

Panel discussion
**“The Relevance of the Right to Development in the context of
global challenges”**
Room XI, Palais de Nations



Opening Statement by Ms. Navi Pillay
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

6 December 2011

Your Excellency,
Ambassador Badr
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to address this final event in a series of many events this year in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development by the General Assembly.

As you are all aware, 4 December marked the actual date of the anniversary and now that this milestone has passed, we must seize the moment to act, and move ahead with renewed resolve and commitment to implementing the right to development.

It is only fitting in hindsight that this twenty-fifth anniversary fell in a remarkable year, a year when ordinary people across the globe have taken to the streets demanding fairness, justice, freedom from fear and want, the bedrock of the Declaration on the Right to Development. The messages enshrined in the Declaration have never seemed more potent or opportune.

The year unfolded with the events in Tunisia and Egypt, but these events are not confined to one region. In recent months, the Arab Spring has also evolved into a Western winter of discontent, where the chants of ordinary people are echoing through the streets in Greece, Spain, Italy, Chile, the United States and the United Kingdom, demanding their rights to health, education, jobs and justice, protesting corruption in financial and economic decision-making and the mismanagement of financial and ecological resources

We cannot afford to ignore or gloss over these basic demands from the streets and especially from a younger generation, who have inherited the mistakes of the past, exacerbated by multiple crises, including food, fuel, energy and climate crises, which continue to take a disproportionate toll on the most vulnerable and marginalized.

Today, 25 years after the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development, the normative content of this right is beyond doubt. This right has been reaffirmed in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action; the Millennium Declaration; the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, and the MDGs Review outcome document.

We must remain steadfast in our efforts to advance the principles and elements enshrined in the Declaration and reaffirmed in these multilateral calls for action, insisting on the collective will to make it a reality.

Last year, the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly called on my Office to launch a programme of commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Right to Development. We have responded to this call by embarking on a far-reaching programme, leading to a series of landmark initiatives and concrete actions. In this anniversary year, we also sought to tackle the stubborn challenges that remain in the path of the meaningful realization of the right to development: in that regard, the politicization, polarization and stubborn impasse in the intergovernmental debate on the right to development must end.

Secondly, we must work to enlarge the organized constituency in support of the right to development. NGOs and civil society at large are the engine of human rights. We must hear them, include them, and support them in their work.

Thirdly, my mandate explicitly includes the mandate to promote and protect the realization of the right to development and to enhance support from relevant bodies of the UN system for this purpose. This requires full mainstreaming of all human rights including the right to development in the work of the UN system, most importantly in the upcoming Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, and in the post-2015 development agenda.

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come full circle at the end of this anniversary year. The four key messages that I emphasized at the launch of the anniversary year need to be repeated: development is a human right for all; the right to development belongs to everyone, without discrimination; the right to development is as relevant today as it was on the day the Declaration was adopted; and finally, we must act together in a determined and coherent manner in order to realize the right to development.

We can ill afford to lose sight of these goals and objectives, in moving ahead, and move ahead, we must.

For our part, be assured of my full support and that of my Office. We need to build on the momentum generated this year, to push forward on the right to development agenda, by building new ties with a range of constituencies including UN system bodies, international organizations, civil society, parliaments and other stakeholders and continue to creatively explore a host of legal and social action strategies for its implementation.

I would like to conclude by reiterating my message at a Human Rights Council panel event on 14 September (let me quote myself), “Let us take full advantage of the opportunity of this anniversary year to renew and revive our commitment to the Declaration on the Right to Development and to live up to its solemn promise and abundant potential to raise millions from poverty and desperation into dignity and hope.” With that final message in what I view of as a successful year and a welcome new start, I wish you an engaging and productive panel event.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.