

Check against delivery



**Statement by Mr Surya Deva  
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to development**

*25<sup>th</sup> Session of the Working Group on the Right to Development*

Interactive Dialogue

14 May 2024

Dear Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address you as the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development at the 25<sup>th</sup> session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development.

Let me begin by congratulating Ambassador Akram on his election as the Chair-Rapporteur and his leadership over the years in strengthening the implementation of the right to development, including through the adoption of an International Covenant on the Right to Development.

Mr Chair

In my remarks today, I would like to focus on three aspects: articulate why States should take seriously the right to development, explain the focus of my two reports for this year, and highlight some of the steps that I am taking to mainstream the right to development.

If one looks around the world, the picture looks very gloomy. We can see structural poverty, worsening inequalities, unaffordable housing, discrimination, digital divide, debt crisis, biodiversity loss, climate change, conflicts, forced displacement and shrinking civic space. There are many reasons for this sad situation. One of such reasons, in my view, is that the world community has not taken seriously the right to development and ignored the interrelationship between the three pillars of the United Nations Charter: peace and security, human rights, and development.

It is not an accident that many people in the Global South are trapped in a situation of poverty or are experiencing disproportionately environmental pollution and climate disasters – this is directly related to our history of colonisation and the neo-liberal capitalist world order rooted in exploitation of people and the planet. Similarly, lack of development triggers not only illegal migration but also conflicts, which escalate xenophobia, racism and gender-based violence. Moreover, because development projects are often not conceived with active, free and meaningful participation of people, these people are forced to protest to defend their land and livelihood – again triggering social conflicts, suppression of protests and targeting of human rights defenders.

What should the world community do differently to achieve inclusive, peaceful and sustainable development? Four steps should help to begin with.

First, States should come out of their myopic political positions and develop a sound normative understanding about the right to development. In line with the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development and other relevant instruments, I would like to underscore that the right to development is not merely about economic development – rather, it is about a holistic development comprising economic, social, cultural and political dimensions. It is both an individual and collective human right. Moreover, since the right to development is a human right, States and other actors have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil this right.

Second, although not easy to achieve in practice, international cooperation is essential to deal with many current challenges: from climate change to conflicts and corruption. Realising the right to development also requires international cooperation – not as a matter of charity but as a duty – in relation to trade, investment, tax evasion, development assistance, finance, technology transfer and capacity building.

Third, States should devote more resources to promote human rights globally. The cost to realise human rights should be seen as an investment to contribute to the other two pillars of peace and security, and development. Long lasting peace and security requires that all human rights, including the right to self-determination, are respected. Similarly, without embedding human rights in development policies and programmes, economic development will not be inclusive or sustainable.

Four, human rights – including the right to development and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment – must remain central to the Pact for the Future and other policy instruments that are negotiated in future. The four key principles of the right to development, that is, self-determination, intersectionality, intergenerational equity and fair distribution are central to addressing the some of the existing structural challenges faced by humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In my vision report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/54/27), I underlined one of my priorities to focus on the development aspirations of certain beneficiaries of the right to development who have been marginalised, made vulnerable or ignored, such as children, youth, women, migrants, persons with disabilities, ethnic or racial minorities, elderly persons, Indigenous Peoples and future generations. In line with this goal, my report to the Human Rights Council's 57<sup>th</sup> session will focus on "The right to development of children and future generations".

In my 2023 vision report, I had also highlighted climate change to be one of the major disruptors to realising the right to development. My report to the General Assembly this year will focus on "Climate justice: Loss and damage". This issue is very timely in the context of current efforts to operationalise the Loss and Damage Fund.

In response to my open call for input, we have received about 100 submissions from States, UN agencies, businesses, civil society organisations and academia. In addition, I have been organising in person or virtual consultations to collect additional input for these two reports. I would like to thank all stakeholders who have made a submission or participated in these consultations.

Mr Chair

Let me now highlight some of the steps that I am taking to mainstream the right to development.

In March 2024, I established an Academic Circle on the right to development comprising 20 academics from all world regions working on a variety of issues concerning the right to development. Members of the Academic Circle collaborate with the Special Rapporteur in their personal academic capacity to promote the realisation of the mandate goals, including by providing advice, conducting research, organising workshops, participating in consultations, and disseminating recommendations.

After participating in various events and talking to a range of stakeholders during the first year of my mandate, it became clear to me that there is limited understanding about the right to development on the ground. To fill this knowledge gap, I am developing flyers which will outline, in a user-friendly way, key elements and principles of the right to development. In

addition, I am developing a policy brief to provide practical guidance to States in implementing the right to development at the national, provincial and local levels.

To stimulate discussion about the relevance of the right to development to various policy agendas or multilateral fora, I am launching a new event series under the title of “Development Dialogues”. The inaugural Dialogue, which is expected to take place virtually in early July 2024, will focus on the right to development and the Pact for the Future. Please watch out for further information in coming weeks.

I am also starting a new project to conduct a Global Mapping of the right to development in all UN Member States. I will be inviting university students and academics to document the state of play regarding the right to development in each State. All mapping documents will be posted on my mandate’s website. It is hoped that this project will not only allow me to engage with the youth but also provide an evidence-based resource to policy makers to strengthen the implementation of the right to development.

I should emphasise that in taking these initiatives as well as in discharging my mandate generally, I am coordinating closely with the Expert Mechanism and the OHCHR’s sections on the right to development, sustainable development, and economic, social and cultural rights to avoid any duplication. I am also collaborating with other relevant mandate holders to build synergy and coherence.

Mr Chair

I am grateful for this opportunity to participate in an annual interactive dialogue organised by the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development. I will continue to collaborate with the Working Group and other relevant stakeholders to realise the right to development for everyone everywhere.

Thank you for your kind attention.