



Celebrate Reflect Mobilize

Knowledge Platform Security and
Rule of Law Closing Event Report

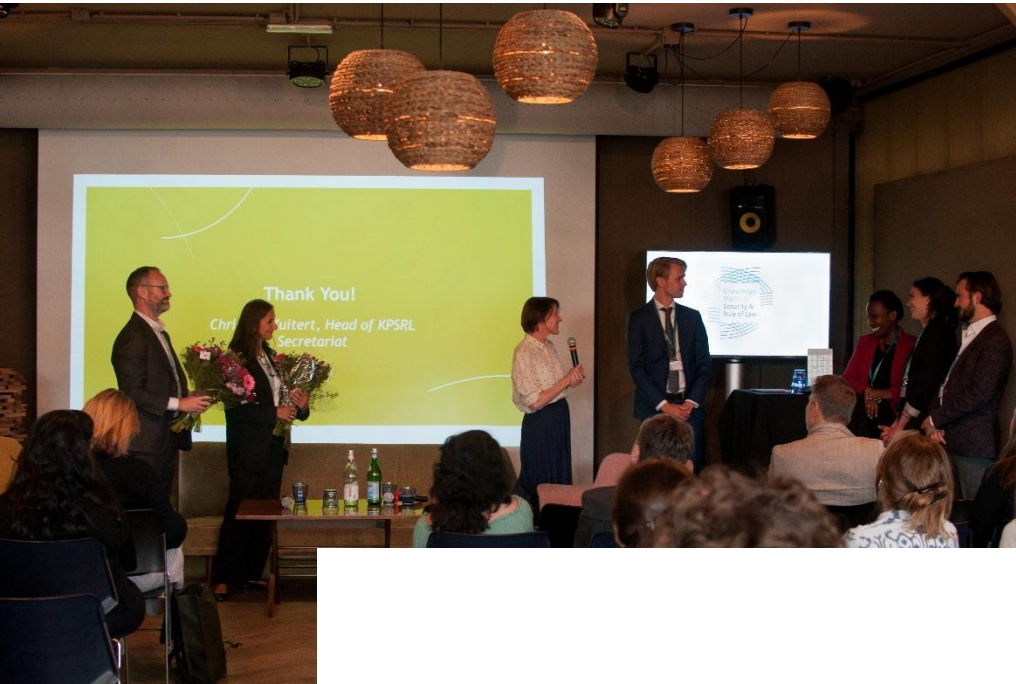


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Chapter 1

Executive Summary

Opening Remarks by Dirk-Jan Koch

Dirk-Jan Koch opened the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law's (KPSRL) closing event by addressing the decline of Dutch commitment to international development cooperation despite increasing national wealth. Through an interactive session, participants identified factors such as conservative backlash, militarisation, migration concerns, and disillusionment with elites as contributing to this shift. Koch emphasized that knowledge platforms and other organisations must resist passivity and instead remain active, open, and committed to learning and collaboration—even in uncertain times. Though the KPSRL Secretariat is ending, the human relationships it fostered remain vital.

Panel I: Learning within Security and Rule of Law: A Changing Landscape

This panel focused on the evolution of learning in the security and rule of law (SRoL) sector and the importance of sustaining meaningful practices amid global uncertainty. It emphasised human-centred learning, adaptive approaches, and long-term solidarity.

Key themes included the essential role of human connection in development, viewing the current crisis as an opportunity to reshape learning ecosystems, and shifting from institutional to adaptive, embedded learning. Participants also underscored the importance of addressing fragmentation and timing issues in knowledge production and navigating power dynamics, trust deficits, and shared learning responsibilities.

Panel II: Support for Democracy and Rule of Law in Times of Transactional Politics

This panel examined the evolving landscape of development cooperation, calling for realism, long-term strategy, and renewed political commitment. It highlighted the enduring importance of development in domains like defence and the private sector and stressed that current governance often prioritizes emotion over evidence.

Global trends—like nationalism, authoritarianism, and declining multilateralism—pose challenges but also open space for civil society activism. A key tension was identified between transactional approaches and long-term democratic commitments. The importance of democratic stability, legal infrastructure, and respectful partnerships was underscored.

Launch of the Democracy and Rule of Law Collective

The KPSRL closing event hosted the launch of the ‘Democracy and Rule of Law Collective,’ a group of The Hague-based organisations focusing on reflection and learning, lobbying and advocacy, and collective action. The Collective is open to all working in the Democracy and Rule of Law sector based in The Hague.

The Future of the KPSRL Network

The Transition Group, a volunteer-led initiative, presented findings from consultations exploring the KPSRL network’s future. Members affirmed the platform’s value in bridging research, policy, and practice and called for its continuation to foster cross-sectoral learning, policy engagement, and community building.

The preferred model includes establishing a new host organisation (or group) with a part-time coordinator to manage core operations. Funding would be sought for expanded activities, with some support potentially coming from member contributions. Multiple organisations expressed interest in co-hosting or supporting the network’s sustainability.



Chapter 2

The Rise & Fall of Dutch Commitment to International Development as We Knew It

KPSRL's closing event opened with remarks by Dirk-Jan Koch, the Director of the Advisory Council on International Affairs of the Netherlands and Network Professor at the Institute of Social Studies Den Haag. Koch's remarks centred on the decline of the Dutch commitment to international development cooperation. While the average gross national income per capita of the Netherlands has been steadily increasing since the mid twentieth century, the Dutch willingness to support spending on development cooperation has been decreasing in recent years, especially since the early 2000s.

Using an interactive presentation tool, Wooclap, Koch led the audience in a discussion on the factors responsible for the decline of the Dutch commitment to international development as we knew it. The general consensus characterised the decline in development support as a

manifestation of a broader trend of conservative backlash, though other causal explanations, such as increasing militarisation of society, perceived negative impacts of migration, and disillusionment with 'the liberal elite.'

Regardless of the reasons for the Dutch decline in commitment, it is the new reality for international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) working in Netherlands or abroad. While we may have an instinct to become defensive, passive, and self-centred as organisations, that is the opposite of what we, especially knowledge platforms, should be doing, Koch said. Knowledge platforms need people willing to share what works – and what does not. (In the spirit of sharing lessons, we invite you to read the recently published KPSRL paper [Distilling Insights on Organisational Learning for International Cooperation](#).) Especially in moments of uncertainty, it is paramount to remain committed to learning from criticisms or shortcomings, to become or remain active, to collaborate, to explain, and to recognise that learning is always necessary.

While the KPSRL Secretariat is coming to an end, the human connections that were facilitated throughout its tenure will remain, as the human factor in development cannot be erased. We may be closing the chapter of KPSRL, but we are not closing the book.



Chapter 3

Learning within Security and Rule of Law: A Changing Landscape

The panel focused on reflecting on the evolution of learning mechanisms within the SROL sector, particularly in Dutch-funded programs, and explored strategies for sustaining meaningful learning practices in an increasingly uncertain global environment.

Participants acknowledged that shifting geopolitical interests and declining institutional trust are challenging the role of learning in development. Yet, in times of crisis, there lies a unique opportunity to rebuild an ecosystem rooted in human connection, trust, and purpose-driven collaboration. This underscores the importance of ensuring that:

- **Human-centered learning is fostered:** Emotional intelligence, humility, and authentic connection are key drivers of meaningful learning, beyond reports and metrics.
- **Learning remains adaptive and community-based:** It should evolve through iteration, lived experience, and co-creation, not solely through institutional programming.

- **Long-term solidarity is prioritized:** Even as security and rule of law may receive less attention, responsible and sustained engagement must extend beyond short-term objectives.

The Central Role of Human Connection and Learning

The human side of development, often mistaken as “soft”, is foundational. It drives personal and institutional growth, resilience, and adaptability, especially in times of crisis. Genuine human connection remains vital even as priorities shift. While Dutch direct interests (e.g., in food, health, and climate) may be declining, long-term collaboration and solidarity are essential.

Crisis Opportunity: A Call to Reinvent the Ecosystem

Participants highlighted the current context as a crisis, but one that offers space to rethink and reshape the development and learning ecosystem. The key question posed: *Are we doing development because it is right, or because it serves our interests?* This tension underscores the importance of sustained engagement and not retreating.

Learning and Knowledge: Shifting Dynamics and Challenges

- **From Institutional to Adaptive Learning:** Traditional, institutionalized learning is increasingly challenged by shrinking faith in institutions and geopolitical shifts. Learning must become iterative, human-centered, and embedded in real experiences, not just data sets.
- **Learning Ecosystems:** The KPSRL community was lauded for fostering a space where learning is communal and not isolated. Still, there's a struggle in managing roles as facilitator, producer, and absorber of knowledge, particularly within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).
- **Fragmentation and Timeliness:** While knowledge production (e.g., via WOTRO and ARC for instance) yielded results, it often lacked coherence and timeliness. Smart learning requires connecting outputs to action and investing in timing, relevance, and localization.

Power, Trust, and Participation

- **Power and Incentives:** Who holds the power, resources, and incentives to enable learning remains contested. True learning requires political awareness and intentional facilitation.
- **Trust and Embeddedness:** With shrinking human capacity (e.g., due to budget cuts at MFA), the trust and relational capital that underpin learning are at risk.
- **Learning Together:** There's a push to move from “learning from” to “learning with” implementers, building shared ownership and trust.

Emerging Shifts in Knowledge Sharing

Three major shifts were highlighted:

- **Democratization:** Emphasis on lived experiences and local knowledge, embracing multiple truths.
- **Digitization:** Technology opens access but introduces imbalance and securitization.
- **Decentralization:** Regional, informal, and one-on-one learning models are emerging, challenging traditional global hierarchies.

Call for Action

As participants committed to improving Security & Rule of Law outcomes, panelists called on themselves and KPSRL partners to:

- **Reaffirm Learning as a Strategic Imperative:** Treat learning as a core function, not a symbolic gesture. Ensure it is purposeful, aligned with programming, and backed with adequate time, staffing, and resources.
- **Empower Local and Regional Leadership:** Support local and regional actors to lead in knowledge creation and innovation. Recognize the value of lived experience and indigenous knowledge in shaping effective approaches.
- **Foster Safe and Open Learning Environments:** Establish spaces for honest reflection, constructive criticism, and co-creation. Encourage courage in confronting assumptions and embracing failures as part of growth.
- **Invest in Human Infrastructure:** Prioritize relationships, trust-building, and long-term connections as foundational elements of any learning system. The human side is not soft; it is essential.
- **Collaborate Smartly and Intentionally:** Break down silos. Work across sectors and organizations, leveraging existing platforms to avoid duplication and build on what already exists.



Chapter 4

Support for Democracy and Rule of Law in Times of Transactional Politics

The second panel explored the shifting landscape of international development and governance, focusing on realism, long-term strategy, and the evolving role of global actors.

Development Cooperation in Transition

Speakers noted that while development cooperation may seem to have moved beyond restrictive government frameworks, its foundational principles and budgetary considerations remain unchanged. There was strong criticism of governance that is increasingly shaped by emotional rhetoric and political framing rather than by evidence or informed policy. A return to reasoned, long-term planning was urged, especially as development's relevance becomes more evident in intersecting policy domains such as defence and the private sector. Development and defence were seen as fundamentally linked—societal development provides the basis for sustainable

security. Similarly, the private sector, with its reliance on legal stability and rights protection, was presented as a potential ally in development efforts.

In the short term, the panel called for renewed political and institutional momentum. This includes redefining what development cooperation means today, influencing budgetary decisions, and ensuring that development policy occupies a central place in political agendas, particularly in the run-up to elections.

Global Trends and Civil Society Responses

Another contributor discussed the global direction of SRoL, highlighting a retreat from multilateralism and a rise in nationalism, protectionism, and authoritarianism. These shifts particularly affect marginalised communities. Despite this, civil society activism and ongoing efforts to reform multilateral institutions were presented as sources of hope. A key tension discussed was balancing transactional politics—often normalised in the global south—with long-term goals and values such as global solidarity and democracy. Overpromising was cautioned against, stressing that shared democratic aspirations are long-term aims rather than immediate deliverables.

The third speaker affirmed the transactional nature of development from a regional perspective, referencing extractive industries, and post-coup discourses that reject the imposition of democratic norms as a violation of sovereignty. We see discourses which instead emphasise partnerships based on equal respect and cooperation (as opposed to partnerships which are explicitly or implicitly based on hierarchical cooperation). While these arguments hold some legitimacy, caution was advised not to undermine democratic stability and cooperation. Stability through democratic means was described as both a value and an interest, with development and economic cooperation reliant on legal infrastructure.

Language, Humility, and Grassroots Space

During the discussion, participants raised concerns about language, humility, and positioning. There was recognition that public scepticism, including populist sentiments, reflects broader societal concerns. The need for plain, accessible language and realistic expectations was underlined. Importantly, development cooperation must allow space for grassroots movements without imposing rigid project structures. Power dynamics, shifting values in the West, and ideological competition (including from actors promoting militarism and authoritarianism) were also addressed.

Throughout, humility and reciprocity were emphasised as essential principles in navigating the evolving global landscape.

Call for Action

- **Champion Plain and Honest Communication:** Make development cooperation accessible by using straightforward, non-technical language. Communicate in ways that resonate with public sentiment without oversimplifying.

- **Respect Sovereignty Without Undermining Democratic Cooperation:** Recognise the legitimacy of demands for sovereignty and equal partnership, and that democracy is both a value and an *interest*.
- **Support Civil Society and Local Agency:** Ensure that development frameworks allow space for grassroots activism and do not crowd out local initiative with externally imposed structures.
- **Reclaim Long-Term Strategic Thinking:** Advocate for development cooperation that is grounded in evidence and long-term planning, even in the face of political or emotional pressures.
- **Embrace Humility and Reciprocity:** Approach international cooperation with openness to learn, share, and adapt. Acknowledge shifting values globally and commit to building relationships based on mutual respect.

Throughout the discussion, the panel stressed that navigating an evolving and contested global development landscape requires realism, strategic patience, and above all, humility.



Chapter 5

Launch of the Democracy and Rule of Law Collective

A Crisis of Democracy

We're in the middle of a 'crisis of democracy'. Over the past few months, we have seen **a need to come together with like-minded organisations** within the international democracy and rule of law sector to create a space:

1. for **reflection** on our sector's overarching role and goals; and
2. to **(better) communicate** in support of these ambitions.

One such space was the **KPSRL**, which focused on critical self-reflection and developing coordinated messages to the outside world. A second space was the **Peace and Justice Cluster**, which is focused on lobby and advocacy efforts. The group was set up in 2024 and consists of around 30 organisations all based in The Hague. The cluster achieved what it initially set out to

do: it met with Minister Klever, presented itself to the BHO committee and has been building relationships with relevant members of parliament.

The Democracy and Rule of Law Collective

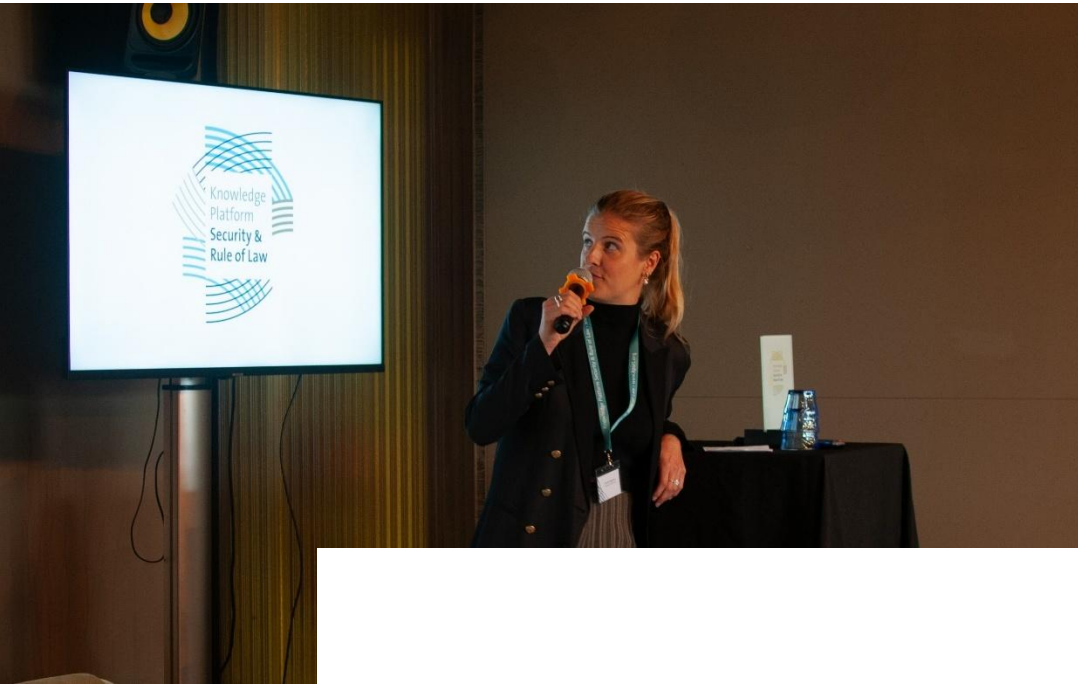
With KPSRL Secretariat closing, the two initiatives have decided to join forces in a '**Democracy & Rule of Law Collective**'. They are currently in the early stages of mapping out the Collective's goals and ambitions, but can already say is that **the aim of the Collective is three-fold**:

- **Reflection and Learning:** Creating time and space to step back, look at the bigger picture, and share different types of evidence, experiences, and narratives.
- **Lobby and Advocacy:** Combining fragmented efforts into strong, unified messages that can influence policymakers and engage the public.
- **Collective Action:** Identifying urgent challenges and working on real-life cases where we can co-create practical solutions. Joint fundraising efforts may be part of this.

The **core group** currently consists of HiiL, NIMD, MIRCURY, Impunity Watch, The Hague Humanity Hub, and The Hague University of Applied Sciences.

The Collective is **open to all working in the Democracy and Rule of Law sector** based in The Hague. They consider this **broadly**: it can be INGOs, organisations working on policy and research, but also the private sector, for example. They also explicitly looking at **organisations making a local impact**. **They are looking for people interested in helping shape a collective narrative**, those with a **relevant network** in support of our lobby efforts or those who have other ideas to **increase the visibility of and support** for the Democracy and Rule of Law sector based here in The Netherlands. They are also looking for people who are willing and able to take up a **leading role**.

If you are willing to collaborate on this collective, please fill out [this](#) form and someone will contact you.



Chapter 6

Presentations on the Future of the KPSRL Network by the Transition Group

The KPSRL Transition Group (TG) is a network-led group, formed to explore the future of the KPSRL network beyond the ending of the convening role and resources of the Secretariat. Since the final Knowledge Platform Annual Conference in November of 2024, the Transition Group systematically conducted group conversations, one-on-one consultations with network members, and a network-wide survey to explore possible ways forward for the network. The main findings of the consultations were presented at the KPSRL closing event.

The consultations affirmed the added value of KPSRL in its unique research-policy-practice approach, relationship and bridging role with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, direct engagement with diverse perspectives and peoples, and energizing and motivating annual conferences. Building upon previous successes, in the future, the main roles of the KPSRL

network should be to foster cross-sectoral learning, create spaces for engagement with policymakers, and build community and solidarity.

Future Coordination of the KPSRL Network

The preferred plan for the future coordination of the network involves identifying a new organization (or group of organizations) to take over hosting responsibilities and cover the network's core operational costs. This would include a part-time coordinator to organize 3–5 online events annually, manage the website and learning resources, and facilitate knowledge sharing—potentially via a newsletter. Additional funding would be sought to support in-person events, small grants, or other initiatives, either through donors or by introducing membership or event participation fees.

During the consultation process, **five organizations expressed a willingness to co-host** the network, with six more considering the possibility. Additionally, five organizations offered to **assist the future host with fundraising** and ensuring the network's long-term sustainability. There is also some willingness among members to **consider membership fees or contributions linked to specific activities**.

Following the closing event, TG will present the report of their work with recommendations to current Consortium Partners and elements of the advised open call for future (co-)hosts of the network.

