

Forum 2026

TRIALWATCH CLINICAL NETWORK

ATHENS, GREECE

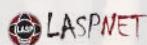




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REMARKS BY TEJAL JESRANI

WELCOME



Coming together in Athens showed us how much we share. Across regions, our network is navigating shrinking civic space, pressure on academic freedom, and the growing use of courts to silence dissent. Yet what stood out most during these days was not the weight of these challenges, but the leadership, creativity, and determination students and faculty bring to meeting them.

This Forum was designed as a space to step back from the urgency of daily work, not only to reflect, but to re-center students within it – as trial monitors, documenters of violations and emerging advocates shaping the future of fair trial defense. The generosity with which participants shared their experiences, doubts, and strategies made this not simply a network of clinics, but a community investing in the next generation of human rights lawyers.

My hope is that these days in Athens strengthen not only our tools and methods, but also our solidarity. The challenges we face are long-term. We will navigate them better if we continue to do so together.

Tejal Jesrani
Director, TrialWatch
Human Rights Institute, Columbia Law School



WHY ATHENS?

“Athens, the historic cradle of democracy, reminds us that justice is never self-executing, it must be defended, renewed, and practiced.”

*Stefanos Gandolfo, Director,
Columbia Global Center, Athens*

The Forum brought clinical partners together in Athens for the first in-person convening of the TrialWatch Clinical Network.

Athens was chosen for its role as a crossroads between regions represented in the Network and as a symbolic place in the history of democracy, civic participation, and public debate.

Meeting here created space to reflect on how courts today are increasingly used to suppress dissent, and on the role of experiential learning which centers student trial monitors and advocates in responding to these pressures.

OUR CLINICAL NETWORK



COLUMBIA HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE
Hub for all clinics



COLUMBIA HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC
New York, United States



THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
Bangkok, Thailand



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY
and Legal Aid Service
Providers Network
Kampala, Uganda



ATMA JAYA CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
Jakarta, Indonesia



CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Pretoria, South Africa



ATENEO HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER
Manila, Philippines



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
Tbilisi, Georgia

OPEN SESSION: THE CRIMINALIZATION OF JOURNALISM AND DISSENT



a public event at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)



This public session explored how legal systems are used to criminalize journalism, protest, and dissent, and how trial monitoring and legal advocacy can respond across regions. Drawing on experiences from different contexts, speakers reflected on the human impact of judicial harassment and on practical tools that have helped challenge these practices in real cases, including fairness reports, litigation support, and engagement with international and regional mechanisms.

Speakers

Tejal Jesrani (TrialWatch, HRI at Columbia Law School)

Stephen Townley (TrialWatch, Clooney Foundation for Justice)

Billie Blanco (Ateneo Human Rights Center)

Professor Photini Pazartzis (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)

Moderator

Professor Maria Gavouneli (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)



THE FORUM IN NUMBERS

7 clinical partners

7 countries represented

30+ students, supervisors, and practitioners in the room

3 days of closed-door collaboration

1 open public event on the criminalization of journalism and dissent reaching over 60 people

ACROSS THE NETWORK:

50+ active students and supervisors monitoring trials

80+ hearings observed

150+ students trained in trial monitoring

Partners joined from Georgia, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda, and Columbia Law School.



CLOSED SESSIONS

01.

OPERATING IN RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

How clinics navigate shrinking civic space, academic freedom constraints, and judicial hostility while continuing trial monitoring work.

02.

PEER PROBLEM-SOLVING THROUGH PROJECT ROUNDS

A structured space for students to present real challenges and crowdsource practical solutions with peers and supervisors.

03.

FAIRNESS REPORTS, AND THEMATIC RESEARCH

How trial notes are translated into fairness reports and thematic research to document patterns of judicial harassment and fair trial violations.

04.

DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL ADVOCACY PATHWAYS

Ways in which trial monitoring feeds into advocacy before domestic courts, regional bodies, and international mechanisms.



05.

SAFETY AND DIGITAL SECURITY

Practical tools and protocols to protect students, data, and communications when monitoring trials in high-risk environments.

06.

DESIGNING JOINT CREATIVE ADVOCACY PROJECTS

Collaborative brainstorming across clinics to develop cross-regional advocacy initiatives on shared themes and trends.

07. LOOKING FORWARD

Planning future collaboration across the Network

NETWORK VOICES



WORDS THAT
REFLECT OUR
COMMITMENT

“The forum highlighted that SLAPPs continue to exist across most countries. But as a TrialWatch community, we support one another with the faith that freedom of expression will ultimately be globally recognized.”



Student Monitor, Thammasat University

“In a world under strain, this gathering proved that hope is collaborative. Shared struggle can become shared courage for justice.”



Kongsatja Suwanapech, Clinic Supervisor, Thammasat University

“The forum was an opportune moment to study best trial monitoring practices from different clinics and crowd-source solutions together on the challenges across board as well as appreciating the meaningful impact of my work as a trial monitor in realising the right to a fair trial.”



Angelo Azinguza, Student Monitor, Makerere University

“Trialwatch is a new clinical activity for us at PILAC. So the past 1 year and a couple of months now has been a very interesting learning experience. At the conference, I was delighted to meet colleagues from the other clinics. I truly felt privileged to be part of the team (...) The experiences sharing revealed to me the fact that we are all very similar access to justice and political challenges in the area of freedom of expression.”



Patricia P’Odong, Clinic Supervisor, Makerere University

WHAT COMES NEXT

The Athens Forum was not an endpoint, but a foundation—one built on the energy, curiosity, and commitment of the students at its core.

In its wake, we hope to deepen cross-regional collaboration in ways that open new horizons for student learning and leadership. By sharing tools, methodologies, and experiences across borders, we will create richer opportunities for partners to engage in joint thematic advocacy projects and to learn directly from peers confronting similar challenges in different contexts. Continued collaboration on safety, ethics, and pedagogy will not only strengthen institutional practice, but also empower students to carry out their work with confidence, integrity, and purpose.

The relationships forged in Athens will shape the Network's next chapter—one in which students are not just participants, but drivers of collective action on fair trial rights and freedom of expression.

