

Press release
For immediate release
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EU, UNOPS & IDLO Launch 20th Justice Zone in La Union, Philippines

Through the EU-GOJUST Programme, the new Justice Zone aims to strengthen the delivery of swift and inclusive justice.

SAN FERNANDO CITY, LA UNION - The Justice Sector Coordinating Council (JSCC), in partnership with the European Union (EU) through the EU-GOJUST Programme, has officially launched the City of San Fernando, La Union as the 20th Justice Zone in the Philippines.

The event represents a major milestone in the country's justice sector reform, bringing the nation to nearly two-thirds of its Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028 target of establishing 30 operational Justice Zones nationwide, now covering approximately 12% of the national population.

As the regional and administrative capital, San Fernando City has integrated the Justice Zone framework into its vision of a "People's City," linking it directly to its landmark Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Code of 2025 and its ongoing partnership with the Commission on Human Rights to be designated as a formal human rights city.

"The establishment of Justice Zones is a recognition that the effective and efficient administration of justice requires the active communication, cooperation, and coordination among the five pillars of the criminal justice system. This initiative also advances the Supreme Court's Strategic Plan for Judicial Innovations (SPJI) 2022-2027, which envisions a judiciary that is efficient, technology-driven, and people-centred," said Supreme Court Chief Justice Alexander G. Gesmundo.

He further highlighted the critical role of development partners, noting: "Last year, the Governance in Justice (GOJUST) Programme of the European Union, our development partner in the establishment of Justice Zones, conducted a study on the impact of the Justice Zone model... which showed that 85% of stakeholders perceived that the Justice Zones in their respective localities have meaningfully contributed to the resolution of justice issues in their areas. We in the JSCC hope to bring this brand and level of justice services to your locality, where institutions do not work in silos, but in partnership with each other."

Critical interventions for the zone's first year will prioritise addressing complex regional challenges—such as cyber scams and human trafficking—by establishing a dedicated Anti-Trafficking Desk and a Cyber Crime Task Force. The first-year roadmap also includes upgrading information technology infrastructure to support video conferencing for delayed litigation, constructing accessible facilities for vulnerable groups, and creating cost-sharing rehabilitation and after-care programs to reduce post-litigation recidivism.

“As development partners, we are proud to help bring justice services closer to the local community in an inclusive and sustainable manner. Alongside national, regional, and local institutions, EU-GOJUST has demonstrated proven success through establishing zones, and we look forward to furthering this work over the weeks and months ahead,” said Peter Browne, UNOPS Country Representative for the Philippines.

The establishment of the San Fernando City Justice Zone reflects an increasingly collaborative funding ecosystem, combining resources from the Philippine National Government, local government unit budget allocations, and technical expertise from the European Union to build public confidence in the local judicial system.

The launch event was attended by national and local leaders, including Supreme Court Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo, Associate Justice Samuel H. Gaerlan, Associate Justice Jose Midas P. Marquez, DOJ Undersecretary Ian Norman Dato, DILG Undersecretary Jon Paulo Salvahan, La Union Governor Mario Eduardo C. Ortega, and San Fernando City Mayor Hermenegildo A. Gualberto, alongside regional judges, prosecutors, law enforcement commanders, and development partners from EU-GOJUST and the Australian Embassy’s FAIR Justice Program.

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About EU-GOJUST

With a total grant of EUR over a period of 39 months, the EU’s GOJUST programme supports the Government of the Republic of the Philippines’ efforts to improve access to justice for all Filipinos, and thus, contribute to inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development.

EU-GOJUST works with the Philippine Supreme Court, the Department of Justice, and the Department of the Interior and Local Government to develop more responsive and accountable justice services in the country. Through a grants facility, the Programme also works with universities and civil society organizations in improving access to justice for women, LGBTQI+, indigenous communities, and other vulnerable groups.

Pictures of the event:



Caption: *San Fernando City Mayor Hermenegildo A. Gualberto delivers his message during the San Fernando City Justice Zone launch, emphasizing the city's commitment to becoming a model "People's City" and human rights hub.*

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Caption: Supreme Court Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo signs the Wall of Commitment, along with representatives from the Department of Justice, Department of Interior and Local Government, San Fernando City LGU, and EU-GOJUST.

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Caption: From left to right: Peter Browne, UNOPS Country Representative in the Philippines; Siavash Rahbari, IDLO Philippines Country Manager; Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo, Supreme Court of the Philippines; Atty. Carolyn Mercado, EU-GOJUST Senior Adviser; and Ma. Katrina Abella, OIC- EU-GOJUST Senior Project Manager during the launch of the 20th Justice Zone in San Fernando City, La Union.

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