



THE TWENTIETH SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL
WORKING GROUP ON THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

OPENING STATEMENT

BY

AMBASSADOR ZAMIR AKRAM

Chair-Rapporteur of the Intergovernmental Working Group on
the Right to Development

29 April 2019

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for me to chair the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development and I would like to thank you, the Members of this Working Group, for your trust and confidence. I remain deeply committed to the objective of our mandate and the goal of making the right to development a reality for everyone.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, Ms. Peggy Hicks, as well as the High Commissioner and her staff members for their continued support to this Working Group and me as Chair-Rapporteur during the session and intersessionally.

Since our last session, I presented the report of the Working Group on its 19th session to the Human Rights Council in September and to the General Assembly in October last year, where I also engaged in an interactive dialogue with the Third Committee of the General Assembly. While in New York, I met Ms. Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Mr. Antonio Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization. I informed both about the latest developments and about the political impasse within the Working Group. I specifically mentioned the request from the Human Rights Council to take sufficient measures to ensure balanced and visible allocation of resources and due attention to ensure the visibility of the right to development by identifying and implementing tangible projects dedicated to the right to development. Both reassured me of their support to the right to development and to economic and social progress more broadly, in particular to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They both were concerned over the lack of progress in the Working Group and expressed their commitment to support the Working Group and me.

We have an ambitious work programme for this session, as we embark on a new phase in our work, turning our attention to the discussion on the elaboration of a draft legally binding instrument on the right to development. In addition, we

will benefit once again from an exchange with Ambassador Alfarargi, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development, and consider the implementation of the right to development and the implications of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this regard, we are looking forward to hearing examples of activities undertaken at the national level.

The work programme before us offers interactive dialogue with experts, as mandated by the Human Rights Council. Many of them have extensive expertise on the issues under our consideration, including with regard to legally binding human rights instruments. Some of them previously engaged with this Working Group, the former high-level task force on the implementation of the right to development and OHCHR on the right to development and related thematic issues. I am looking forward to the active participation of delegates in this dialogue and discussion.

The wealth of research and analysis that this Working Group has produced over the past twenty years has contributed greatly to a better understanding of the right to development. This body of knowledge will accompany us in our task and provide immeasurable support in the preparation of a legally binding instrument on the right to development and in our future deliberations.

The Declaration on the Right to Development is at present the most important normative document defining the right to development as a human right and spelling out the obligations of States to respect and ensure the fulfilment of this right. It calls for a holistic approach to development—not limited to mere economic growth but centred on human well-being. Economic growth, if pursued in the absence of adequate measures to promote inclusive, equitable, participatory and environmentally sound development, is ultimately unsustainable.

Development, if it ought to be truly sustainable, must aim to fulfil the aspiration of a world in which all human beings can enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want. This, in turn, depends upon an enabling environment as affirmed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 2030 Agenda is informed by the Declaration on the Right to Development and reaffirms key principles of the Declaration, such as participation, equality and non-discrimination, equity and accountability.

The right to development requires equality of opportunity for development for individuals and peoples, enabling all countries to participate equitably in international development, and the fair distribution of development benefits, income and resources, at the national and global levels, and the fair sharing of the burden associated with development.

As we begin our discussion on a legally binding instrument on the right to development, we must not forget those left behind. We must remain conscious that true development requires rooting out the underlying structural causes of inequality and discrimination.

Development policies must not deprive anyone of their autonomy. Reducing poverty requires policies that enable every person, especially those in a situation of vulnerability and marginalization, to make their own choices and to seize opportunities to live the kind of lives they value.

Operationalizing the right to development must be informed by and sensitive to its foreseeable impact on the enjoyment of human rights. It must work toward the creation and strengthening of institutions and processes that enable every person to realize their full potential. The very essence of development lies in its capacity to embolden marginalized and vulnerable people and groups – those who have been left behind – to act as its principal.

Achieving this requires responsive and accountable institutions and policy coherence on all levels.

To leave no one behind is to create a fairer, more humane world.

Today is for those we have left behind. With these words I call upon you to engage constructively in our work, to do your utmost to seek consensus and make progress in the fulfillment of our mandate.

I thank you for your attention.