The 12th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

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Implementation of the Mandate and Programme of Work –
Focused Thematic Discussions and Interactive Dialogues
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Impacts of trade tariffs on the realization of the right to development

Tuesday 28 October 2025, 11:30 – 13:00

Introductory Remarks
Presented by Mihir Kanade

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Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome all of you to this Panel discussion on the topic of "Impacts of trade tariffs on the realization of the right to development". This topic lies at the very heart of debates that led to the emergence of the right to development in the 1950s and the 1960s and its eventual recognition as a human right of all individuals and peoples in the 1986 Declaration.

As the Declaration stipulates, the right to development is an inalienable human right that entitles every person and all peoples the right to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural, and political development. The right to development aims to ensure equitable distribution of development benefits and reduce inequalities and social injustices and requires international cooperation and appropriate international conditions for sustainable development. As this Expert Mechanism has noted previously in our very first thematic study, there is a symbiotic and mutually dependent relationship between the enhancement of the right to development and the realization of sustainable development.

It has also been long established that the realization of sustainable development and the right to development, on the one hand, and a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system, on the other, go hand-in-hand. Indeed, the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization includes sustainable development as one of its institutional objectives. Similarly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes trade as a vital means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Targets 2.b, 8.a, 10.a, 14.6, 17.10, 17.11, and 17.12 all directly reference trade as an enabler of sustainable development.

The multilateral trading system is built on the principle of non-discrimination, including the most-favored nation and national treatment principles. The most favored nation principle basically means that the best tariff treatment that a particular country gives to a trading partner would be given to all other trading partners. So, if I charge 5% tariff to some country, and that's the best deal I give to them, that would be the same tariff I charge to all my trading partners. And the national treatment principle is basically also built on non-discrimination, which means that I would not charge a higher internal tariff to foreign produce as compared to my domestic product. So, the multilateral trading system is built on these principles of non-discrimination. Additionally, the principle of special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries has also long been established.

Recent global trade tensions and escalating differential tariffs have, however, challenged the very fundamental principles on which the multilateral trading system is founded, thereby creating uncertainty and lack of coherence worldwide. The principle of special and differential treatment and the Aid for Trade initiative have also suffered significantly. This has further resulted in disruptions

of global value chains, inefficiencies, and adverse economic impacts that disproportionately affect developing and least-developed countries, hindering their ability to realize the right to development. Sudden enhancements in tariffs in just one country can create significant trade diversions for others and thus affect existing markets. They can also amplify economic inequality, impair access to markets, increase production costs, and slow down poverty reduction efforts, thereby obstructing the realization of the right to development and the SDGs.

Conversely, mainstreaming a right to development lens reinforces the imperative that trade must be inclusive, rights-enhancing, and environmentally sustainable to be effective.

It is in this context that the main purposes of this Panel are:

1. To analyze the multifaceted impacts of tariffs on the economic, social and cultural dimensions of the right to development, with a focus on developing countries.

2. To explore how tariff measures influence key sustainable development outcomes, including poverty eradication, equality, and economic growth.

3. To discuss international cooperation mechanisms and policy solutions that can mitigate the negative impact of tariffs and promote the realization of the right to development, including in the context of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

4. To identify the role of States, international organizations, and non-State actors in ensuring trade policies do not exacerbate inequalities and uphold the right to development.

We have a wonderful panel, as the Chair has already introduced, and we look forward to a wonderful conversation today and learning a lot from the lived and practical experiences of many of our fellow delegates from different countries and organizations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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