# The 10th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

**Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda**
**Implementation of the mandate and programme of work –**
**Focused thematic discussion and interactive dialogue**
Palais des Nations, Room XXI, Geneva

## Bilateral, regional and multilateral trade: friends of enemies of RTD

Wednesday 30 October 2024, 10h to 12h

**Transcript of the statement by H.E. Ms. Patricia Ann Hermanns,**
**Permanent Representative of Bahamas**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I thank the organizers today for the discussion and the opportunity to address you, on behalf of the Bahamas, on a number of matters of vital importance to our country and in particular small island developing states.

The interconnectedness of human rights, regional trade and environmental issues has never been more crucial for us, particularly as the Caribbean faces unprecedented challenges that directly impact our people, economies and ecosystems.

Today, I hope to highlight why these issues are so critical for us and how we see engagement with the right to development framework as a pathway to support our efforts toward a more sustainable, equitable future.

To begin, let me emphasize the importance of linking human rights regional trade and environmental discussions. Since share unique vulnerabilities due to our geographic economic and environmental realities, our very survival depends on our ability to address these interconnected issues together rather than in isolation. Climate change for instance, threatens not only our environment but our food security, our housing and our right to live in safe dignified conditions. If we ignore the link between human rights and environmental issues, we ignore the realities facing our communities who experience first-hand the impact of rising sea levels and natural disasters and biodiversity loss.

Bringing these discussions together allow us to develop holistic approaches that protect both our people and our resources. For the Bahamas, and since at large environmental issues are not merely important, they are allowed a matter of life and death. Rising sea levels, hurricanes and coral reef degradation are not theoretical concerns, they are immediate threats. The Bahamas is at the frontline of these climate impacts, witnessing an increasing frequency of intensity of devastating events that destroy homes, infrastructure and livelihoods.

In the broader human rights context, climate change directly impacts the right to life, the of life, health and adequate living standards. It is our moral imperative to address these threats comprehensively and cooperatively, using every platform available, including trade discussions and human rights forum.

As the first Caricom state to serve on the Human Rights Council from 2019 to 2021, the Bahamas took on a historic, but also timely rule. Our participation was a recognition of the

challenges unique to our region and an opportunity to advocate for Caribbean human rights priorities on the global stage and an opportunity to advocate for Caribbean human rights.

However, we still have much work to do to advance the interests of sits at the Human Rights Council. The council must continue to strengthen its work to address climate justice, access to resources for adaptation and resilience and the disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation on vulnerable island states. In this regard, the Bahamas serves on the core group of states along with the European Union, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Panama, Paraguay and Sudan that created the mandate of a Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change.

Along with other core group members, we led a resolution at the last HRC session to successfully renew the mandate for a further three years. The council must also continue addressing issues such as the reform of the international financial architecture, high indebtedness and international cooperation and tax matters particularly selective and arbitrary approaches to international tax governance, such as blacklisting. All of which have direct impacts on the full enjoyment of human rights, including the right to development by our people.

These are immediate crises that we face here and now but that also put at risk the well-being of future generations. Our challenge in the roam of trade, human rights and the environment are intertwined Caribbean nations depend on fair and inclusive trade systems to thrive. Yet, as small economies, we are vulnerable to external shocks and fluctuations in global markets, restrictive trade policies and limited bargaining power. Trade agreements often overlook the challenges we face in sustainably producing goods and services.

It is here that the right to development framework holds particular promise. The RTD framework calls on the international community to support developing nations in achieving equitable growth and development. For since, this means not only providing resources for climate adaptation but also ensuring that trade and environmental policies respect our unique circumstances. The duty to cooperate is paramount as it incorporates the obligation of states not to adopt policies that infringe on human rights extraterritorially and it acknowledges that sustainable development cannot be achieved in isolation.

We rely on partnerships with the global community to access resources, share knowledge and develop resilience strategies that prioritize human rights and environmental protection. The Bahamas recently signed a host country agreement with the High Commissioner for human rights to establish a regional office serving Caricom nations. This agreement is vital because it will provide the member states of Caricom with much needed technical assistance and capacity building in the field of human rights.

By establishing this office, we reinforce our commitment to protecting human lives building regional resilience and advocating for climate justice. The office will help strengthen our states capacities and ensure that we can work collectively to address our region's most pressing issues in the field of human rights moreover while some trade regional trade agreements include objectives around environmental and labor standards.

The application of these agreements often falls short in supporting local actors and . We need trade agreements that protect the most vulnerable along the value chain, including small farmers fisherfolk and producers who formed the backbone of many SIDS economies. These

agreements should not simply impose standards but should provide support systems and resources that allow our local industries to meet those standards while remaining competitive.

The Expert mechanism on the Right to Development has an essential role to play in this regard. We see the mechanism as a partner in promoting development pathways that prioritize inclusivity, environmental sustainability and human rights. Specifically, the Bahamas would seek support from the mechanism to provide technical assistance and policy guide guidance tailored, to say it's unique challenges and aligning trade environmental protection and human rights, to advocate for greater financial and technical resources for states, to strengthen our climate resilience and promote the full enjoyment of human rights including on the basis of the duty to cooperate and international solidarity.

We welcome the work of the mechanism and other parties, including the Special Rapporteur on the right to development, which they have been doing in this regard.

We support efforts toward reform of international financial architecture as well as the elaboration of the UN framework convention on international tax cooperation. This convention will contribute to a more fair, transparent and inclusive tax governance and avoid approaches such as arbitrary blacklisting that perpetuate double standards, allowing the largest contributors to tax evasion to operate with limited accountability while imposing inequitable compliance obligations on smaller economies.

In conclusion the interconnected challenges facing SIDS require integrated cooperative solutions. The Bahamas will continue to champion initiatives that uphold the human rights of our citizens, promote fair trade and safeguard our environment. Our participation in global, including the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, is a commitment to not only upholding the rights and fundamental freedoms of our people but also to work actively towards sustainable and inclusive development for all.

Thank you.