

The Principle of *Ultimum Remedium* as Human Rights Protection in Relation to Sexual Violence Crimes: A Legal Comparison between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Tunisia

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Abstrak

The principle of ultimum remedium is one of the principles in legal science that serves as an important foundation in the criminal justice system, placing criminal sanctions as the last resort after non-criminal efforts are deemed ineffective. The application of this principle is closely related to children as both perpetrators and victims of sexual violence, emphasizing a humane approach, restorative justice, and the protection of human rights, with a focus on recovery efforts for victims. This article examines the principle of ultimum remedium in relation to its application in sexual violence crimes in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Tunisia. The study results show that all three countries share a common vision in placing criminal sanctions as a last resort and emphasizing the importance of child protection and restorative justice. However, there are significant differences in regulation and implementation challenges. Indonesia and Malaysia have a more systematic and integrated approach, while Tunisia faces legal and social obstacles in consistently applying this principle. Efforts to strengthen law enforcement capacity and update legislation are urgently needed so that the principle of ultimum remedium can be effectively implemented to achieve comprehensive justice and protection for victims of sexual violence.

Keywords: *Legal Principles, Sexual Violence, Ultimum Remidium.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is any act that degrades, humiliates, harasses, and/or attacks a person's body and reproductive functions, caused by various factors such as power dynamics or gender-based inequalities (Karaman et al., 2022). Violence can cause various forms of suffering, including psychological, physical, and other injuries, such

as disruption to reproductive health, including the loss of the ability to fulfill human rights like the right to education, the right to economic well-being, and others (Salmon & Jacob, 2025). In general, sexual violence is understood as any attempt or action carried out without the victim's permission or consent, whether it involves physical contact such as touching, pinching, or sexual penetration, or thru unwanted sexual words or behavior, such as threats, intimidation, seduction, or insults (Fitri Hardianti, 2022).

Sexual violence can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, or social background (Debnath et al., 2025). Sexual violence can have significant physical, mental, or social impacts on victims. Sexual harassment, both physical and non-physical, can include various types, such as: forced contraception, forced sterilization, forced marriage, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, and electronic sexual violence are some examples of sexual violence recognized by law (Anas & Haedariah, 2022). Sexual violence is a global phenomenon that transcends national borders, cultures, and social strata. Various international reports and studies indicate that sexual violence occurs worldwide and affects millions of people, particularly women, children, and gender and sexual minority groups. The majority of women globally, including 1 in 3 women, experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lives, primarily committed by partners (Serradell & Puigvert, 2025). Among children, the prevalence of sexual violence is also very high, with 11% having experienced sexual harassment and 9% having experienced physical contact-based sexual violence during their lifetime (Yulia et al., 2023). UNICEF estimates that over 370 million girls and women have experienced rape or sexual violence as children, and if non-contact forms such as verbal or online harassment are also

counted, the number could reach 650 million (Judiasih et al., 2020).

Sexual violence is also frequently used as a weapon of war, particularly against women and girls, to intimidate, control, or destroy specific communities during armed conflict (Gabryella, 2024). Additionally, sexual violence does not only occur in developing or poor countries, but also in developed countries, as evidenced by cases in the United States and Europe (Peršak, 2025). The causes of sexual violence are very complex, including gender inequality, social norms that demean women, and unequal power dynamics in society (Skan et al., 2025). Stigma and underreporting often make the actual data lower than reality, leaving prevention and management efforts a major challenge worldwide.

Countries around the world have enacted laws or legal regulations related to sexual violence as an effort to protect society from sexual crimes and provide justice for victims (Koch, 2025). The process of forming these laws is diverse, but is generally driven by global awareness of the importance of protecting human rights, especially the rights of women and children, as well as pressure from international legal instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Clark, 2025). At the international level, legal instruments such as CEDAW and CRC serve as a foundation for member states to adopt and strengthen national laws governing sexual violence (Choirunnisa, 2021). However, challenges remain because the definition, scope, and sanctions for sexual violence still differ between countries, making law enforcement and victim protection inconsistent.

In April 2022, Indonesia passed the Sexual Violence Criminal Act (UU

TPKS), which regulates all aspects of prevention, handling, protection, and recovery for victims (Yusrianti et al., 2025). This law also regulates international cooperation in addressing sexual violence (Nurisman, 2022). Meanwhile, Singapore uses the Penal Code and the Women's Charter as its legal basis, with additional special protection for children thru the Children and Young Persons Act (Chng, 2025). In many developed countries, laws against sexual violence have long been in place and are constantly updated to expand protection, for example, by clarifying the element of consent, broadening the definition of victims (not just women), and regulating sexual violence within marriage (Faraldo-Cabana, 2025). Recommendations from the UN Special Rapporteur also encourage states to revise their national laws to align with universal human rights standards, including defining rape more broadly and explicitly ensuring the absence of consent as an element of the crime. Generally, the enactment of laws on sexual violence in various countries is a response to the need for victim protection and justice enforcement, although their implementation and effectiveness still face various challenges, such as social stigma, underreporting, and differences in legal definitions and sanctions between countries.

Based on the above explanation, this research focuses on the aspect of the principle of *ultimum remidium* as a means of protecting human rights related to sexual violence crimes by conducting a legal comparison between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Tunisia. Previous research on sexual violence has essentially been conducted by several previous researchers, including Ningrum (2024), who analyzed sexual violence focusing on the TPKS Law in Indonesia (Ningrum, 2024). Another study was conducted by Adnan (2025), which focused on the Indonesian government's efforts to prevent sexual violence against children (Adnan, 2025).

Further research, such as that conducted by León and Céspedes (2025), which details gender inequality in sexual violence in Latin American countries (Lisandra León, 2025). From the three previous studies mentioned above, this research is original because it focuses on the principle of *ultimum remidium* as a means of protecting human rights related to sexual violence crimes by comparing the laws of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Tunisia, which were not discussed by the previous three studies. The legal comparison between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Tunisia is intended because the three countries have a majority Muslim population, which is linked to efforts to provide legal protection related to sexual violence crimes from a human rights perspective.

This research focuses on the principle of *ultimum remidium* as a means of protecting human rights related to sexual violence crimes by conducting a legal comparison between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Tunisia it is a normative legal research. As normative legal research, primary legal materials such as legislation in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Tunisia are the main focus of this study (Terry Hutchinson, 2015). The secondary legal materials used are journal articles and books that discuss sexual violence offenses. Non-legal materials are language dictionaries. The analysis of legal materials is conducted prescriptively, emphasizing legal solutions to the legal issues that have been presented. The main approach in this research is a comparative approach, supplemented by conceptual and legislative approaches.

B. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Principle of *Ultimum Remidium* in Sexual Violence Crimes

Legal principles are fundamental, abstract, and broad ideas that serve as the foundation and background for every concrete regulation within a country's legal

system (Prasetio, Masnun, Disantara, et al., 2025). Legal principles are not rigid and detailed rules, but rather fundamental principles or values that underpin the formation, interpretation, and application of law (Nafisah, 2023). In practice, legal principles serve as guidelines for lawmakers, judges, and law enforcement officials in formulating regulations, making decisions, and upholding justice within society (Muh. Ali Masnun, Dicky Eko Prasetio, Mohd Badrol Awang, 2024).

Etymologically, the principle can be defined as a foundation, base, or guideline, like a solid stone for a house foundation (Prasetio, Masnun, & Widodo, 2025). In the legal context, a principle is also understood as a truth that serves as the foundation or core of thinking, opinion, and action (Anggraeni, 2020). Legal principles are not merely written norms, but also reflect the moral values, ethics, and social ideals that exist within society (Saputra, M. Reza, 2024). Therefore, legal principles serve as a link between formal legal regulations and society's ideals of justice, certainty, and utility.

Based on the opinions of experts, Bellefroid defines legal principles as the basic norms derived from positive law, while Van Eikema Hommes emphasizes that legal principles are general foundations or guidelines for the applicable law (Fuad et al., 2021)(Muhammad Solikhudin et al., 2024). Legal principles are the "heart" of legal regulations, providing direction and foundation for the entire legal system. Legal principles should not be considered concrete norms, but rather as fundamental ideas that are general in nature and serve as the background for concrete regulations, whether reflected in laws or judicial decisions (Kusniati, 2024). Legal principles have two main functions when used (De Micco & Scendoni, 2024). First, they serve as the foundation for the existence of law, acting as a norm and legitimizing it, and

second, they serve as a binding force for parties involved in the legal process. Second, they function within legal science, serving as an explanatory guide to help legal experts understand and develop legal theories (Shcherbanyuk et al., 2023). In addition, legal principles are also instrumental, meaning they can accommodate changes and developments in society, making the legal system more flexible and adaptable to social dynamics.

There is a difference between general legal principles and specific legal principles. General legal principles apply to all areas of law, such as the principles of justice, legal certainty, and equality before the law (Widodo et al., 2024). Conversely, specific legal principles only apply to certain areas of law, such as the principle of legality in criminal law or consensualism in civil law. Additionally, there are legal bases derived from specific religious or cultural principles. For example, Islamic law emphasizes justice, certainty, and benefit in human relationships. Overall, the rule of law plays an important role in maintaining consistency, justice, and legal certainty. Without a legal basis, the legal system will lose its direction and foundation, making it difficult to achieve the true goals of law, which are to realize order, justice, and the welfare of society (Lestarini, 2023). Therefore, understanding legal principles is very important for every citizen, especially for those involved in the process of forming, enforcing, and implementing laws in Indonesia and other countries.

The principle of *ultimum remedium* is one of the fundamental principles in the criminal justice system, emphasizing that criminal law should be used as a last resort in resolving a case or legal violation (Andrianto, 2021). This principle is rooted in the idea that criminal sanctions, such as imprisonment or fines, have very

serious implications for the perpetrator, both physically, psychologically, and socially, so their application must be done carefully and selectively (I Gusti Bagus Suryawan, I Putu Ngurah Aryana, Yohanes I Wayan Suryadi, M. Ngurah Arya Yogie Krsna, 2025). In practice, this principle requires that any matter that can be resolved thru other channels such as mediation, negotiation, civil law, or administrative law must be prioritized before resorting to criminal law as a solution.

Literally, "*ultimum remedium*" comes from Latin and means "last resort." (Hartanto & Wahyandono, 2025). This concept emphasizes that criminal law is the "ultimate weapon" used only when all other resolution efforts have been exhausted and have not yielded results (Suratman & Shanty, 2021). Thus, this principle aims to minimize the use of harsh criminal punishments, such as imprisonment, and prioritize softer approaches, such as rehabilitation, mediation, or out-of-court settlements. This approach is also in line with the principles of restorative justice, which emphasizes restoring relationships between the offender, victim, and community, as well as repairing the harm caused by the legal violation (Toni Kasmiri et al., 2024).

The principle of *ultimum remedium* is not only applicable in the context of law enforcement but also has relevance in the legislative process. In lawmaking, this principle is an important consideration in determining whether an action needs to be criminalized or can be adequately regulated thru administrative or civil sanctions. Thus, this principle also serves as a guideline for lawmakers not to immediately criminalize every violation, but rather to consider the effectiveness and proportionality of the sanctions imposed.

The application of the principle of *ultimum remedium* is very important in

maintaining a balance between the state's interest in upholding the law and the protection of human rights. Criminal sanctions that are too easily imposed can lead to injustice, especially if the perpetrator could actually be rehabilitated or reconciled with the victim (Helka et al., 2024). Therefore, this principle is also part of the effort to protect human rights, because by placing criminal law as a last resort, the likelihood of human rights violations due to disproportionate punishments can be minimized. In the practice of law enforcement in Indonesia, the principle of *ultimum remedium* has been adopted in various fields, such as general criminal law, tax law, and labor law. For example, in cases of tax violations, taxpayers who admit their mistake and pay the outstanding taxes along with administrative penalties can stop the examination process before it reaches the criminal investigation stage. Similarly, in labor cases, criminal sanctions are only applied if attempts at resolution through mediation or administrative sanctions are unsuccessful.

Overall, the principle of *ultimum remedium* reflects a cautious and humane approach to law enforcement (Anggoro, 2022). This principle asserts that criminal law is not the first solution, but the last resort, only to be used when all other alternative resolutions have failed. Thus, the principle of *ultimum remedium* plays an important role in achieving justice, protecting human rights, and ensuring the effectiveness of law enforcement in society.

The principle of *ultimum remedium* in sexual violence criminal acts serves as a fundamental principle emphasizing that the application of criminal sanctions should be the last resort after other resolution efforts are deemed ineffective or impossible (Hendra, Ravel, Novel Firdhaus, Michael Ari Kurniawan, 2021). This principle is highly relevant in handling cases of sexual violence because of the highly

sensitive, complex nature of the offense, and its widespread impact on victims, perpetrators, and society as a whole. In law enforcement practice, the principle of *ultimum remedium* dictates that law enforcement officials should always prioritize non-criminal approaches, such as mediation, counselling, or rehabilitation, before ultimately deciding to impose criminal sanctions on the perpetrator.

In the context of sexual violence, applying the principle of *ultimum remedium* does not mean ignoring the victim's interests or denying the seriousness of the crime. On the contrary, this principle actually requires law enforcement officers to be more careful and proportionate in handling cases, while still considering the rights of victims, the rights of perpetrators, and the public interest. For example, in cases of sexual violence involving a child as the perpetrator, Law No. 11 of 2012 concerning the Child Criminal Justice System stipulates that criminal sanctions may only be imposed if diversion efforts, which is resolution outside of court, cannot be achieved (Kmak, 2021). This shows that the principle of *ultimum remedium* is an important foundation for ensuring that the legal process runs fairly, transparently, and without harming the parties involved.

Additionally, the principle of *ultimum remedium* is also relevant in handling cases of sexual violence against children, whether committed by adults or other children (Indriany & Monica, 2023). Applying this principle can help reduce the stigmatization and trauma experienced by children, whether as victims or perpetrators, and promote better recovery and social reintegration processes (Fatimah et al., 2022). Law enforcement is expected to consider various factors, such as age, background, and the psychological and social impact of the crime, before deciding to impose criminal sanctions.

In cases of very severe sexual violence, for example, involving extreme violence, numerous victims, or repeat offenders, the principle of *ultimum remedium* still applies, but with an emphasis on proportionality and justice. Severe criminal sanctions, such as the death penalty, should only be imposed as an *ultimum remedium*, meaning after considering all the evidence, aggravating factors, and the broad social impact of the crime. Law No. 12 of 2022 concerning Sexual Violence Crimes also stipulates that the death penalty can be imposed as a last resort, but only in very serious cases and after a strict legal process.

Overall, the principle of *ultimum remedium* in sexual violence offenses serves as a guideline for law enforcement to always consider softer and more humane alternative resolutions before deciding to impose criminal sanctions. This principle not only protects the rights of perpetrators to receive fair treatment but also ensures that the interests of victims and society remain the top priority in the law enforcement process. Thus, the principle of *ultimum remedium* plays an important role in realizing substantive justice and protecting human rights within the Indonesian criminal justice system.

The principle of *ultimum remedium* plays a very important role in handling sexual violence offenses, both from a legal, social, and human rights protection perspective. In this context, the principle of *ultimum remedium* asserts that the use of criminal sanctions such as imprisonment or fines should be reserved as a last resort after all non-criminal or rehabilitative resolution efforts have been considered and deemed insufficiently effective. This approach is highly relevant considering that sexual violence is a sensitive, complex crime with far-reaching impacts on victims, perpetrators, and society, requiring just, proportionate, and humane handling.

The importance of the *ultimum remedium* principle in cases of sexual violence lies in the effort to minimize the negative impact that legal processes can have, especially on children involved as both perpetrators and victims. In cases involving children, for example, the Child Criminal Justice System Act explicitly states that punishment should be the last resort, while efforts toward diversion, rehabilitation, and guidance should be prioritized. This aims to prevent children from losing their future and opportunities for positive development, as well as to prevent trauma and stigmatization that could worsen their psychological and social conditions.

Additionally, the application of the principle of *ultimum remedium* also encourages law enforcement officers to be more cautious and selective in deciding cases, considering various factors such as the perpetrator's age, social background, psychological condition, and the long-term impact of the sentence to be imposed. Judges are expected to assess whether the perpetrator can still be rehabilitated thru a rehabilitative approach, or whether the victim can achieve better recovery thru non-criminal means. Thus, this principle not only protects the perpetrator's right to fair treatment but also ensures that the interests of victims and society remain the top priority in the law enforcement process.

In a broader context, the principle of *ultimum remedium* also serves as an important foundation for establishing restorative justice, which is an approach that emphasizes restoring relationships between the offender, victim, and community, as well as repairing the harm caused by the legal violation. This approach is considered more effective in handling cases of sexual violence involving children or perpetrators who still have the potential to be rehabilitated, as it can reduce the burden on the

criminal justice system while giving perpetrators the opportunity to improve their behavior without having to face punishments that could have long-term consequences for their lives.

The principle of *ultimum remedium* also serves as an instrument for protecting human rights, because by placing criminal sanctions as a last resort, law enforcement agencies can avoid human rights violations resulting from disproportionate or excessive punishment. Handling sexual violence cases that prioritize this principle will be more transparent, accountable, and just, thus strengthening public trust in the legal system. Overall, the principle of *ultimum remedium* is important in cases of sexual violence because it provides a basis for law enforcement to always consider softer and more humane alternative resolutions before imposing criminal sanctions. This principle not only protects the rights of perpetrators and victims but also promotes the creation of a criminal justice system that is fairer, more effective, and oriented toward recovery and social reintegration.

The principle of law, particularly the principle of *ultimum remedium*, plays a crucial role in maintaining the balance between strict law enforcement and the protection of human rights. In the context of sexual violence offenses, this principle serves as a guideline emphasizing the importance of caution, proportionality, and a just and humane approach, both toward victims and perpetrators. The application of the principle of *ultimum remedium* not only strengthens the principles of restorative justice and child protection but also ensures that the criminal justice system operates effectively, adaptively, and in favor of the overall well-being of society.

2. Efforts to Protect Human Rights in Sexual Violence Crimes Thru the Principle of *Ultimum Remidium*: A Legal Comparison between Indonesia,

Malaysia, and Tunisia

The concept of human rights protection is an effort to guaranty, respect, and protect the fundamental rights inherent in every human being from birth, which are universal, natural, and cannot be revoked by anyone, as a form of respect for human dignity (Judijanto, 2024). Human rights protection in law, particularly criminal law, aims to create a just, humane, and fair judicial system that aligns with universal human rights principles. This ensures that every individual, including suspects, defendants, and victims, receives proper treatment, equal protection under the law, the right to defense, and protection from arbitrary actions, violence, or treatment that degrades human dignity (Retnowulandari et al., 2024)(Prasetio, Masnun, & Widodo, 2025).

In the context of criminal law, human rights protection is realized through various rights guarantied by legislation, such as the right to be examined immediately, the right to be accompanied by legal counsel, the right not to be forced to confess guilt, and the right to security and privacy, ensuring that the legal process remains fair and transparent without disregarding human dignity. Human rights protection is also a key foundation for preventing abuse of power by state institutions and ensuring that everyone, without exception, fully obtains their rights in the legal process.

Human Rights (HAM) protection in cases of sexual violence is an effort to guaranty and restore the basic rights of victims, including the right to safety, honor, dignity, and protection from threats, violence, and discriminatory treatment (Suwandoko & Rihardi, 2020). Sexual violence is internationally and nationally recognized as a serious violation of human rights, as it not only deprives victims of

their right to safety and freedom but also has long-term consequences such as trauma, stigmatization, and psychological and social disorders.

Human rights protection in the context of sexual violence also requires the active involvement of state institutions and society, such as the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM), the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), and the Indonesian Child Protection Commission, to conduct advocacy, provide assistance, and educate on the prevention and handling of sexual violence cases (Keddell, 2023). Thus, human rights protection in cases of sexual violence does not only focus on law enforcement, but also on the recovery and empowerment of victims, as well as prevention to ensure similar violations do not happen again in the future.

Human rights protection in the context of sexual violence thru the principle of *ultimum remedium* is established by placing criminal sanctions as the last resort after all non-criminal resolution efforts, such as mediation, rehabilitation, or diversion, are deemed ineffective (Frati et al., 2025). This principle emphasizes the importance of minimizing the negative impact of legal processes on the perpetrator, especially if the perpetrator is a child, while still considering the victim's rights to justice, protection, and recovery (Piolanti et al., 2025). In handling cases of sexual violence, the principle of *ultimum remedium* encourages law enforcement to be more cautious and proportional, prioritizing peaceful and rehabilitative solutions before imposing criminal sentences. This aims to ensure that the rights of both the perpetrator and the victim are protected, that the legal process is fair and transparent, and that the victim receives optimal recovery without neglecting the protection of the perpetrator from excessive legal action.

This principle is highly relevant in cases of sexual violence involving a child as the perpetrator, where the Child Criminal Justice System Law affirms that criminal sanctions should only be imposed if diversion efforts cannot be realized. Thus, human rights protection in the context of sexual violence thru the principle of *ultimum remedium* seeks to create a balance between justice for victims, protection for perpetrators, and fair legal certainty for all parties (Rizki et al., 2022).

The principle of *ultimum remedium* in Indonesia, particularly within the context of Law Number 12 of 2022 concerning Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS Law), emphasizes that criminal sanctions should be used as a last resort after all non-criminal resolution alternatives, such as mediation, diversion, or rehabilitation, are deemed ineffective or impossible to achieve. This ensures that law enforcement remains oriented toward protecting human rights, restoring victims, and restorative justice. This principle generally means that if a case can be resolved thru other channels (family, negotiation, mediation, civil, or administrative law), those channels must be prioritized before resorting to criminal law (Reno Efendi, Firda Yanis Hardianti, Putri Diah Lestari & Puspoayu, 2021). In cases of sexual violence, the application of the *ultimum remedium* principle becomes highly relevant, especially when the perpetrator is a child, because the TPKS Law explicitly prohibits resolving sexual violence cases outside the judicial process, except for child perpetrators who can be addressed thru diversion efforts. This ensures that the victim's rights to justice and protection remain a priority, while the perpetrator's rights, particularly those of children, to receive fair, non-discriminatory, and proportionate treatment are also protected, in accordance with the spirit of human rights protection and restorative justice promoted by the TPKS Law. This law emphasizes the importance of

comprehensive case management, from prevention, handling, protection, to victim recovery, and ensuring that criminal sanctions are only imposed as a last resort when all other efforts have been deemed ineffective. This ensures that the legal process remains humane, fair, and focused on recovery and social reintegration, as mandated by the *ultimum remedium* principle in the Indonesian criminal justice system.

Sexual violence offenses in Malaysia are established thru a legal framework and law enforcement practices that place criminal sanctions as a last resort, especially in cases involving children, whether as victims or perpetrators. The state aims to provide maximum protection for children's interests and well-being thru key legal instruments such as the Sexual Offenses Against Children Act 2017 (SOACA), which aims to provide better protection for children from sexual crimes and ensure that case handling processes are fair, humane, and focused on the child's recovery and social reintegration, while still considering the complexity and sensitivity of sexual violence cases (Tan Geok Mooi, 2020). In practice, the principle of *ultimum remedium* is reflected in the efforts of law enforcement agencies and relevant institutions to prioritize non-criminal approaches, such as rehabilitation, counselling, and psychological support, before deciding to impose severe criminal sanctions, thereby protecting the rights of children as victims and perpetrators, and ensuring that the legal process remains proportionate and recovery-oriented, as reflected in the Special Guidelines for Handling Cases on Sexual Offenses against Children, which emphasize the importance of integrated handling from reporting, investigation, to trial, with the main focus on protecting, supporting, and rehabilitating child victims and witnesses, so that criminal sanctions are only imposed as a last resort if all non-criminal resolution alternatives are deemed ineffective, in line with the spirit of

human rights protection and restorative justice, which are the main foundations in handling sexual violence offenses in Malaysia (Fernandez et al., 2023).

Although SOACA includes the threat of severe criminal sanctions for perpetrators of sexual crimes against children, including imprisonment for up to 30 years and caning, the principle of *ultimum remedium* remains paramount in handling cases involving children, especially thru a softer approach before imposing criminal sentences. Child perpetrators are also entitled to special protection and rehabilitative approaches, ensuring that the legal process remains fair, humane, and focused on recovery and social reintegration, as stipulated in the Special Guidelines and child justice practices in Malaysia. These guidelines emphasize the importance of protecting, supporting, and rehabilitating child victims and perpetrators, and ensuring that criminal sanctions are only imposed as a last resort when all other efforts have been deemed ineffective. Therefore, the protection of human rights and restorative justice remains the top priority in handling sexual violence offenses in Malaysia (Fernandez et al., 2023).

The criminal offense of sexual violence in Tunisia, viewed thru the principle of *ultimum remedium*, is embodied in an evolving legal framework. In 2017, the state enacted the Law on Violence Against Women, which came into effect in February 2018. This law comprehensively criminalizes all forms of violence against women, including physical, sexual, moral, and economic violence, and provides extensive protection and support for victims, focusing on prevention, handling, and recovery. The law also expands the definition of sexual harassment to include acts in public spaces and sets severe criminal penalties, including imprisonment for up to 20 years, or even life imprisonment if the perpetrator uses a weapon. Additionally, it raises the

age of consent for sexual relations from 13 to 16 years and increases penalties if the perpetrator is a close relative or exploits the victim's vulnerable position. Criminal sanctions are thus considered a last resort after the state, thru various institutions such as family violence units within security institutions, gender equality education, and training for employes in the health, education, and youth sectors, has attempted prevention, accompaniment, and rehabilitation of victims and perpetrators, while still considering restorative justice and human rights protection (Midani et al., 2025).

In practice, the application of the *ultimum remedium* principle in Tunisia still faces challenges due to provisions in the Penal Code that allow perpetrators of sexual harassment to sue their accusers, which often makes victims reluctant to report. Additionally, there are legal loopholes regarding the punishment of sexual relations between children aged 16-18 and the absence of explicit provisions criminalizing marital rape. Consequently, law enforcement and the protection of victims of sexual violence in Tunisia remain focused on recovery and social reintegration, but are not fully consistent in applying criminal sanctions as a last resort. Therefore, the implementation and dissemination of the *ultimum remedium* principle still require strengthening to ensure that legal processes remain fair, humane, and oriented toward protecting human rights and restorative justice, as mandated by the Tunisian constitution and national laws, which affirm the state's commitment to eliminate all forms of violence against women and guaranty equal rights for all citizens (Midani et al., 2025).

The principle of *ultimum remedium* in sexual violence crimes in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Tunisia equally places criminal sanctions as the last resort after all non-criminal resolution alternatives such as mediation, diversion, rehabilitation,

counselling, or psychological support are deemed ineffective or impossible to implement, thus the law enforcement process remains oriented toward protecting human rights, restoring victims, and restorative justice. In general, these three countries recognize the importance of a humane, fair, and recovery-focused approach, as well as social reintegration for both victims and perpetrators, particularly in cases involving children as perpetrators or victims. Therefore, the rights of children and women are given maximum protection thru a comprehensive legal framework and integrated prevention and handling efforts, as reflected in Law Number 12 of 2022 concerning Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS Law) in Indonesia, the Sexual Offenses Against Children Act 2017 (SOACA) in Malaysia, and the Law on Violence Against Women in 2017 in Tunisia, all of which emphasize the importance of an integrated approach to case management, from reporting and investigation to trial, with a primary focus on protecting, supporting, and rehabilitating victims and witnesses, and ensuring that criminal sanctions are only imposed as a last resort when all other efforts have been deemed ineffective, thus maintaining human rights protection and restorative justice as top priorities in addressing sexual violence crimes in the three countries (Krismiarsi, 2021).

However, there are significant differences in the implementation and challenges of applying the principle of *ultimum remedium* in each country. In Indonesia, this principle is explicitly regulated in the TPKS Law, which limits the resolution of sexual violence cases outside the judicial process except for child perpetrators who can be addressed thru diversion efforts, ensuring that the rights of victims to obtain justice and protection remain a priority. Meanwhile, the rights of perpetrators, especially children, to receive fair, non-discriminatory, and

proportionate treatment are also protected, with an emphasis on comprehensive case management from prevention to victim recovery. In Malaysia, the principle of *ultimum remedium* is embodied thru SOACA and the Special Guidelines for Handling Cases on Sexual Offenses against Children which emphasizes the importance of integrated handling and non-criminal approaches, such as rehabilitation and counselling, before imposing severe criminal sanctions, so that the legal process remains fair, humane, and focused on the child's recovery and social reintegration. Although the SOACA contains the threat of severe criminal sanctions for perpetrators of sexual crimes against children, the principle of *ultimum remedium* remains paramount in handling cases involving children, where child perpetrators are also entitled to special protection and rehabilitative approaches, so that human rights protection and restorative justice remain the main priorities in handling sexual violence crimes in Malaysia.

In Tunisia, the principle of *ultimum remedium* is embodied in the 2017 Law on Violence Against Women, which comprehensively criminalizes all forms of violence against women, including sexual violence, and provides extensive protection and support for victims, with a focus on prevention, handling, and victim recovery. It also broadens the definition of sexual harassment and sets severe criminal penalties. However, the application of the *ultimum remedium* principle in Tunisia still faces challenges due to provisions in the Penal Code that allow perpetrators of sexual harassment to sue their accusers, making victims often reluctant to report. Additionally, there are legal loopholes regarding the criminalization of sexual relations between children aged 16-18 and the absence of explicit provisions criminalizing marital rape, meaning that law enforcement and the

protection of victims of sexual violence in Tunisia remain oriented toward recovery and social reintegration, However, it has not been fully consistent in applying criminal sanctions as a last resort, so the application of the *ultimum remedium* principle still needs strengthening at the implementation and socialization levels, in order for the legal process to continue fairly, humanely, and with an orientation toward protecting human rights and restorative justice, as mandated in the Tunisian constitution and national laws, which affirm the state's commitment to eliminate all forms of violence against women and guaranty equal rights for all citizens (Muhajir, 2021).

Thus, the main equation in applying the principle of *ultimum remedium* in the three countries is the placement of criminal sanctions as a last resort and the emphasis on human rights protection and restorative justice, while the main differences lie in the depth of regulation, non-criminal resolution mechanisms, and implementation challenges in each country. Indonesia and Malaysia are more explicit in regulating child protection and restorative approaches, while Tunisia still faces challenges in the consistency of application and victim protection due to legal loopholes and social barriers.

C. CONCLUSION

Legal principles are the fundamental foundation of the legal system, which are abstract but crucial in shaping, interpreting, and applying concrete legal rules. In the context of criminal law, particularly in cases of sexual violence, the principle of *ultimum remedium* asserts that criminal sanctions should be the last resort after all non-criminal resolution attempts are deemed ineffective. This principle reflects a

more humane, just, and human rights-oriented approach, as well as the rehabilitation of victims. The application of the principle of *ultimum remedium* is highly relevant in complex and far-reaching cases of sexual violence, especially when children are involved as perpetrators or victims, as it allows for legal handling that is not only punitive but also restorative. Thru this approach, the legal system not only enforces justice repressively but also promotes restorative justice and social reintegration. Therefore, a proper understanding and application of legal principles, particularly the principle of *ultimum remedium*, is crucial in achieving a criminal justice system that is fair, proportionate, and adaptable to societal dynamics and the needs of protecting victims of sexual violence.

The application of the principle of *ultimum remedium* in cases of sexual violence in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Tunisia shows a shared vision in placing criminal sanctions as a last resort, after all non-criminal resolution efforts such as mediation, rehabilitation, or counselling are deemed ineffective. The three countries generally emphasize the importance of human rights protection, restorative justice, and victim recovery, especially in cases involving children as both perpetrators and victims. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in terms of regulation and implementation challenges. Indonesia and Malaysia demonstrate a more systematic and explicit approach to child protection and integrated management. Conversely, Tunisia, despite having a fairly comprehensive legal framework, still faces legal and social obstacles that hinder the consistent application of this principle. Therefore, although the principle of *ultimum remedium* has been normatively recognized and applied, strengthening regulations, harmonizing approaches, and increasing law enforcement capacity are still needed for this principle to be truly effective in

ensuring comprehensive justice and protection for victims of sexual violence in each country.

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