

Statement by Olivier De Schutter

Panel: The interrelationship between the right to development and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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I would like to thank you for allowing me to contribute to this important session of the Working Group on the Right to Development dedicated to understanding the links between civil and political rights and the right to development.

I'd like to start by recalling that when in 1986 the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Right to Development, it was the first to question the traditional view that development could be equated with economic growth.

And indeed, it started a process that was continued by the adoption of the Human Development Report series launched in 1990 at the initiative of the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and the laureate Nobel Prize in Economics Amartya Sen that has continued since then.

And I'd like to quote from the very first sentences of the foreword to the 1990 Human Development Report by Mahbub ul Haq. He wrote the following,

"People are the real wealth of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives." This may appear as a simple truth, but it is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth.

Now, I would submit that the right to participation, the right to take part in public affairs, as described in Article 25 of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights is absolutely essential for a truly human development to occur, one that contributes to the full realization of all human rights.

And this is true for four reasons. Firstly, participation is essential to break the vicious cycle between economic dominance and political influence.

In many cases, we see that powerful economic actors use their wealth in order to manipulate the political system. In turn, they try to obtain from the political system regulations that will strengthen their position as rent seekers.

And this is what UNCTAD, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, has documented in its 2017 flagship Trade and Development Report, speaking of the state of the rentiers. Secondly, participation is essential to ensure that social investments are made in areas that matter the most to people: Housing, education, health care, public transport, for example.

Indeed, many governments are now being squeezed and unable to really fulfil the needs of the population and thus protect their rights.

3.3 billion people today live in countries that spend more on servicing the debt than they can spend on health or education. Many countries are facing the need to privatise public services in order to reduce public deficits.

Many of them are facing fiscal competition, lowering corporate income tax rates in order to attract or retain investment. Many of them are unable to count on effective international cooperation to combat base erosion and profit shifting practices by transnational corporations leading to a very important loss of public revenue.

So for all these reasons, governments find it very difficult to provide to the population the public services that would be required and effective participation, democratization of economic decision making, is essential to ensure that they do deliver on these promises and do contribute thus to protect the human rights of the population.

The third reason why participation is so important is because it ensures that people in poverty in particular will have a greater say in decision-making, allowing policymakers to be informed about the very real obstacles that people in poverty face in in enjoying their rights.

And this is why, together with the NGO ATD Fourth World, we've been developing a new tool, a new methodology, called the IDEEP tool for Inclusive and Deliberative Elaboration and Evaluation of Policies, a tool that was presented at the World Bank on 15th of February and that we are continuing to develop.

We see participation, not simply as a means towards an end, as a means to ensure that poverty reduction strategies will be more effective. We see it as an end in itself, as a way to empower people in poverty, ensuring that there are actors in the development process and that they can co-construct solutions with policymakers.

Fourth and finally, participation is essential also for workers. Indeed, Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects union rights, replicating what we find in Article 8 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and that is absolutely vital to ensure that development benefits workers and not only shareholders, the owners of companies.

Yet over the years we've seen that the portion of the wealth that is created, the portion of the GDP that is created, that goes to workers, has been diminishing more and more going to the owners of capital.

Therefore, it is essential to better protect the rights of unions to enter into collective bargaining to ensure that workers benefit from the general progress of the economy.

So, for all these reasons, civil and political rights, as enshrined in the ICCPR, and the rights to participation in particular, are essential to guide the development process, ensuring that growth is inclusive, ensuring that we move away from the dominant fixation on GDP increase, and that instead we prioritize well-being and the realization of human rights, guided by indicators alternative to GDP, as recommended by target 17.19 of the SDGs, and that indeed is what I explore in greater depth in my next report to the upcoming session of the Human Rights Council under the heading "Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth".

I would like to thank you for working on this extremely important topic and I look forward to our continued collaboration.

Thank you.