

**4TH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL JUDICIAL DISPUTE
RESOLUTION NETWORK**

**“Strengthening the JDRN: The Case for a Structured Outreach
Programme”**

Tuesday, 27 January 2026

The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon
Supreme Court of Singapore

I. THE NEED FOR AN OUTREACH PROGRAMME

1. Thank you, co-chairpersons, for just allowing me a few minutes to speak to you about an issue that goes to the heart of the future of the JDRN.

2. Over the past two days, we have heard compelling accounts of the vital role that JDR plays in the administration of justice in each of our jurisdictions. And our discussions suggest that the work of the JDRN has actually never been more relevant, particularly in the context of the rising number of self-represented persons, the persistent gaps in access to justice, the steady growth of our caseloads, and the need for us to discharge our core mission of administering justice in the most appropriate, and sometimes innovative ways.

3. Against that backdrop, I think it is unsurprising that we are witnessing a dramatic increase in JDR and in the work of the JDRN. 12 new jurisdictions and 15 new members have joined us since our last meeting, with the Supreme Court

of the Republic of Kazakhstan joining us just last week. Now that statistic is significant not only because it reflects the growing geographical reach of our network, but also because it signals a widening recognition that the challenges that drive interest in JDR are shared across the globe. And that leads me to suggest that we should seize this moment and think about how we can institutionalise an outreach programme that can convey, in a clear and compelling way, the importance and relevance of our work to other judiciaries around the world. Such a programme would enable us to share the lessons that we have learnt, extend support to jurisdictions facing similar pressures that we are facing, and foster a broader appreciation of the mission of JDR, and especially of how it can strengthen the rule of law and enhance access to justice, through the incorporation of different modalities of dispute resolution into the core of our court processes.

II. POSSIBLE COMPONENTS OF AN OUTREACH PROGRAMME

A. *Statement of Principles*

4. What might such a programme look like? One key step might be the development of a Statement of JDR Principles that can be periodically refined on an ongoing basis. We already have a strong vision statement¹ and mission statement,² but a set of principles would more fully articulate the values and the

¹ Advancing justice globally through JDR excellence.

² Promoting the early, amicable resolution of cases through judge-led case management and Court ADR modalities.

principles which guide our work. This would anchor an authoritative understanding of exactly what JDR means and what it stands for. It would provide a coherent narrative for outreach and communication, and, by demonstrating our commitment to transparent standards, it would help to build trust and legitimacy with prospective partners and the public. As I said in my remarks yesterday, we should not forget that JDR is not always well understood, outside this kind of community, as a natural or necessary part of judicial work. So, we need to think of what we must do to ensure that our stakeholders, by which I mean lawyers, users, and other Courts, come to understand and appreciate exactly what it is and how it works and how it benefits justice systems.

5. Without being prescriptive, let me suggest a few illustrative principles for us to be thinking about:

- (a) The first might be “**Access to Justice and Inclusivity**”. This would reflect our commitment to ensuring that justice is accessible to all, especially self-represented litigants, low-income groups, and marginalised communities. It would signal our belief that dispute resolution processes should address the practical barriers that litigants face, including the cost and sometimes the confusion of having to navigate the legal system, as well as the literacy barriers that arise when individuals are unable to understand legal issues and the relevant laws and processes.
- (b) Another principle might be “**Proportionate Justice**”, which would reflect our conviction that disputes differ in nature and complexity,

and that the choice of the dispute resolution process should be calibrated with that in mind, so that judicial resources are deployed in a manner that is fair, efficient and sustainable. It would also extend to making appropriate use of technology where this can meaningfully and responsibly enhance access to justice.

- (c) A related principle might be “**Appropriate Justice**”, which would recognise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the resolution of disputes. In particular, this would acknowledge that there are some kinds of disputes – construction disputes, climate-related disputes, and family disputes which I touched on yesterday – for which litigation may not always be well-suited, and that other, less adversarial approaches may be more appropriate.
- (d) A further principle could be “**Peacebuilding and the Preservation of Relationships**”, which would invite us to look beyond the immediate vindication of rights, and to consider how dispute resolution processes can be designed to promote reconciliation, preserve ongoing relationships and reduce the risk of future conflict, thereby contributing to longer-term social and societal stability.

6. Such a statement of principles, accompanied by useful elucidation and elaboration, could be a very effective way to convey to the world the core of the JDRN’s work and mission and draw more of our stakeholders into our work.

B. Workplan

7. Aside from a Statement of Principles, we could consider formulating and disseminating a sustainable Workplan for the JDRN between our meetings. A clear Workplan signals that we are not just a forum for discussion, but a network of like-minded professionals with defined objectives, timelines and deliverables. It would also provide clarity on how members may contribute to, and benefit from, the collective work of the network.

8. The Workplan could encompass, just for the sake of discussion, several interrelated strands.

- (a) It might include a regular programme to review and update our existing Practice Guides, so as to ensure that they remain relevant in the light of evolving practices and emerging challenges, and that they reflect the insights shared through our meetings, and the learning we acquire from the contributions of all our members.
- (b) The Workplan could also identify new and emerging areas where additional guidance could be invaluable. A particular example that stands out is the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (“Gen AI”) in JDR, most obviously in online dispute resolution or in online mediation. While such technologies may offer efficiency gains, we must recognise that they may also raise important ethical considerations. The International Bar Association has, for instance, has recently issued guidelines on the use of Gen AI in mediation, which addresses both potential applications and suggests possible

safeguards in order to uphold principles such as privacy, confidentiality, neutrality, impartiality and independence.³

- (c) Finally, the Workplan could place a sustained emphasis on another point that came up in the last two days, training and professional development for judicial officers engaged in JDR, including exchange programmes and court visits that would facilitate the systematic sharing of best practices across jurisdictions.

9. As we think about the design of our Workplan, empirical evidence might offer a useful point of reference. The Singapore International Dispute Resolution Academy or SIDRA, which is a research centre located within the Singapore Management University, is engaged in doing empirical research into matters concerning dispute resolution. For example, the 2024 survey conducted by SIDRA⁴ offers robust, user-centric insights into how businesses and legal advisers choose and experience different dispute resolution mechanisms, including mediation. Such evidence can help us benchmark and refine our own practices, test our assumptions against user experience, and identify areas where further initiatives may be most needed. In this way, our Workplan can remain responsive, evidence-based, and closely aligned with the needs and

³ IBA Mediation Committee, "Guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence in mediation", available at: <https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=Guidelines-on-the-use-of-generative-AI-in-mediation>.

⁴ Singapore International Dispute Resolution Academy, Singapore Management University, "SIDRA International Dispute Resolution Survey: 2024 Final Report", available at https://sidra.smu.edu.sg/sites/sidra.smu.edu.sg/files/survey-2024/SIDRA_Final_Report_2024.pdf.

expectations of our users. It might even be worth exploring whether SIDRA might undertake specific and more targeted research to inform our work.

C. *Dedicated Website*

10. We might also consider how best to use our dedicated website to better publicise our work and the materials we generate in order to ensure that this is widely accessible.

D. *Frequency of Meetings*

11. Yet another issue we might consider is whether, looking to the future, a meeting frequency of perhaps once every 18 months might be more sustainable and optimal. This would also leave more time for some of the more in-depth work, such as the development of the Statement of Principles or refinement of guides, to be done in the intervening period.

III. *Working Group*

12. Friends, these suggestions are intended to start a conversation, and they will require careful consideration. Translating them into concrete outcomes will require sustained effort. And to take this work forward, I propose that a working group be established to develop these ideas, to consider them in greater detail and to report back at the next meeting of the JDRN. And I suggest that each member might consider nominating a representative to the Working Group, so that collectively, we may shape the future direction for the network. If this is

agreeable in principle, perhaps the secretariat can follow up to convene the membership of a working group to take this forward.

IV. CONCLUSION

13. Let me end by thanking our co-chairpersons for their steady guidance. Justice Jose Midas P. Marquez and Justice Dato' Abu Bakar Bin Jais have steered us tremendously well over the past two days, and we are deeply grateful to them. I also, once again, would like to close by expressing our heartfelt appreciation to colleagues from the Supreme Court of the Philippines and the entire team, who have been so warm and attentive to every single thing that we could have wanted. Thank you so very much. I think there is a tendency sometimes when things move so smoothly to think that it must be easy. It is anything but easy, and it is the work of so many hands that makes it seem seamless to us. So, from all of us, thank you very, very much.

14. But we also thank each of the speakers for their thoughtful presentations. That is the stuff of these meetings, for us to share knowledge, for us to learn from one another and for us to exchange our perspectives. And I think the amount of thought and care that went into the presentations is what made this meeting so very valuable. I am sure many of us were taking notes furiously, even as one or two of us were speaking extra fast.

15. The conversations over the past couple of days have been candid and constructive. I think we have all benefited from the openness with which we have

shared our experiences and ideas. And I think it is so clear to me that there is a shared sense of purpose, and a common recognition that JDR has an important and growing role in helping our judiciaries meet the challenges ahead. And I very much look forward to working with all of you and to seeing you all again soon.