

Foreword

We live in challenging times. Across the globe, millions are suffering the merciless, often devastating, effects of the many global crises of our age. The global financial and economic crisis, the food crisis, the energy crisis and the climate crisis have converged in a multi-front assault on human dignity. And our institutions of governance, at both the global and national levels, have been at best negligent, and at times complicit, in this onslaught. As a result, in both North and South, the opening years of the twenty-first century have been marked by growing poverty, inequality, hunger, desperation and social unrest.

This was not the vision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that gave birth in 1948 to the modern international human rights movement, promising freedom from fear and want, and declaring that “everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in [the] Declaration can be fully realized”.

And it was not the vision of the Declaration on the Right to Development, the twenty-fifth anniversary of which this publication commemorates.

Since the adoption of that landmark document, a debate has been raging in the halls of the United Nations and beyond. On one side, proponents of the right to development assert its relevance (or even primacy) and, on the other, sceptics (and rejectionists) relegate this right to secondary importance, or even deny its very existence. Unfortunately, while generating plenty of academic interest and stimulating political theatre, that debate has done little to free the

right to development from the conceptual mud and political quicksand in which it has been mired all these years.

We are determined to change that.

To do so, we must first take a hard look at the parameters of that debate, as they have evolved throughout the years. This book—the first of its kind—collects articles produced by a broad range of authors and reflecting an equally broad range of positions. Most were generated by or for the many successive expert and intergovernmental mechanisms established by the United Nations to study the right to development. Others were specifically written for this book. All are valuable to our task of documenting, and advancing, the right to development debate.

For the coming years, our challenge will be to move beyond the many myths, distortions and misunderstandings that have plagued the right to development since its codification in 1986. Doing so begins with the recognition of the simple fact, affirmed in numerous United Nations declarations and resolutions, from the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights to the 2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit outcome—and, indeed, the mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights—that the right to development is a human right. No more, and no less.

And, because the United Nations recognizes no hierarchy of rights, and all human rights are equal and interdependent, the right to development cannot

correctly be viewed as either a “super-right” (i.e., an umbrella right that somehow encompasses and trumps all other rights) or as a “mini-right” (with the status of a mere political aspiration).

Nor should we permit the fog of political debate to confuse the identity of the right holder to whom the right to development belongs: as with all human rights, the rights holders are human beings. Not Governments, not States, not regions, but human beings—that is, individuals and peoples. And because human rights are universal, the right to development belongs to all people, everywhere—from New York to New Delhi, from Cape Town to Copenhagen, and from the deepest forests of the Amazon to the most remote islands of the Pacific. Wherever the accident of their birth, whatever their race, sex, language or religion, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, including the right to development.

Like all human rights, the right to development also contains a specific entitlement—in this case *the right “to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development”*. This basic entitlement, set out with perfect clarity in article 1 of the Declaration, includes a number of constituent elements, enumerated subsequently in the Declaration. Among them are:

- *People-centred development.* The Declaration identifies “the human person” as the central subject, participant and beneficiary of development
- *A human rights-based approach.* The Declaration specifically requires that development be carried out in a manner “in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized”
- *Participation.* The Declaration calls for the “active, free and meaningful participation” of people in development
- *Equity.* The Declaration underlines the need for “the fair distribution of the benefits” of development
- *Non-discrimination.* The Declaration permits “no distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”
- *Self-determination.* The Declaration integrates self-determination, including full sover-

eignty over natural resources, as a constituent element of the right to development

Equally explicit are the prescriptions provided by the Declaration for the implementation of this right, among them:

- The formulation of appropriate national and international development policies
- Effective international cooperation
- Reforms at the national and international levels
- Removal of obstacles to development, including, inter alia, human rights violations, racism, colonialism, occupation and aggression
- Promotion of peace and disarmament, and the redirecting of savings generated therefrom to development

Thus, when you enter into the right to development discussion, when you hear the phrase invoked in academic discourse or in political debate or, indeed, when you review the contributions to this book, I encourage you to do so critically. Ask yourself these questions: Is this the “right to development” codified in the United Nations Declaration? Is the analysis grounded in the recognition of the right to development as a universal human right, with human beings as the right holders, Governments as the duty bearers, and an entitlement to participate in, contribute to and enjoy development at its centre? Where you are unable to answer these questions in the affirmative, you will know that you have left the realm of human rights analysis, and entered into a geopolitical boxing match that uses the right to development as a proxy for other issues that have long complicated relations between North and South.

Our mission, on the other hand, is to promote the realization of all human rights—including the right to development—as human rights.

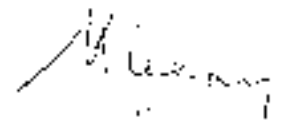
Today, the ideological edifices of the dominant economic models of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are crumbling under the weight of the realities of the twenty-first. Growing inequalities, global poverty, systemic deprivation, hunger, unemployment, environmental degradation and social unrest raise human rights imperatives that cannot be deferred to the invisible hand of the market, the pilfering hand of the greedy few or the repressive hand of autocratic regimes. The call now, written across the banners

of a mobilized citizenry from Tahrir Square to Wall Street, is for accountable and democratic economic and political governance under the rule of law—at both the national and international levels—with the paramount, sacred mission of ensuring freedom from fear and want for all people, everywhere, without discrimination.

In other words, people are demanding a human rights-based approach to economic policy and

development, with the right to development at its centre.

This collection is intended to serve as a resource for experts, advocates and other stakeholders in development and in human rights, United Nations delegations and agencies, policy makers, academics and students, and is a part of ongoing efforts by my Office to advance understanding and, ultimately, the realization of the right to development.



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