



United Nations  
Office on Drugs and Crime



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# Deliverable on events

## FINAL CAMPAIGN EVENT

### More Than Words: Turning Commitment into Real Change for Victims

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## Introduction

This landmark event — co-organised with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU, was a moment of unity between the national, European and international communities to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power.

It also marked the culmination of the Year of Victims’ Rights campaign led by VSE and its members across Europe and beyond throughout 2025. The event brought together key EU and international policymakers, civil society leaders, victims’ rights advocates, law enforcement officials, and academic experts to reflect on the achievements and remaining challenges in delivering real justice for victims.

The event also served as a fundraising opportunity. By doing a charitable raffle, we aimed to gather funds to establish a Victim Care Team at our Brussels HQ, to ensure we can dedicate the staff time required to engage with any victims who contact us directly.

# Agenda



**Residence Palace,  
Brussels**  
28 November 2025

Final Campaign Event

## **MORE THAN WORDS:** TURNING COMMITMENT INTO REAL CHANGE FOR VICTIMS

Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the UN Declaration  
of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and  
Abuse of Power



Co-funded by  
the European Union



United Nations  
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09:00-09:30 **Welcome Coffee**



09:30-10:30 **Opening**

- **John Brandolino** | Acting Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (recorded opening speech)
- **Najla Nassif Palma** | UN Victims' Rights Advocate
- **Michael McGrath** | EU Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law, and Consumer Protection (recorded opening speech)
- **Roxana Mînzatu** | European Commissioner for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness (recorded opening speech)
- **Alessandra Giraldi** | Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union
- **Rosa Jansen** | President of Victim Support Europe



10:30-11:15 **Panel Session: Voices That Turn  
Words Into Reality – The Power of  
Victims' Advocates to Reform**

**Introduction by: Levent Altan** | Executive Director, Victim Support Europe

**Moderator: Larisa Spahic** | Victim Support Europe

- **Cath Hill** | VSE Victims' Advocates Platform. Project lead for the Bee the Difference research project with the UK National Emergencies Trust and trustee for UK charity Survivors Against Terror.
- **Moubajel Lehmann** | VSE Victims' Advocates Platform. Advocate for victims of forced marriage, human trafficking, cults and honour-based violence.
- **Ruth Maxwell** | VSE Victims' Advocates Platform, Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal consultant & Victims' Representative. Founder of the 'Not Consent' Exhibition.



11:15-11:45     **Coffee Break**



11:45-12:00     **Pro Bono for Impact**

- **Niels De Waele** | A&O Sherman



12:00-13:00     **Panel Session: From Declaration to Delivery: Institutional Voices on Victim Support**

**Moderator: Anna Giudice** | UNODC

- **Irvin Waller** | University of Ottawa, Emeritus Professor, Criminology (Video Message)
- **Gema Varona Martinez** | President of the World Society of Victimology (Video Message)
- **Katarzyna Janicka-Pawlowska** | Coordinator for Victims' Rights, European Commission.
- **Michaela Moua** | Coordinator on Combating Racism, European Commission.
- **Maria R. MOLLICA, LL.M.** | Team leader – Stop violence against women, European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Gender Equality Unit
- **Marie-Cécile Rouillon** | Coordinator for the Rights of the Child, European Commission.
- **Bartjan Wegter** | EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator

 13:00-13:15 **Voice Under Threat: Advocating for Journalists' Safety and Justice**

- **Pamela Morinière** | International Federation of Journalists, Head of Campaigns and Communications department and gender expert.

 13:15-14:00 **Panel Session: From Words to Support: Frontline Best Practices**

**Moderator: Levent Altan** | Victim Support Europe

- **James McCulloch** | Chief Executive of Manaaki Tāngata | Victim Support
- **Bart Claes** | Avans University, Professor of Victimology / Criminology
- **Arastalis Chouldry** | Founder of NECX
- **Sandra Demeester** | Director of Hachiko

 14:00- **Lunch, Inspiration Speech & Raffle**

**“Leading Through Crisis: A Story from New Zealand”:** **James McCulloch** | Chief Executive of Manaaki Tāngata | Victim Support



## Report

On the 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2025 Victim Support Europe (VSE) hosted an event titled “More Than Words: Turning Commitment into Real Change for Victims” at the Residence Palace in Brussels. This event was a celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power and an opportunity to fundraise for VSE’s Victim Care Team.

This event brought together, amongst others, high-level representatives from European institutions, civil society organisations, and victim support professionals, academics and national authorities. It served both as a celebration of decades of progress in supporting victims and as a key moment to evaluate current challenges and reflect on the future to come. The event was attended by 98 individuals including speakers, attendees and VSE staff.

### Opening Speakers

The event began with a video made and produced by VSE staff that explained the significance of the event as the conclusion of the 2025 campaign “Year of Victims’ Rights”.

**Rosa Jansen**, VSE’s president, then proceeded to detail the legacy of the 1985 declaration and how it contributed to creating a more resilient and just system for victims. She explained that taking care of victims is a sign of civilisation and that the role of the European Commission is to protect these rights.

A video of **John Brandolino** - Acting Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) - then played where he focused on the ongoing commitment and work to guarantee victim’s rights and needs. He also highlighted the collaboration between VSE and the European commission as a successful cross-border and cross-sector cooperation focused on a victim-centred agenda.

**Najla Nassif Palma**, the UN’s Victim’s Rights Advocate, then took the stage. She stated that while the meaning of justice varies from victim to victim, the meaning of justice for victims cannot vary. One of the turning points of the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power was the recognition of victims as rights holders. The main principles of the declaration were the access to justice and fair treatment, restitution, compensation and assistance. This approach bridges the divide between victims and the justice system, making justice more victim-centred. She also introduced her mandate at the UN as an advocate for victims of sexual violence, exploitation and abuse perpetrated by UN staff. Nassif Palma finalized her speech by naming the current challenges society is facing, these mainly being abuse of power, gender-based violence, trafficking, digital violence and cross-border offences. She concluded that now is the time to fully implement the declaration and the revision of the Victims’ Rights Directive.

**Katarzyna Janicka-Pawlowska**, Coordinator for Victims’ Rights at the European Commission, gave a speech on behalf of Michael McGrath, EU Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law, and Consumer Protection. The Commissioner highlighted his personal commitment to advancing victims’ rights even at the international level by increasing cooperation with victim support organizations and international bodies like the UN. Again the focus was on the following question: what are victims for justice? The answer is very different from 40 years ago when the declaration was created. Passing new laws and legislation is not enough, there needs to be a mind-set shift. Judges should look at victims as witnesses rather than victims until the perpetrator is found guilty.

Through a pre-recorded speech, **Roxana Mînzatu**, the European Commissioner for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness, echoed this sentiment by saying that the promise of justice for

victims is still unfulfilled. True justice is not only measured in courts but also in the way we support victims and restore justice in our societies. There needs to be a new approach to help victims.

**Alessandra Giraldi**, Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, addressed similar concerns. She explained that justice for victims is fundamental for the integrity of our society since everybody can become a victim, but supporting and protecting is not always an easy task. The UN declaration has laid the ground for their work, and the Victims' Rights Directive was a crucial development in establishing a victim-centred approach in the justice system. Special attention should be given to the needs of child victims through targeted, integrated mechanisms, such as emotional and psychological care and medical examinations. She concluded her address by clarifying that victims' rights are a priority for the Danish presidency and that the goal is to improve access to justice and ensure reparations.

**Rosa Jansen** closed off the opening ceremony by explaining that the 1985 UN Declaration was a revolutionary document that set the moral foundations of everything that followed, generated public awareness and pushed governments to implement these principles. However, some obstacles remain. Victims now are present, but are still unheard and justice must listen, not only rule. Rights on paper are not enough, they need to be real and lived.

### [Panel Session - Voices that Turn Words into Reality: The Power of Victims' Advocates to Reform](#)

The panel was moderated by **Larisa Spahic**, VSE's Junior Project and Partnership Officer. She was joined by members of the VSE's Victims' Advocates Platform (VAP): **Moubajel Lehmann** and **Ruth Maxwell**. The Platform gives a voice to victims' advocates and influences the work of VSE to be more inclusive of victims' experiences. The VAP members support victims in navigating the criminal justice systems and advocating for their rights, as well as getting involved in creating meaningful change through policy and awareness raising. During the panel they discussed the importance of giving victims a voice and the goals of the VAP.

Due to personal reasons, **Cath Hill** could not join the event in person, therefore, the panel began with her recorded message. In the video, Cath introduced her project "Bee the Difference" that advocates for the improvement of lived experiences of survivors of terrorist attacks, focusing specifically on the needs of children and young people.

When explaining what motivated them to become an advocate, **Lehmann** said that she found solace and recognition in her friends. Trauma can be isolating, hence, having a support network, the feeling of acknowledgment and respect are extremely important in the healing process. In the same vein, **Maxwell** said that it was extremely difficult to navigate life without the required psychological support and financial compensation. This motivated her to become an advocate so no one went through what she did. All victims should have automatic access to respectful and adequate care.

The following question asked by the moderator was about what urgent changes needed to be made to improve support systems and to make them truly victim-centric. **Lehmann** affirmed that victims have to be listened to with real understanding and compassion. This way they feel comfortable to fully share what happened to them without any self-blame or obligation. This is the only way to ensure that support is adequate and tailored to the victims' needs.

**Maxwell** reflected on what can be done to prevent re-traumatisation while navigating support systems and compensation mechanisms. The set-up itself makes the process extremely difficult for victims, she said. There needs to be a truly trauma-informed scheme with all parties working together to find a solution and to allow the victim to rebuild their lives.

**Lehmann** weighed in on what small steps can help victims find their voice. She noted that it is key to understand what happened to you and how this will continue to affect you. You need to find what brings you back to calmness and the people that will empathetically listen to you, she reflected.

Finally, the panel concluded with the speakers giving a message to those in power and those victims that are in the recovery journey. To policy makers, **Maxwell** stated that they shouldn't build systems *about* victims but with victims at the forefront and **Lehmann** that they should talk more with victims' and people that have been through the systems before so they can truly tailor support systems to victim's needs. To survivors, both panellists concluded by stating that their voices matter and that there is help for those who need it.

### Pro Bono for Impact

**Niels de Waele**, a lawyer at A&O Shearman – a leading commercial law firm that is committed to providing pro bono work - gave a presentation about the importance of pro bono and social impact projects. He spoke that they matter because the ultimate goal is to assist clients in needs. These cases are also a great for lawyers to learn specific skills and face real work challenges. It is not only about being charitable but also about having the opportunity to bring real meaningful change and learn in the process.

At A&O, their pro bono pillars are: access to justice for individuals; sustaining and protecting the natural environment; innovative finance solutions and support to forcibly displaced people.

### Panel Session - From Declaration to Delivery: Institutional Voices on Victim Support

Moderated by **Anna Giudice**, Team Leader of the Access to Justice Team at UNODC, this panel explored the triumphs and challenges of creating, debating and implementing victim support and justice initiatives.

**Bartjan Wegter**, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, reflected on how big the impact of terrorist attacks are on victims. He had just attended the 10-year commemoration for the Bataclan attacks in Paris and saw the importance of having victims' and vulnerable people at the centre of the discussion.

**Katarzyna Janicka-Pawlowska** highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to victims' rights across the different EU Institutions. The Victims Rights Directive is a triumph because it covers crucial areas like participation in criminal proceedings, the right to support and a plethora of phases of the victim's journey. Another milestone is the infringement against member states for failing to transpose the VRD. The next milestone should be the revision of the VRD.

On a similar note, **Maria R. Mollica**; Team leader – Stop Violence Against Women, European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Gender Equality Unit; noted the significance of the EU Directive on Violence Against Woman. It states explicitly that children that witness domestic violence are victims themselves. It gives access to support and individuals needs assessments to children and other people that live in the same house where the abuse took place. It

also secured the preservation of evidence from the offender to properly protect the victims and avoid any future victimization. Finally, the directive puts in place a cascade system of specialised support for victims of domestic and gender-based violence.

**Michaela Moua**, the European Commission coordinator on Combating Racism, reflected on the importance of cooperating with different stakeholders to avoid secondary victimisation and facilitate access to justice. For victims of racially motivated offences, micro aggressions and racial profiling stereotypes can be really triggering. This should be recognised with an intersectional and trauma-informed approach. This is aggravated as most victims don't report hate crimes due to mistrust of the police, fear of retaliation and stigmatization or not knowing how to work through the system. The bonding standard for equality of bodies, adopted in 2024, needs to be properly implemented to help victims.

The last panellist, **Marie-Cécile Rouillon**, the European Commission Coordinator for the Rights of the Child, highlighted the need to bring the perception of children into the discussion. Intersectionality is key as it also includes children and it focuses on their specific vulnerabilities. There needs to be a child-friendly justice system where their needs are considered and that teaches people how to identify signs that a child is being victimised.

### Voices Under Threat – Advocating for Journalists' Safety and Justice

**Pamela Morinière** represented the International Federation of Journalists, an association advocating for press freedom, good working conditions for journalists and ethical journalism.

She noted that when reporting about victimisation, journalists must remember the impact that their stories will have on the victims of various crimes and disasters. There are important ethical rules to follow in such cases – rigorous fact-checking, respect for dignity and commitment to avoid discrimination.

She stressed that, as a journalist, you not only report on victimisation but can also become victim yourself, an example of this are the journalists working now in Gaza and environmental journalists who are victims of violence and intimidation. However, it is often difficult for them to “become the story”. She concluded that strong protocols are needed to protect journalists as part of victim support initiatives and policies.

### Panel Session – From Words to Support: Frontline Best Practices

This panel dealt with different methods and practices taken by varied victim support organisations. It was moderated by **Levent Altan**, executive director of Victim Support Europe.

To start off the panel, the moderator asked how did the panellists respective victim support organisations evolve in the past years and what are their missions. **James McCulloch**, Chief Executive of Manaaki Tāngata | Victim Support, said that Victim Support New Zealand had to evolve drastically in the past years. The crucial change was the application of a victim-centric approach, as well as looking after the frontline workers directly supporting victims. **Sandra Demeester**, director of Hachiko, explained that for them the shift has been in going from provision of functional assistance to psychological assistance. **Bart Claes**, former general manager of CAW, affirmed that over the last 20-25 years, a lot of the time was invested in collaborative work between victim support and, for example,

police departments. Collaboration will now evolve towards working as a single ecosystem operating for the victim. Lastly, **Arastalis Choudhury**, found of NEXC, said that we need to think of ways to include technology in supporting victims navigating the criminal justice system, as well as making this tough process as seamless as possible for victims. NEXC builds such ecosystems where victims have access to easy-to-navigate solutions to guide them through support and judicial systems, informing victims about their rights and connecting them to the best available services.

The moderator asked **McCulloch** how can they guarantee access to services in New Zealand where there is a big rural population. He answered that getting people to speak to services in the first place is difficult. All victims are always referred to Manaaki Tāngata | Victim Support by the police and that they made their organization easy to connect with for those who want to access support. Furthermore, they are now working on enhancing the process of reaching-out to people whose access to services might be limited.

Regarding mandatory referrals, **McCulloch** said that they want to ensure no victim is left behind and that it is important to offer help to victims as soon as the crime occurs. Self-referrals are very important at the moment too, as well as understanding why persons of different backgrounds might be reluctant to reporting. **Claes** chimed in that victim support services in the past 15 years have invested a lot to increase the amount of referrals, but it still remains a reactive way to present the available support. Organisations are now evolving towards a more pro-active approach – every citizen can become a victim, hence, every citizen should be aware of the available support services.

Following a question posed by **Altan** about how to promote your organization to the general public, **Demeester** explained that there is a great demand for the service of support dogs but there are many challenges in raising awareness about the possibility of accessing support dogs. The public needs to know about these kinds of services and leaning in to their work and its cute appeal helps promote their organisation.

Regarding the use of technology for victim support organisations, **Choudhury** commented that organisations spend a lot of time on writing and submitting reports to secure funding. Their work at NEXC helps not only victims but it also explores how to support professionals to automate these processes so they can have more time to help victims.

To conclude, the moderator asked what would the panellists suggest support organisation should improve on or change. **Demeester** said that it is important to remember that the essence of their work is well-being. **McCulloch** followed up by saying that organisations should ground every innovation in making positive impact on victims. **Choudhury** finalised the session by stating that there needs to be more collaboration between the private sector, public sector and non-profits.

### [Leading Through Crisis: A Story from New Zealand](#)

The event finished with a short inspirational speech by **James McCulloch**. He insisted on the importance of trusting your employees and putting their needs first. He re structured Victim Support New Zealand into a community-based organisation that values and focuses on the wellbeing of its frontline workers.

# Pictures

