving force, meeting the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life as our fundamental goal, and full and rigorous Party self-governance as the fundamental underpinning for all our efforts. We will promote higher-quality economic growth while achieving an appropriate increase in economic output and make solid headway in promoting well-rounded personal development and common prosperity for all. All of this will allow us to secure decisive progress toward basically realizing socialist modernization.”² Objectively, these initiatives and policy orientations provide a scientific Chinese approach for addressing the dilemmas of international human rights governance and for guiding the development and capacity-building of the global human rights system.

I. The Symptoms and Origins of the Incompetence of International Human Rights Mechanisms

At a high-level meeting commemorating the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated that the purposes and principles of the *Charter of the United Nations* (the UN Charter) are “under attack as never before.”³ The international human rights mechanisms established on the basis of the purposes and principles of the *UN*

¹ “Xi Jinping Chairs the ‘Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plus’ Meeting and Delivers an Important Speech,” *People’s Daily*, September 2, 2025; see also “Concept Paper of the Global Governance Initiative,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/wjbxw_new/202509/t20250901_11699909.shtml.

² “Recommendations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development,” *People’s Daily*, October 29, 2025, 13.

³ Xinhua News Agency, September 23, 2025: “A high-level meeting commemorating the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations was held, calling for the strengthening of the role of the United Nations,” accessed January 2, 2026, <https://www.xinhuanet.com/20250923/c20b12668c444e37a6e4128a1b805334/c.html>.

Charter — serving as the principal institutional vehicle of global human rights governance — are likewise facing severe challenges, including deviations from the spirit of the Charter and declining governance effectiveness. The “incompetence” of international human rights mechanisms essentially reflects a systemic disjunction between institutional frameworks and practical capacity. At the systemic level, the focus lies on constructing frameworks addressing “how things should be done,” whereas at the capability level, the emphasis lies on the practical capacity to determine “whether things can be done.” Without a rational institutional framework, capacity-building loses direction; conversely, without sufficient capacity, even the best institutional framework risks remaining merely a paper arrangement.

A. The systemic level: the “imbalance” dilemma of existing international human rights mechanisms

First, normative imbalance constitutes the core manifestation of the “imbalance” dilemma within international human rights mechanisms. At the level of norm formulation, Western countries — particularly developed countries in Europe and North America — have long monopolized the authority to formulate international human rights rules by controlling international organisations, setting global standards, and dominating global discourse.⁴ These countries often proceed from their own interests and values, imposing their human rights standards upon the international community while disregarding differences in historical traditions, social systems, and stages of development among developing countries. In the setting of human rights agendas, European and American human rights perspectives have tended to emphasize civil and political rights while neglecting rights related to subsistence, development, and economic, social, and cultural conditions. Under the influence of the Cold War and the leadership of Western countries, international human rights covenants were effectively “divided into two.” *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) and its Optional Protocol focus on civil and political rights such as the right to life, electoral rights, and freedom of expression, and establish the Human Rights Committee and an individual communications mechanism to ensure its implementation. In contrast, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR), which focuses on rights such as subsistence and development, did not have its Optional Protocol adopted by the United Nations General Assembly until 2008, and its implementation has progressed slowly. Consequently, the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights has lagged behind.⁵ At the level of normative content, some provisions of international

⁴ Zhou Xiaoming, “Breaking Western Hegemony and Enhancing the Discursive Power of the Global South,” *Legal Daily*, October 28, 2024, 6.

⁵ Di Lei, “The International Justiciability of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Balancing International Oversight and National Sovereignty,” *The Journal of Human Rights* 6 (2024): 205.

human rights conventions primarily reflect the interests and demands of developed countries while insufficiently considering the actual needs of developing countries. For example, the *Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention* (No. 87) and the *Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention* (No. 98), led by the International Labour Organization (ILO), were designed on the basis of the mature trade union systems and industrialization levels of developed countries. These conventions do not fully take into account the economic foundations and employment structures of developing countries. Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 require member states to guarantee workers' unrestricted freedom of association and grant trade unions full collective bargaining rights. However, in many developing countries, large numbers of workers are engaged in informal employment — such as workers in household workshops and self-employed laborers — where trade union coverage rates are often below 20 percent, and small and medium-sized enterprises generally lack the capacity to bear the costs associated with collective bargaining. As a result, these convention provisions are difficult to implement in practice. Regarding the subjects of application, a clear “double standard” is evident in which some rules constrain other countries but not those that formulated them. The *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, adopted on December 10, 1984, explicitly prohibits torture in all forms. Nevertheless, the United States has long been accused of abuses at the Guantánamo Bay detention facility, including prisoner abuse and indefinite detention. International prosecutors have pointed out that U.S. military and intelligence personnel committed acts of torture, abuse, and violations of personal dignity against detainees in places such as Afghanistan, thereby producing a pattern of “legislative constraints on other states while exempting oneself.”⁶ Such imbalance in rule-making has resulted in international human rights norms lacking broad representativeness and inclusiveness, making them difficult to gain widespread recognition and effective compliance from the international community and weakening the legitimacy of international human rights mechanisms.

Second, the imbalance in enforcement effectiveness further aggravates the “incompetence” of international human rights mechanisms. Some developed countries adopt a pragmatic approach of “using rules when they serve their interests and abandoning them when they do not.” They actively promote human rights rules that align with their interests while ignoring or even openly violating those that do not. For example, the United States has twice withdrawn from the United Nations Human Rights Council. Before its withdrawal, the

⁶ Guo Chushan, “The Unclosable Guantánamo Prison Has Shut Down the ‘Filter’ of American-Style Human Rights,” accessed December 21, 2025, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/473GNVgi6Or>.

United States frequently used the platform of the Council to criticize other countries in the name of human rights while avoiding discussion of its own domestic problems, such as racial discrimination and inadequate protection of migrants' rights. This double standard — “I may criticize you, but you may not supervise me” — has exposed the hypocrisy underlying such practices. It has not only undermined the unified enforcement basis of international human rights mechanisms but has also reduced the principle of “rule supremacy” to a subordinate instrument of “interest supremacy,” thereby further eroding the credibility of the mechanism.⁷

Table 1 Timeline of the United States’ Withdrawals from International Organizations and Agreements

Organization Mechanism	Date of U.S. Withdrawal	Impact
Paris Agreement	6-1-2017	It undermined the universality of the agreement, created a climate finance gap and resulted in unfulfilled emission reduction commitments, severely impeding the effective implementation of the agreement and hindering the achievement of global temperature control targets.
United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	10-12-2017	It affected the financial stability and project implementation of UNESCO, weakening the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation in global education, culture, science and technology.
Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration	12-18-2017	It eroded the consensus on global migration governance, obstructed cooperation on the safe and orderly management of cross-border migration, and exacerbated the governance deficit in refugee and migration affairs.
United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)	6-19-2018	It damaged the integrity and authority of the international human rights regime, weakened multilateral oversight, dialogue and cooperation in the field of human rights, and intensified the fragmentation

⁷ Di Si, “‘Withdrawal Frenzy’ at the Twilight of Hegemony: An Analysis of the Political Logic Behind the United States’ Second Withdrawal from the United Nations Human Rights Council,” accessed December 21, 2025, <https://www.humanrights.cn/2025/02/07/f33fd5387b5247d58e80b2c690bf7eea.html>.

		of human rights governance.
World Health Organization (WHO)	5-20-2021	It weakened capacity for pandemic surveillance, emergency response and international cooperation, exacerbating imbalances in global health governance.

The United States, as the largest contributor to the United Nations budget, has nevertheless repeatedly fallen into arrears on its assessed contributions. As of January 2025, its accumulated arrears had reached as high as \$2.8 billion. This has directly resulted in financial shortages for the United Nations, forcing the UN Headquarters in New York to close one of its staff entrances in order to reduce operational costs.⁸ When speaking on the “UN 80th Anniversary Initiative,” United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres explicitly noted that, over the past seven years, some member states have failed to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time, leaving the UN’s financial situation persistently strained and seriously constraining its ability to perform its functions. In addition, within the framework of human rights monitoring mechanisms, these countries frequently criticize and impose sanctions on other states while turning a blind eye to their own human rights problems, such as racial discrimination, widening wealth inequality, and police violence. For instance, the United States often imposes accusations and sanctions on other countries, entities, organizations, or individuals based on its own policies and domestic laws rather than on authorization from multilateral institutions such as the United Nations. It has also been accused of promoting “color revolutions,” provoking regional disputes, and even launching wars directly, actions that violate fundamental norms of international relations and represent, in effect, infringements upon human rights carried out under the banner of democracy and human rights.⁹ Such imbalance in enforcement effectiveness has reduced international human rights rules to instruments used by a small number of countries to advance their political agendas. This has seriously undermined the authority and seriousness of international human rights laws and significantly weakened the supervisory and enforcement functions of international human rights mechanisms.

Imbalance in coverage is another prominent challenge facing human rights governance in emerging fields. With rapid technological advancement

⁸ “Due to some member states’ arrears in membership contributions, the United Nations headquarters closed one of its entrances because of financial constraints,” accessed December 21, 2025, <https://news.cctv.com/2025/03/23/ARTI6sszHDwGoPnqPu2pnpQY250323.shtml>.

⁹ “U.S. Hegemony, Hegemonism, and Bullying and Their Harm,” published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, accessed December 21, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/wjbxw__new/202302/t20230220_11027619.shtml.

and the expansion of human activities into new domains, human rights issues related to artificial intelligence, cyberspace, the deep sea, and outer space are becoming increasingly prominent, placing new demands on the scope of international human rights mechanisms.¹⁰ However, most existing international human rights mechanisms were established during the twentieth century, and their normative systems and governance frameworks are ill-suited to the evolving needs of these emerging areas. For example, issues such as the protection of personal information and data security in cyberspace lack unified international rules; human rights protections in the development of outer space resources have yet to be incorporated into the international human rights governance agenda; and coordinated mechanisms linking artificial intelligence ethics with human rights protection have not yet been established. This imbalance in coverage has created a “governance vacuum” in emerging domains of human rights protection, allowing risks to accumulate and posing a serious challenge to the sustainable development of the international human rights cause.

B. The capability dimension: the prominent “shortcomings” in international human rights protection

In addition to the “imbalance” dilemma at the systemic level, international human rights protection also suffers from a number of “shortcomings” in terms of capacity. These shortcomings are reflected not only in the human rights protection capacities of developing countries but also in the collaborative and evaluation–supervision capacities of international human rights governance. Together, they significantly affect the practical effectiveness of human rights protection.

First, the limited capacity of developing countries in protecting human rights constitutes the main capability challenge facing international human rights governance. Due to relatively low levels of economic development, limited technological capacity, and shortages of human resources, many developing countries face clear constraints in financial investment, infrastructure construction, and technological application for human rights protection. For instance, numerous developing countries continue to confront multiple challenges such as poverty, hunger, and disease, making it difficult to allocate sufficient resources to safeguard people’s rights to subsistence and development. In key livelihood sectors such as education and healthcare, outdated infrastructure and shortages of professional personnel are common, which in turn makes it difficult to fully guarantee people’s rights to education and health. Furthermore, developing countries often have relatively limited capacity in areas such as human rights rule-making, human rights research, and

¹⁰ Zhao Yang, “The Protection of Emerging Rights Has Become a New Issue in the Global Development of Human Rights,” *Legal Daily*, November 18, 2024, 5.

human rights education. This constrains their ability to participate effectively in international human rights governance processes and further exacerbates the imbalance in global human rights protection.

Second, shortcomings in global coordination capacity restrict the effectiveness of responses to global human rights challenges. Global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and pandemics have cross-border and multidimensional impacts on human rights, requiring coordinated actions by the international community. However, the current mechanisms for international human rights cooperation remain underdeveloped, and countries often face difficulties arising from divergent interests and policy coordination challenges. For example, in addressing the human rights impacts of climate change, developed and developing countries continue to hold markedly different positions regarding emissions reduction responsibilities, financial support, and technology transfer, making it difficult to establish unified strategies.¹¹ Likewise, during global public health crises, cooperation among countries regarding lockdown measures, quarantine policies, and vaccine distribution has often been insufficiently coordinated, raising questions about global solidarity and complicating collective responses. The protection of people's right to health is thus diminished.¹² Such deficiencies in global coordination capacity weaken the ability of the international community to form a unified response to global human rights challenges and ultimately reduce the overall effectiveness of human rights protection.

Third, shortcomings in evaluation and supervision capacity affect the effective functioning of international human rights mechanisms. A scientific and well-structured evaluation and supervision system is essential for ensuring the implementation of international human rights rules and promoting the progress of the human rights cause. However, existing international human rights evaluation and supervisory mechanisms face several problems, including inconsistent evaluation standards, lack of transparency in evaluation procedures, and insufficiently binding supervisory measures. Some international human rights assessment institutions are significantly influenced by political factors, and their evaluation practices and standards display clear tendencies toward politicization, selectivity, and double standards, often reflecting ideological bias. As a result, they may fail to objectively reflect the human rights conditions of different countries. For example, country-specific reviews targeting developing countries — and the politicization behind them — highlight the fairness and impartiality issues embedded in international

¹¹ Lin Boqiang, "Addressing Climate Change: The Difficulties Faced by Developing Countries and the Responsibilities of Developed Countries," accessed December 21, 2025, <https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202402/23/WS65d88241a3109f7860dd2bb3.html>.

¹² Lucky Imade, "COVID-19 pandemic exposes deep fault lines in global health governance," *Journal of Global Faultlines*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2023): 190-209.

human rights mechanisms.¹³ In terms of supervisory measures, existing mechanisms tend to rely primarily on criticism and condemnation, while lacking effective incentives or assistance measures capable of encouraging substantive improvements in national human rights practices. These shortcomings in evaluation and supervision capacity make it difficult for international human rights mechanisms to fulfill their intended oversight functions. They are unable to promptly identify and address problems in human rights protection, thereby further exacerbating the “incompetence” of international human rights mechanisms.

II. The Intrinsic Connection Between the Global Governance Initiative and International Human Rights Governance

The dilemmas currently facing international human rights mechanisms urgently require systematic and practical governance solutions. In this context, the Global Governance Initiative proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping directly addresses the critical question of our time — what kind of global governance system should be built and how it should be reformed and improved. Its conceptual framework and practical orientation not only correspond closely with the common concerns in the field of international human rights governance but also provide direction, principles, and pathways for overcoming the current impasse in global human rights governance.

A. The value alignment and shared objectives between the Global Governance Initiative and international human rights governance

The intrinsic connection between the Global Governance Initiative and international human rights governance is first reflected in the deep alignment of their value foundations and the strong convergence of their practical goals. This connection is not merely a superficial correspondence of ideas but rather a profound unity embedded throughout the logic of governance.

From the value dimension, both share a highly consistent normative orientation, placing fairness, justice, equality, and inclusiveness at the core of governance. The concept of global governance based on “extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits” proposed by the Global Governance Initiative echoes the purpose of the *UN Charter*, which emphasizes “to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character.”¹⁴ It also corresponds to the core requirement of the *Declaration on the Right to Development*, which stipulates that “States have the primary responsibility for

¹³ Mao Junxiang, “From Nation-based Review to Universal Periodic Review: A Fairer International Human Rights Mechanism,” *Human Rights* 3 (2021): 73-91.

¹⁴ Article 1 of the *UN Charter* stipulates: “To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.”

the creation of national and international conditions favourable to the realization of the right to development.”¹⁵ The principle of “sovereign equality,” upheld by the Global Governance Initiative, represents a practical application of the sovereign equality principle enshrined in the *UN Charter*.¹⁶ It provides a fundamental basis for the development of national human rights endeavors by safeguarding state sovereignty. At the same time, people-centeredness, as the shared value starting point of both frameworks, remains anchored in the core principle of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* — the recognition of the inherent dignity and equal rights of all human beings.¹⁷ It rejects the instrumentalization of human rights and remains consistent with the essential objective of international human rights governance: the protection of people’s rights to subsistence and development.

At the practical level, the two frameworks translate this shared value orientation into convergent lines of action, closely linked to the Global Governance Initiative’s principles of upholding the international rule of law and pursuing practical results. On the one hand, the initiative’s emphasis on international rule of law echoes the *UN Charter*’s objective of resolving international disputes through peaceful means in accordance with justice and international law.¹⁸ It also corresponds with the provision in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* that the exercise of rights and freedoms should be subject to limitations determined by law.¹⁹ This alignment closely reflects the objectives of international human rights governance — namely, rejecting

¹⁵ Article 3 of the *Declaration on the Right to Development* stipulates: “1. States have the primary responsibility for the creation of national and international conditions favourable to the realization of the right to development. 2. The realization of the right to development requires full respect for the principles of international law concerning friendly relations and co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. 3. States have the duty to co-operate with each other in ensuring development and eliminating obstacles to development. States should realize their rights and fulfil their duties in such a manner as to promote a new international economic order based on sovereign equality, interdependence, mutual interest and co-operation among all States, as well as to encourage the observance and realization of human rights.”

¹⁶ Article 2 of the *UN Charter* stipulates: “The Organisation and its Members, in pursuit of the Purposes stated in Article 1, shall act in accordance with the following Principles. 1. The Organisation is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members.”

¹⁷ Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* stipulates: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

¹⁸ Article 1 of the *UN Charter* stipulates: “The Purposes of the United Nations are: 1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.”

¹⁹ Article 29 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* stipulates: “In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.”

double standards and safeguarding the authority of international rules. On the other hand, the initiative's emphasis on practical effectiveness resonates with the core goal of international human rights governance: moving beyond rhetorical commitments to ensure that human rights achievements tangibly benefit the people. Both frameworks seek to transform human rights principles into concrete governance actions rather than allowing them to remain at the level of abstract declarations.

B. Empowering international human rights governance through the Global Governance Initiative

The resonance in values and alignment in objectives between the Global Governance Initiative and international human rights governance lay the foundation for the initiative to empower global human rights governance. By clarifying the direction, principles, and pathways for reforming global governance institutions and mechanisms,²⁰ the Global Governance Initiative has become an important force for addressing current dilemmas in human rights governance and injecting new momentum into the development of the international human rights cause.

First, it actively guides the reform direction of international human rights governance. Since the beginning of the new era, General Secretary Xi Jinping has grasped the laws of human development and the evolving trends of international human rights governance, providing strategic guidance for improving the human rights governance system. In response to democratic issues within traditional human rights governance, General Secretary Xi Jinping introduced for the first time the major concept of “whole-process people's democracy.” This concept embodies profound human rights ideas, deep human rights values, and far-reaching human rights objectives.²¹ It advocates the integration of human rights development with the holistic national security concept, the new development philosophy, the principle of comprehensive rule-of-law governance, and the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind. Together, these ideas form and consistently uphold a people-centered theory of human rights.²² This theoretical framework emphasizes that the rights to subsistence and development are the primary and fundamental human rights while also stressing the balanced advancement of civil and political rights alongside economic, social, and cultural rights. In doing so, it provides an important conceptual framework for overcoming

²⁰ “Concept Paper on the Global Governance Initiative,” published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, accessed December 22, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/wjbxw_new/202509/t20250901_11699909.shtml.

²¹ Dai Jitao, “The Human Rights Implications and Realization Mechanism of Whole-Process People's Democracy,” *Human Rights* 2 (2025): 1-21.

²² Xiao Junyong, “‘People-Centered’ — The Master Key to Comprehending the Centennial Human Rights Theory and Practice of the CPC,” *Journal of Human Rights* 1 (2023): 3-22.

current difficulties in international human rights governance, demonstrating China's wisdom and responsibility in promoting global governance reform and helping to recalibrate the direction of international human rights governance.

Second, it contributes to reforming and improving the framework principles of international human rights governance. China firmly upholds the authority and central role of the United Nations while actively promoting improvements in international human rights governance. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, China has worked together with developing countries to advance institutional reforms in human rights governance — from facilitating the replacement of the former UN Commission on Human Rights with the Human Rights Council, to actively participating in reforms of the UN human rights treaty body system and promoting pragmatic reform proposals. These efforts have continually strengthened the principle of fairness within the governance framework.²³ Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China has also advanced important concepts such as building a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for mankind, which have become key guiding principles for improving the normative system of international human rights governance. These ideas are not merely abstract proposals; they have been incorporated into multiple resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, transforming Chinese initiatives into broader international consensus. They promote the evolution of the framework principles of international human rights governance — from formal equality to substantive justice, and from single-actor dominance to pluralistic co-governance — thereby providing more inclusive and practicable foundations for implementing international rules.

Third, it promotes comprehensive participation in the practical processes of international human rights governance. As a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, China has consistently emphasized pragmatic action, integrating human rights protection into multilateral cooperation and global development practices. Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, more than 150 countries and over 30 international organizations have participated in cooperative development. With nearly \$1 trillion in investment, numerous cooperation projects have been implemented, creating large numbers of jobs and helping many people in participating countries escape poverty.²⁴ In international poverty reduction cooperation, China has shared its own poverty alleviation experience while achieving domestic poverty reduction, providing

²³ Mao Junxiang, "China Is a Normative Force in Global Human Rights Governance," *People's Daily*, December 14, 2018, 11.

²⁴ "For a Better World: Ten Years of Jointly Building the Belt and Road from a Human Rights Perspective" (Think Tank Report), accessed December 22, 2025, https://www.news.cn/world/2023-12/07/c_1130013782.htm.

technical training and financial support to developing countries and helping them strengthen their independent capacity for human rights protection.²⁵

Since the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights called upon countries to formulate national human rights action plans, only a few states have developed three or four such plans consecutively. China is the only major country in the world that has continuously formulated and implemented four National Human Rights Action Plans.²⁶ These practical efforts have transformed human rights from an “abstract concept” into “tangible improvements in people’s lives.” By directly addressing the long-standing difficulty of implementation, they provide an important example for international human rights governance, demonstrating a practical pathway from commitment to action.

III. Future Directions for Optimizing the International Human Rights System and Strengthening Capacity Building

The empowering support provided by the Global Governance Initiative for international human rights governance has already laid a foundation for addressing the dilemmas of “systemic imbalance” and “insufficient capacity” within existing international human rights mechanisms. Moreover, the initiative’s five core principles — staying committed to sovereign equality, staying committed to international rule of law, staying committed to multilateralism, staying committed to the people-centered approach, and staying committed to real results — further transform this support into concrete guidance for future action.

A. Strengthening the institutional foundation through sovereign equality

Sovereign equality is the primary premise of the Global Governance Initiative and the fundamental basis for constructing a just and reasonable international human rights system. Building the institutional foundation of international human rights governance upon sovereign equality ensures that all states enjoy equal status and rights in the governance process.

Promoting the equalization of human rights dialogue is an important pathway to realizing sovereign equality. It requires abandoning the condescending and didactic approaches often adopted by certain countries and transforming the current situation in which a small number of states dominate the human rights discourse. Instead, mechanisms for human rights exchanges that ensure equal participation among all countries should be established. For example, multilateral human rights dialogue platforms could be developed to enable developing and developed countries to engage in consultation on human

²⁵ “China’s Poverty Reduction Experience Contributes to the Global Fight Against Poverty,” accessed December 22, 2025, <https://www.news.cn/world/20241130/1b3c8b83ed0e438d9350dd3272e240b0/c.html>.

²⁶ Party History and Literature Research Institute of the CPC Central Committee, *Selected Works of Xi Jinping on the Rule of Law* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2025), 317.

rights issues on an equal footing. Such platforms would allow all parties' perspectives and concerns to be fully heard, ensuring equal participation, equal decision-making, and equal benefits in the governance process.²⁷ Within these dialogues, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs should be upheld, with full respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Human rights issues should not be politicized or instrumentalized. At the same time, human rights dialogue should shift from a "confrontational and accusatory model" to a "cooperative model." Through exchanges of experiences and mutual learning, countries can deepen understanding and build trust, thereby jointly advancing the global human rights cause.

Respecting the diversity of human rights development paths is another concrete manifestation of the principle of sovereign equality. Due to differences in historical traditions, cultural backgrounds, social systems, and development stages, countries inevitably pursue distinct approaches to human rights development. These differences arise from each nation's unique national conditions and should therefore be recognized and respected. The international community should acknowledge various national models of human rights protection and oppose the imposition of uniform or "one-size-fits-all" standards. For many developing countries, safeguarding the rights to subsistence and development remains the primary focus of human rights efforts, whereas developed countries may prioritize further expansion of civil and political rights. Such differences should be understood and respected within international cooperation. Accordingly, countries should be encouraged to explore human rights development paths suited to their own national circumstances and the aspirations of their people,²⁸ while engaging in mutual learning and drawing on each other's experiences. Through such exchanges, the global community can collectively enhance the overall level of human rights protection.

B. Improving the rule system through the principle of international rule of law

The international rule of law constitutes a fundamental guarantee of the Global Governance Initiative and serves as an important instrument for improving the international human rights rule system. Strengthening the international human rights framework through the rule of law requires coordinating elements such as legal validity, compliance, implementation, enforcement, and effectiveness, enabling international law to function more

²⁷ "Upholding Sovereign Equality as the Primary Premise — Building a More Just and Reasonable Global Governance System 2," accessed December 22, 2025, <https://www.news.cn/20250913/fb5143c1ad8c4b4082f10b3a80d6bd62/c.html>.

²⁸ Xi Jinping, "Steadfastly Following the Chinese Path to Promote Further Progress in Human Rights," *Qiushi Journal* 12 (2022).

fully as genuine law in global governance.²⁹ This approach helps ensure both the authority and comprehensiveness of international human rights rules.

Strengthening the foundation for the “uniform application” of existing rules is central to safeguarding the authority of international law. The Global Governance Initiative clearly emphasizes that the purposes and principles of the *UN Charter* must be firmly upheld, and that international laws and rules should serve as common standards applied equally and uniformly. In this regard, all countries should be encouraged to strictly comply with international human rights law and faithfully fulfill the obligations stipulated in international human rights treaties. At the same time, mechanisms for the implementation and supervision of international human rights law should be further improved. This includes strengthening monitoring and evaluation of states’ fulfillment of their human rights obligations and pursuing accountability for violations of international human rights law in accordance with legal norms. Equally important is opposition to all forms of “double standards,” ensuring that international human rights law is applied consistently worldwide and preventing certain states from evading their international obligations by invoking domestic legal justifications.³⁰

Accelerating rule-making reinforcement in emerging fields is also an inevitable requirement for addressing new challenges in human rights governance. With the rapid development of technologies and the expansion of human activities into areas such as artificial intelligence, cyberspace, the deep sea, and outer space, gaps have appeared in the existing international human rights rule framework. Addressing these governance gaps requires coordinated efforts by states to advance rule-making in these emerging domains, while leveraging the coordinating and guiding role envisioned by the Global Governance Initiative. In the process of formulating such rules, the principles of fairness, justice, inclusiveness, and shared benefits should be upheld, ensuring that the interests and concerns of all countries are adequately reflected — particularly those of developing countries. For instance, when establishing rules related to human rights protection in artificial intelligence, it is essential to balance technological innovation with human rights protection and to clarify the fundamental human rights boundaries governing AI research, development, and application. By accelerating the reinforcement of rules in these emerging areas, the international community can gradually construct a comprehensive international human rights rule system that covers both traditional and newly emerging domains.

²⁹ Ding Huang, “On ‘What Makes Governance Work’ in Global Governance,” *Social Sciences in China* 3 (2025): 111-127.

³⁰ “Upholding Sovereign Equality as the Primary Premise — Building a More Just and Reasonable Global Governance System 3,” accessed December 22, 2025, <https://www.news.cn/20250914/2215c3909f9f44faa4cece0fcb196f20/c.html>.

C. Strengthening coordinated capacity through multilateralism

Multilateralism represents the fundamental pathway of the Global Governance Initiative and is also the key to addressing the problems of insufficient coordination and fragmented efforts in international human rights governance. Its essence lies in practicing the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits. Rather than allowing unilateral dominance or a “single voice” approach, this principle should be implemented in practice to enhance coordination and build a multi-level and comprehensive network of human rights cooperation.

Relying on United Nations human rights mechanisms forms the institutional foundation for multilateral cooperation in human rights governance. As the central institution of global human rights governance, the role of the United Nations is irreplaceable. Practicing multilateralism therefore requires using the UN platform to build global consensus and coordinate national actions. On the one hand, countries should support further reforms of UN human rights bodies, improving their capacity for coordination and the precision of their institutional responsibilities so that they can continue to play a leading role in global human rights governance. On the other hand, it is necessary to promote greater representation and voice for developing countries within these institutions, ensuring that decision-making processes more accurately reflect the concerns of the majority of states and thereby encouraging more fair, transparent, and efficient governance practices.³¹ At the same time, countries should be encouraged to actively participate in UN human rights activities and to translate human rights resolutions and action plans into concrete implementation. Through such engagement, the dispersed efforts of individual states can be integrated into a collective force promoting the advancement of global human rights.

Building regional cooperation platforms is an important support for expanding the dimensions of coordination. Regional organizations — because of geographic proximity, shared interests, and cultural connections — often have stronger foundations for effective cooperation. Platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, the African Union, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can focus on practical areas including technical exchanges, talent training, and joint projects. These mechanisms enable countries to share experiences and learn from one another in improving human rights protection. When promoting regional cooperation, it is essential to adhere to the principles of mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefit, while designing cooperation initiatives that respond directly to the real

³¹ “Upholding Sovereign Equality as the Primary Premise — Building a More Just and Reasonable Global Governance System 3,” accessed December 22, 2025, <https://www.news.cn/20250915/89ad008f5b1b430f9ffd2febd96f28ee/c.html>.

needs of countries within the region. Such targeted cooperation can effectively address common human rights challenges faced by participating states. Global and regional cooperation should not operate as isolated processes; rather, they should complement and reinforce each other. A model in which global frameworks provide strategic direction while regional practices refine and implement concrete solutions can gradually establish a multi-layered and comprehensive system of human rights coordination. Through this interaction, the overall effectiveness of international human rights governance can be significantly enhanced.

D. Calibrating the direction of development through a people-centered approach

A people-centered approach represents the core value orientation of the Global Governance Initiative and the fundamental guiding principle for building both the international human rights system and its governance capacity. Rather than an abstract declaration of values, it constitutes a comprehensive framework that moves from respect as a prerequisite, to the realization of tangible goals, and ultimately to practical transformation. This orientation ensures that human rights development remains focused on the real needs of people and does not deviate from its essential purpose — enhancing the well-being of the population.

A genuine people-centered approach begins with respect as its primary premise, which implies the promotion of greater democracy in international relations. Human rights development should not be a process through which a small number of states impose their own values on others. Instead, it should respect each country's people in choosing their own development path and model of human rights protection, while recognizing that different national conditions lead to different expectations regarding what constitutes a "happy life." Only on the basis of such mutual respect and equality can human rights development move beyond the constraints of "value imposition" and become a shared undertaking voluntarily pursued by all countries rather than an externally imposed obligation. Furthermore, the core objective of a people-centered approach is to enable people to obtain tangible benefits. As emphasized by the Global Governance Initiative, the sense of public gain and well-being should serve as the key measure of human rights development. By providing stable conditions for livelihood and opportunities for development, human rights initiatives should enable people to genuinely experience improvements in their daily lives. In this way, global governance frameworks can gain broader recognition and support, and human rights capacity-building can maintain sustainable momentum instead of becoming merely a formal institutional arrangement without substantive impact.

This principle is also reflected in global cooperation in livelihood-related fields. China's advocacy of a people-centered approach consistently focuses on

areas closely related to human life, health, and basic survival. For instance, in the field of global public health, China has actively shared pandemic-response experiences and provided vaccine assistance. In addressing climate change, China has firmly advanced green development and made significant commitments to achieving carbon peaking and carbon neutrality, contributing to the protection of the shared home of humanity. In the area of food security, China has proposed international cooperation initiatives to help developing countries strengthen their capacity for food self-sufficiency.³² These practices move beyond abstract debates about rights and translate the people-centered principle into concrete actions aimed at safeguarding people's fundamental rights to subsistence and development. By grounding human rights development in the fundamental needs of people's livelihoods, they help recalibrate the direction of human rights construction and provide the international community with an example of a human rights practice centered on the needs of the people.

E. Addressing implementation challenges through an action-oriented approach

An action-oriented approach represents an important principle of the Global Governance Initiative and serves as a key means of overcoming the long-standing challenge of translating international human rights commitments into effective practice. Rather than a collection of scattered initiatives, this approach emphasizes solving practical problems and achieving tangible outcomes, promoting the transformation of human rights governance from textual commitments to real-world implementation.

From the perspective of its fundamental objective, the vitality of global governance lies in practice, its effectiveness depends on concrete action, and its success is ultimately measured by results. Human rights governance, therefore, must focus on practical improvements that people can directly perceive, rather than remaining confined to formal declarations or normative commitments. In advancing practical implementation, it is essential to coordinate multiple governance agendas simultaneously. On the one hand, the international community should respond swiftly to urgent issues such as refugee crises and global public health threats. On the other hand, it must also develop sustainable solutions for long-term challenges including climate change and the widening digital divide. This integrated approach enables governance strategies to address both immediate symptoms and underlying structural causes. In terms of responsibility allocation, developed countries should earnestly fulfill their responsibilities by providing greater resources and global public goods, while

³² "Upholding Sovereign Equality as the Primary Premise — Building a More Just and Reasonable Global Governance System 5," accessed December 22, 2025, <https://www.news.cn/20250916/9689616006bd4368af52fd6cc7ee71d5/c.html>.

developing countries should strengthen solidarity and contribute according to their capacities. Such cooperation can foster a framework of shared responsibilities and collective participation. With regard to implementation methods, the United Nations and other multilateral and regional mechanisms should serve as central platforms for translating abstract commitments into concrete cooperation projects. This approach helps prevent the fragmentation of governance caused by unilateral actions and enables multilateral institutions to function as hubs for coordinated action. Finally, in terms of strategic priorities, particular attention should be given to areas where governance deficits are most evident — such as artificial intelligence governance, climate change response, and reforms in international financial systems. At the same time, it remains essential to firmly support the authority of the United Nations and promote the implementation of its human rights agenda under the *Pact for the Future* framework. By prioritizing key issues and seeking early, visible results, the international community can gradually drive the comprehensive implementation of international human rights commitments.³³

IV. Concrete Pathways for Optimizing the International Human Rights System and Strengthening Capacity Building

On the basis of clarifying the future direction of optimizing the international human rights system and strengthening governance capacity, it is necessary to translate guiding principles into practical and effective pathways. At present, global human rights governance faces multiple challenges, including the imbalance of rule-making dominated by Western countries, governance gaps caused by the United States' withdrawals from certain multilateral mechanisms, and the insufficient voice of developing countries in international human rights discourse. As a responsible major country, China upholds a spirit of integrity and innovation, openness and inclusiveness, practices the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits, and works with countries of the Global South and other partners to fill governance gaps, address structural problems, and promote a global human rights governance system that is fairer, more efficient, and more inclusive.

A. Breaking western discursive monopoly and building a substantively equal human rights rule system

The international normative system constitutes the fundamental code of conduct for international human rights governance.³⁴ At present, the international human rights rule system faces several structural problems, including monopolization of rule-making authority, imbalances in normative

³³ “Upholding Sovereign Equality as the Primary Premise — Building a More Just and Reasonable Global Governance System 6,” accessed December 22, 2025, <https://www.news.cn/20250917/4de44510e1fb464ea9ea606ac36311d4/c.html>.

³⁴ Mao Junxiang, “China’s Approach to International Human Rights Governance,” *Guangming Daily*, October 25, 2019, 12.

orientation, and the application of double standards in enforcement. These issues largely stem from the long-standing discursive dominance of Western countries in the human rights field. The United States' repeated withdrawal from certain multilateral human rights mechanisms — such as the United Nations Human Rights Council — does not necessarily indicate a relinquishment of influence over human rights issues. Rather, such withdrawals may reflect attempts to avoid constraints imposed by rules that do not align with its strategic interests, while maintaining discursive leadership through alternative channels without bearing any responsibility. In this context, China's leading efforts to reshape international human rights rules require strengthening cooperation among developing countries in order to break the unequal pattern in which a small number of countries formulate rules while the majority merely follow them. The goal is to establish a substantively equal human rights rule system that takes into account differences in development stages among countries and responds to the diverse concerns of the international community.

Substantive equality does not simply refer to formal procedural equality such as “one country, one vote.” Rather, it requires ensuring that countries with different levels of development, historical backgrounds, cultural traditions, and social systems can participate equally in rule-making processes and exercise meaningful voice in shaping global norms, so that the rules can respond to the core concerns of most countries.³⁵ This includes guaranteeing equal participation for developing countries in agenda-setting, drafting of normative texts, and deliberation and voting processes. At the same time, institutional arrangements should help address capacity gaps that developing countries may face in participating effectively in rule-making. In this way, international human rights rules can evolve from being unilateral expressions of Western values into collective outcomes reflecting diverse global needs. With regard to participation mechanisms, efforts should focus on addressing the problem whereby formal equality masks substantive inequality. For example, the United Nations General Assembly adopted in 2021 a resolution promoting fair geographical distribution in the membership of human rights treaty bodies, recommending that seats be allocated in proportion to the number of states parties in each region. This measure helps mitigate regional imbalances in representation.³⁶ In addition, it would be beneficial to further clarify the proportion of seats allocated to developing countries to ensure that their practical experiences and needs are fully reflected and developed in the rule-making process. For the adoption of major human rights norms, consensus

³⁵ Gong Yun, “Promoting the Common Values of All Humanity and Advancing the Building of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind,” *Jiefang Daily*, October 31, 2022.

³⁶ Shi Hui, “New Developments in the Reform of the United Nations Human Rights Treaty Body System,” *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, February 2, 2023, A3.

should be pursued through multiple rounds of consultation. If consensus cannot be achieved, voting arrangements could consider factors such as population size, development stage, and contributions to human rights governance in determining voting weight. Such mechanisms would help prevent a small number of developed countries from blocking the legitimate demands of the majority of developing countries through alliance-based voting advantages, thereby ensuring that participation rights translate into genuine discursive influence.

The vitality of rules lies in their context-sensitive applicability. Rules detached from the development realities of countries are unlikely to be effectively implemented. In some cases, difficulties in implementing international human rights norms in developing countries stem mainly from attempts to impose standards derived from Western developmental contexts without sufficient regard for differences in economic levels, social systems, and cultural traditions. Therefore, the formulation and implementation of human rights rules should allow for a degree of contextual flexibility, enabling countries to develop implementation guidelines consistent with their cultural traditions and national circumstances. This approach avoids the risk of “cultural colonialism” in normative export and encourages the systematic documentation of diverse national experiences in human rights development, allowing states to learn from one another according to their specific needs rather than adhering to a single Western model.³⁷ The authority of rules depends heavily on rigid enforcement and supervision. In response to actions by the United States and some Western countries — such as withdrawing from international organisations and agreements, evading rule-based constraints, and even undermining international human rights rules through unilateral sanctions and “long-arm jurisdiction” — it is necessary to establish a regularized supervision and sanction mechanism. To this end, efforts should be made to promote the establishment of an “International Human Rights Rules Compliance Supervision Mechanism.” Led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, this mechanism would regularly publish an *International Human Rights Rules Compliance Report* to provide objective assessments of how states fulfill their obligations under international rules. Acts such as violations of international rules and the imposition of unilateral sanctions should be included in a “Rule Violation Warning List.” Sanctions could then be imposed through measures such as public condemnation by the United Nations General Assembly, restrictive measures within multilateral trade mechanisms, and constraints on eligibility for international financing. In this way, a system of “accountability for every

³⁷ Mao Junxiang, “The International Norm Dissemination of Xi Jinping’s Important Discourses on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights,” *Legal Forum* 1 (2023): 18-19.

violation” would be formed, thereby effectively safeguarding the authority and seriousness of international human rights rules.

B. Promoting human rights governance through pragmatic cooperation to ensure development benefits all peoples

Human rights have never been merely abstract political slogans; rather, they are concretely reflected in people’s everyday needs for subsistence and development — such as food, clothing, housing, transportation, education, healthcare, employment, and opportunities for entrepreneurship. In this sense, the greatest human right of all is the right to a happy life.³⁸ However, following the United States’ consecutive withdrawals from certain multilateral mechanisms, some human rights assistance projects previously supported under its leadership have either been abruptly terminated or have been tied to stringent political conditions. In some cases, the United States’ forms of assistance have prolonged the Ukraine crisis and been criticized for linking aid with ideological conditions and domestic political influence, fully reflecting the hegemonic logic of “prioritizing the United States” and the utilitarian orientation of “serving its own interests.”³⁹ Such irresponsible practices have reduced the continuity of key support for human rights protection in some developing countries. Against this background, China has sought to take the lead in promoting the implementation of human rights protection projects by deeply integrating human rights protection with livelihood improvement, economic development, and infrastructure construction. Through a series of visible, practical, and sustainable cooperation initiatives, these efforts aim to enable people in developing countries to experience the tangible benefits of human rights protection while simultaneously strengthening their capacity for independent and sustainable human rights protection.

First, the implementation of such projects depends on addressing the livelihood needs of developing countries, particularly by prioritizing the rights to subsistence and development as fundamental human rights. In the field of education, targeted cooperation initiatives have focused on addressing shortages in basic educational resources, low enrollment rates, and limited teaching capacity in many developing countries. Programs such as the African Human Resources Development Fund, continued student exchange initiatives, the dispatch of teachers to African countries, and the expansion of government scholarship programs have aimed to strengthen educational infrastructure and teaching capacity, particularly in the least developed nations and regions of the African Union. The focus of assistance has been expanded toward teaching

³⁸ Party History and Literature Research Institute of the CPC Central Committee, *Selected Works of Xi Jinping on the Rule of Law* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2025), 318.

³⁹ “The Hypocritical Nature and Factual Truth of U.S. Foreign Aid,” published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, accessed December 22, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/wjbxw_new/202404/t20240419_11284707.shtml.

content, disciplinary development, and innovative modes of cooperation. For example, support has been provided to African Union member states in carrying out Chinese language education, strengthening vocational training, and developing distance education programs. By integrating China's high-quality educational resources, course materials and teaching support are delivered to remote areas, thereby addressing the problem of uneven distribution of educational resources.⁴⁰ These cooperation and assistance projects aim to cultivate innovative and entrepreneurial competencies as well as lifelong learning abilities in developing countries, enabling individuals to acquire the survival skills and core competencies required in the information age. In the field of healthcare, the "Health and Human Rights Protection Initiative" has been implemented. In response to the shortage of medical resources and the weak public health emergency response capacity in developing countries, a comprehensive support system has been established. China works with developing countries to build regional public health emergency response centers, sharing China's mature experience in epidemic prevention and control as well as disaster medical rescue. Joint emergency drills are conducted to enhance coordinated responses to public health emergencies. In addition, cooperation has been carried out to establish pharmaceutical factories and vaccine production bases, reducing the costs of producing and transporting medicines and vaccines, and ensuring that the public can access affordable medical services. In the field of infrastructure development, the "People's Livelihood Infrastructure Connectivity Initiative" has been implemented. The lack of infrastructure remains a major bottleneck hindering improvements in living standards in many developing countries. To address difficulties in transportation and the movement of goods, green energy cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative accelerated significantly from 2019 to 2024. During this period, a total of 395 green energy projects were implemented, including 189 solar photovoltaic projects, 90 wind power projects, 55 hydropower projects, and 31 energy storage projects.⁴¹ The Mombasa-Nairobi Railway, built by China in Kenya, has demonstrated through concrete results that such pragmatic infrastructure cooperation can directly create employment, stimulate industrial development, and improve people's livelihoods, representing a vivid practice of human rights protection.⁴²

⁴⁰ Qian Xusheng, "The Discourse Transformation and Construction In Educational Aid Policy From China to Africa," *African Studies* 2 (2016): 244-257.

⁴¹ "Contributing Energy Strength to the High-Quality Development of Jointly Building the Belt and Road," *China Energy News*, October 9, 2024, 10.

⁴² Li Zhuoqun, Cai Ronghan, and Hu Pingchao, "A Road of Livelihood and Prosperity — The Seventh Anniversary of the Operation of the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway," accessed December 22, 2025, <https://www.yid-aiyilu.gov.cn/p/03IJF1JB.html>.

Second, the sustained advancement of these initiatives relies on stable financial support, while funding shortages remain a core bottleneck constraining the implementation of human rights protection projects in developing countries. To address this issue, China has taken the lead in establishing a “South-South Cooperation Special Fund for Global Human Rights Governance,” providing long-term and stable financial support for project implementation. In the future, the scale of the fund can be gradually expanded through diversified channels, including additional investment from the Chinese government, equity participation by multilateral financial institutions, and philanthropic donations from enterprises and social organizations, thereby ensuring the sustainability of funding supply. In terms of financial management, a board governance system that balances scientific decision-making, professional operation, and effective supervision has been established. Priority is given to core human rights protection projects in low-income countries, such as poverty reduction, basic education, and essential healthcare, while an emergency reserve fund is also set aside to respond to urgent situations including public health emergencies and natural disasters.

Finally, the long-term development of human rights protection requires a transition from “blood-transfusion assistance” to “capacity-building empowerment.” This shift reflects the principle that “teaching people how to fish is better than giving them fish,” emphasizing the importance of sustainable capacity building. China has accumulated extensive mature technologies, practical experience, and development models in the field of human rights protection, which constitute valuable resources urgently needed by developing countries. To this end, technological resources in areas such as poverty alleviation big data management, digitalized basic education, grassroots healthcare service network development, and public health emergency response can be integrated. Through a service model combining “online and offline” approaches, China can provide developing countries with free technical consultation, customized solutions, and personnel training. At the same time, government officials and technical personnel from developing countries can be invited to China for exchanges and training. Through field visits and hands-on exercises, their capacity for project operation and management can be enhanced, ultimately helping developing countries establish independent and sustainable human rights protection systems and achieve long-term development in human rights protection.

C. Promoting multilateral coordination to fill governance gaps and consolidate global human rights governance

Global human rights governance is a systematic undertaking that requires the coordinated participation of states, international organizations, and civil society actors. Unilateral actions by the United States have directly weakened the effectiveness of existing multilateral human rights governance mechanisms

and increased the risk of governance fragmentation, leaving noticeable gaps in the global human rights governance system. In response to such challenges, China has sought to assume a more responsible and proactive role by becoming the main contributor for the development of multilevel, broad-based, and high-standard multilateral cooperation platforms. Through integrating global governance resources and mobilizing diverse actors, these efforts aim to address governance gaps caused by the United States' withdrawals and promote a transition in global human rights governance from a model perceived as Western-dominated toward a more pluralistic and cooperative framework.

Focusing on the key challenge that global governance rules often lag behind evolving human rights needs, China has actively participated in and contributed to rule-making in relevant areas. In the field of environmental and climate-related human rights, China has engaged in global ecological governance by fully supporting and implementing major international frameworks such as the *Paris Agreement* and the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*. It has also proposed national targets for 2035 under its nationally determined contributions and advocated for the establishment of global clean energy partnerships. These initiatives aim to strengthen the protection of climate-related human rights and environmental rights through green development. In the field of digital human rights, China has participated deeply in shaping global digital governance norms. It has proposed initiatives such as the *Global Data Security Initiative*, the *Global AI Governance Initiative*, and the *Global Cross-Border Data Flow Cooperation Initiative*. These proposals aim to support the development of a digital governance framework that balances security considerations with inclusive access, addressing inequalities in technological innovation and helping ensure that the benefits of digital progress are shared more broadly rather than concentrated among a small number of countries or groups.

In response to longstanding challenges such as imbalances in global governance power structures and the limited discursive power of developing countries in international human rights discourse, China has also advocated for structural reforms in global governance. On the one hand, China supports reforms within major international economic and financial institutions to adjust voting shares and representation, thereby increasing the participation and voice of developing countries in global decision-making. On the other hand, China has promoted the strengthening of multilateral cooperation frameworks such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, while enhancing cooperation platforms including the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the China-CELAC Forum. Through strengthening cooperation and coordination among developing countries, these mechanisms help articulate collective concerns in human rights governance and contribute to reshaping the

international governance system toward greater fairness and appropriateness.⁴³ Through more active integration and deeper participation in international human rights mechanisms, China has not only provided a valuable reference for the vast number of developing countries in exploring a human rights development path suited to their own realities, but also strengthened its own discourse persuasiveness in international human rights dialogues.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Global human rights governance is currently at a critical crossroads of systemic optimization and capacity building. The dysfunction of certain international human rights mechanisms can be attributed in part to structural imbalances in rule-making authority, power asymmetries, and governance inefficiencies within the existing system. In addition, unilateral actions by major powers — such as the United States’ withdrawals from multilateral institutions — have further intensified governance gaps and the risk of fragmentation, making it more difficult for the legitimate concerns of developing countries to be adequately represented and core rights and interests to be secured. Against this backdrop, the principles embodied in the Global Governance Initiative — including extensive consultation, joint contribution, shared benefits, fairness and justice, and practical effectiveness — offer an ideological guidance and a value orientation for addressing the challenges of global human rights governance. These principles help establish an internal logic deeply combining global human rights governance with the Global Governance Initiative, injecting new conceptual vitality and practical momentum into the advancement of global human rights governance.

Looking ahead, efforts to optimize the international human rights system and strengthen governance capacity should move beyond the limitations of Western-centric perspectives and avoid approaches that politicize human rights issues. Instead, they should adhere to fundamental principles of international law such as sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs, promote substantive rather than merely formal equality, strengthen human rights protection through sustainable development, and encourage pluralistic co-governance rather than unilateral dominance. In this context, three practical pathways — rule restructuring, project implementation, and multilateral coordination — represent concrete mechanisms for translating these principles into reality. By working with developing countries to build a more inclusive rule-making framework, international human rights norms can better reflect the livelihood needs and development priorities of the majority of the world’s

⁴³ “Following the Right Path to Build a Better World — Injecting Stability and Certainty into the Changes of the Century Through the Four Global Initiatives,” accessed December 22, 2025, <https://www.news.cn/politics/20251221/cac7980a9e964119918ff5e5faa63b4f/c.html>.

⁴⁴ Zhao Xin, “China’s Imprint and Contemporary Value in International Human Rights Discourse,” *Guangming Daily*, December 17, 2025, 12.

population. Through pragmatic cooperation projects focused on pressing social needs, human rights protection can be transformed into tangible improvements in people's daily lives. Meanwhile, multilayered multilateral cooperation mechanisms can help mobilize collective governance capacity and address existing governance gaps, facilitating a gradual transformation of global human rights governance toward a more pluralistic and cooperative model from the original Western-centric style.

As a major developing country and a responsible participant in international affairs, China has positioned itself as a participant, contributor, and promoter of global human rights governance. From actively engaging with international human rights mechanisms and sharing development experiences with other developing countries, to taking the lead in promoting rule stipulation, cooperation platforms, and multilateral consensus-building, China's approach emphasizes people-centered development, practical effectiveness, and openness and inclusiveness. Looking to the future, the international community faces an urgent need to bridge differences and strengthen consensus, guided by the principles embodied in the Global Governance Initiative and the practice of genuine multilateralism. By pursuing substantive equality in rule-upgrading, strengthening the foundations of human rights through pragmatic cooperation, and consolidating governance capacity through multilateral coordination, the protection of human rights can transcend national boundaries and social divisions to benefit all humanity. The global community can thus promote the steady development of a fairer, more just, and more inclusive global human rights governance system, and write a new chapter in human rights development within the broader vision of a community with a shared future for mankind.

(Translated by *LI Donglin*)