

High-level meeting commemorating the 35th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development | Human Rights Council 52nd session

28 February 2023

Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme
(video message transcript)

Distinguished President of the Council,

Excellencies, Colleagues and Friends,

It is a great pleasure to join this event to mark the **Anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development**.¹

This is the right of every human being to participate in, to contribute to, and to benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political development.²

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The right is **paralleled in the human development approach**, pioneered by the United Nations Development Programme.

Both approaches recognise that **GDP growth is not an end in itself**.³

Rather, **the wellbeing of people depends on enabling everyone to live their lives to their full potential and expanding their capabilities**.

That **means peoples' active, free, and meaningful participation in development -- and in the fair distribution of its benefits**.

In doing so, **reducing inequalities that threaten fundamental human rights becomes a goal, not just an outcome**.⁴

This is development that benefits everyone, everywhere.

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¹ Although 37 years have passed the HLM is commemorating the 35th Anniversary with an event that was postponed due to COVID-19.

² While the right does not create a cause of legal action, many of the elements of the right to development are reaffirmed in binding international law. That includes international treaties, customary law, regional instruments – and the Charter of the United Nations.

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/right-development>

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/right-development>

Yet, for the first time ever, the latest **Human Development Index -- which measures a nation's health, education, and standard of living -- has declined globally for two years in a row in the wake of interlinked crises.**

Climate change -- the greatest ever threat to human rights -- is now accelerating while conflicts are at their highest levels since 1945.⁵

Much hard-won progress towards the Global Goals has been reversed.

In this 'age of uncertainty', how do we drive forward the right to development?

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First, there must be a transformation in how we think about the rights of future generations as **people take to the streets and leverage legal instruments** in frustration over a lack of climate and environmental action.⁶

Most recently, the **UN General Assembly concurred that all people have the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.**

Yet we are seeing how **environmental human rights defenders are threatened, harassed, and killed, often with impunity -- particularly Indigenous peoples.⁷**

In this respect, the role of **National Human Rights Institutions** is pivotal.

Through our **Tripartite partnership**, UNDP, the UN Office for Human Rights and GANHRI are **boosting the ability of these institutions to address the human rights implications of climate change and environmental degradation.**

UNDP is also **supporting communities to directly shape their right to development -- including through our Climate Promise initiative.**

It is allowing tens of thousands of people -- including women and young people -- to get involved in their country's development trajectory through **consultations on Nationally Determined Contributions.**

There is also an acute need to **close the digital divide** to allow people to have **their say** on critical decisions that will affect **their futures** -- including **climate action.**

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2019/sep/09/climate-crisis-human-rights-un-michelle-bachelet-united-nations>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/climate-change-greatest-threat-world-has-ever-faced-un-expert-warns>

⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/2021/09/environmental-crisis-high-commissioner-calls-leadership-human-rights-council-member-states>

Yet we are also seeing how **Artificial Intelligence** is currently biased -- **reflecting and amplifying discriminatory practices and failing to adequately represent large segments of populations.**

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Second, **unlocking new sources of finance will be key to ensuring the right to development.**

That is a key aim of the UN Secretary-General's new **SDG Stimulus Plan.**

It calls for the **G20 to agree on a \$500 billion annual stimulus for sustainable development to meet the 2030 Agenda** as well as **new debt relief measures.**

Integrated National Financing Frameworks -- currently being leveraged by 86 countries -- offer a ready-made platform for the new SDG Stimulus Plan.⁸

As part of these efforts, countries need to **recommit to the target of dedicating 0.7% of their Gross National Income to Official Development Assistance.**⁹

Indeed, the **SDG Stimulus Plan** and **National Determined Contributions** will have a vital role to play in **reducing inequalities.**

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Third, the **Universal Periodic Review process** is ever-more vital to drive forward this right.

To take just one example, it has **recently advanced the inclusion of marginalised women in Albania.**

UNDP is also working with the business sector and governments to uphold the **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.**

For instance, that includes some 2,000 companies that have participated in **Business and Human Rights Academies** in the past year alone.

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⁸ <https://www.undp.org/speeches/first-regular-session-executive-board-2023>

⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/states-must-renew-their-commitment-international-cooperation-achieve-global>

Distinguished President of the Council,

Excellencies, Colleagues and Friends,

The right to development is not about charity -- but rather about human agency and empowerment.¹⁰

As part of the UN family, UNDP is committed to advancing this key right by **dismantling obstacles to development** -- from **gender inequality** to **racial discrimination**.¹¹

Indeed, the right to development is woven into the very fabric of UN and UNDP support across the globe.

Far from being merely aspirational, it has **spearheaded efforts to lift millions of people out of poverty and realise a better life.**

At this critical moment for people and planet, the United Nations has an **unwavering commitment to keep this powerful** promise of development.

That means **continuing to think of development as freedom.**

Thank you for your kind attention.

END

¹⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/development/development-and-human-rights>

¹¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/development/development-and-human-rights>