Belarus

**Subject: High Commissioner’s annual report on the right to development**

**Belarus’ stance on the right to development**

Belarus has been a consistent supporter of the right to development that was promulgated in the United Nations General Assembly Declaration under the same title in 1986. We fully embrace the Declaration’s key tenet that “the right to development is the inalienable right of every individual and all peoples to participate, contribute and enjoy the results of economic, social, cultural and political development”.

Belarus believes that the right to development is vital for all states, regardless of their level of development, since all countries face specific development challenges. Furthermore, Belarus consistently supported the idea of crafting an international convention on the right to development.

**International Financial Institutions and their Contribution to Belarus’ development**

International financial institutions (IFIs) were established in the first place with the purpose of supporting their Member States in the latter’s domestic development. Undoubtedly, the IFIs have since then played an important role to that end.

Since acquiring independence in 1991 Belarus has enjoyed productive and fruitful cooperation with international financial institutions – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Finance Corporation, as well as with regional institutions like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the Nordic Investment Bank.

With their expertise in specific areas, the IFIs provided assistance that was requested by the Government in such areas, among others, as provision of loans, credits and grants, drafting of macroeconomic policy programs and policy guidances, provision of funding for big infrastructure projects in diverse areas, financial support to the private sector, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Thus, the IFIs to some extent helped Belarus on its path to realize the right of development.

Notwithstanding, our pattern of cooperation with the IFIs has not been without “bumps on the road”. The inherent problem underlying the IFIs is that at the moment of their founding their governing bodies have been structured in such ways as to make them nearly totally dominated by advanced Western countries. In others words, the international financial institutions have always been a tool in the service of advanced countries.

As a result, in some periods of time the IFIs’ contribution to the realization of the right to development in some countries has been outright negative. For instance, since the 1980s, as the USA and some other leading Western countries embraced domestically the policies of economic deregulation, these countries used their influence in the IFIs to impose a similar set of policies, which became known as the “Washington Consensus”, on a number of developing countries. Yet, the outcome was disastrous as these policies brought nothing but economic crises, misery and impoverishment to many developing countries that relied on the IFIs, with the 1997 Asian financial crisis being the most prominent example.

Back then, Belarus encountered a similar approach from the IFIs, which were willing to provide financial assistance to the country, but on conditions that the Government implemented “deregulation policies” that entailed slashing the Government’s spending on social and economic objectives. The Government of Belarus never yielded to these politically-motivated demands because our socially-oriented policy has never been something we could trade off.

Unfortunately, the underlying problem with the IFIs, that is, their near complete domination by Western countries, has not been resolved, even though there were some lackluster attempts to “democratize” the discredited IFIs in the wake of the 2007-2008 global financial and economic crisis.

It is only natural that as the world is getting increasingly polarized nowadays, those countries that dominate the IFIs use them against those countries that resist the West’s attempts at diktat.

Belarus presents a clear-cut case in point. Having failed in its attempt to mastermind a “color revolution” in Belarus in 2020 and building also on the conflict in Ukraine as a pretext, the West, for all intents and purposes, forced the IFIs to stop their cooperation with Belarus.

So, in March 2022 the World Bank decided to terminate assistance on nine projects, in which it was involved in Belarus in the areas of education, healthcare and energy. In a similar vein, the EBRD and other European IFIs unilaterally decided to cease cooperation with Belarus on a number of ongoing projects, in which they were involved. As a result, Belarus lost nearly US$ 1 billion, which it would otherwise have received if the IFIs had not frozen their loans (the World Bank in the amount of US$ 415 million, the EBRD – US$ 254, EIB – US$ 350, NIB – US$ 10).

Since these anti-Belarus moves on the part of the IFIs came unilaterally, suddenly and unexpectedly, the Government of Belarus was presented with a *fait accompli.* The Government, hence, had to cover the gaps created by a loss of funding, including by diverting funding allocated to other areas. These examples clearly show that the IFIs actually currently work to make it harder for the people of Belarus to realize their right to development than to assist them. Our appeals to the IFIs that their actions undermine the prospects for the people of Belarus to realize their human rights remain unanswered.

**Suggestions to the High Commissioner**

With all the above in mind, Belarus would like to kindly suggest to the High Commissioner for Human Rights the following two actions in the context of his report on the right to development to the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

First, to illustrate the examples of how the international financial institutions dominated by Western countries terminated cooperation with Belarus purely for political reasons thereby impeding the people of Belarus in the realization of their right to development.

Second, to articulate the point about the need to reform the international financial institutions so that their governing structures become fairly represented of global realities and thus avoid politically-motivated decisions. It would be worthwhile to support this point with the examples of the IFI’s policies contributing to the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the IFIs’ taking sides in the ongoing global geopolitical confrontation.