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The role of civil society organizations in realizing the right to development at the grassroots level

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Transcript of statement by H.E. Samuel Housman Buggie Saffa Esq., Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative, Sierra Leone

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Chair,

It's a pleasure to join these very eminent and illustrious panelists, to discuss this very important topic. And clearly, I admire so much Ms. Rossi, who was very instrumental during yesterday's panel discussion on the goal of participation. And I trust your engagement this morning will be very much meaningful as well. It's a pleasure to join this conversation.

Your Excellency, Chair,

I want to thank you very much, for providing this platform and indeed, the members of the Mechanisms … for organizing this panel discussion this morning. I also want to welcome the members of the Mechanism to Geneva and again, on a personal note, permit me, Chair to convey very personal, special welcome to Professor Mihir Kanade to Geneva. And I hope you have a very productive stay here in Geneva. Thank you so much.

Now to the subject matter, which is very important for us, not just because locally in Sierra Leone, we value our engagement with civil society, but particularly our role here in Geneva on the civil society …. So, this is such an opportunity for us to continue to share our thoughts on how useful we consider civil society to be in the development agenda, both locally and internationally.

Now, I will look at key components. Let me just provide key components of my presentation. I will first and foremost look at the legal institutional framework, particularly reference in both, Resolution 4223 of 2019 and of course, the Resolution 53/13 and 59/13 of 2023 and 2025 this year. And then I will also discuss the role, the substantive role of civil society as indispensable partners, to development. And I'll share with you, Sierron Leon leadership both at the Council and domestically as well.

I will discuss national media, national development plan 2024 to 2030, which describes CSOs as core creators of development. And I will try to do some sense of connection between participation as a tool for development and civil society organization and analyzing the right to development at the grass level. And of course, I'll conclude with some few enablers, which are key and very fundamental to development.

Now, from the outset, I would like to reaffirm that Sierra Leone views the right to development as an inalienable human right. This right is rooted in the 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, which states that, and I quote states, States should encourage popular participation in all spheres of an important factor in development, in the full realization of all human rights. And of

course, this vision was reaffirmed and operationalized to the Human Rights Council Resolution 46/23, and adopted on September 27, 2019. The resolution recognizes the right to development as universal, an integral to every human right. The evolution of sciences, the principles of participation, equality, accountability, and international cooperation are central to realizing this right. It also establishes key institutional mechanisms, including the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development. It provides an assessment and the means to which States and civil society translate these commitments into concrete action.

The Declaration and subsequent resolutions, including 42/23, emphasize that people are active participants in shaping their development, are not passive beneficiaries. In this regard, civil society is indispensable partners. Their work at the grassroot level connects policies to deliver the realities of communities and build trust between the States and its citizens and ensures the development processes are inclusive, accountable and of course, rights based.

Sierra Leone is of course proud to serve as a primary and one of the co-sponsors of both Resolutions 53/L.13 (2023) and 59/L.13 (2025), which affirmed that a vibrant, independent and realistic civil society is essential to democracy, development, human rights and the rule of law. Through this initiative Sierra Leone and its partners advance the principle that is safe and enabling environment both online and off, is indispensable for civil society to thrive. Resolution 59 /L.13 in particular builds on a decade of normative focus that emphasizes the protection, participation, and meaningful engagement of civil society actors in public life and international decision-making processes. What is the connecting point between civil society as a precondition to the realization of the right development vis a vis both Resolution 59/L.13 and 53/L.13? Now both Human Rights Council Resolutions 53/L.13 (2023) and 59/L.13 (2025), recognizes that a safe and enabling environment of civil society, both online and offline, is a democratic imperative and the prerequisite for realizing the rights to development as set out in the 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to development and reaffirmed in Council Resolutions 42/23.

These resolutions operationalize this principle by urging states to facilitate, safeguard and institutionalized participation of civil society in policy making, decision making and accountability processes. This means that civil society is not merely an adjunct to development. It is the means by which participation can be realized.

Each resolution reaffirms that creating and maintaining civic space helps states to fulfill their human rights obligations and commitment. As the right to development is a human right in itself, any restrictions on civic space undermines a state's ability to realize this right. Conversely, when states protect and expand civic space, they strengthen equality, accountability, and the rule of law, all of which are the key pillars and central to development. Both resolutions also emphasized the pluralistic and diverse nature of civic space, including grassroots organizations, women's groups, youth networks, indigenous women, and persons with disability. This complements the people centered approach on the right to development and showing that developments is shaped by those it aims to serve and that no one is left behind and … connections with international cooperation and solidarity.

Now, both resolutions promote regional and global cooperation to support civic space. This echoes Article 14, Article 3 of the Declaration on the Right to Development, which calls for international cooperation for development. In this way, civic space becomes a transnational partner in development, linking local realities to global norms and enforcing the universality of the right to development.

I will now focus on the role of civil society in Sierra Leone's national development agenda. What role has civil society actually played locally within our context?

At the national level, Sierra Leone continues to promote the active participation of civil society in its national development agenda. CSOs, as I quote …, play a central role in the design, implementation and monitoring of both our national development plans. The first plan was between 2019 to 2023, and the second plan is between 2024 and takes slide through to 2030. The 2024 to 2030 plan is poised to transform Sierra Leone into a food secure, inclusive and green middle-income nation by 2030 and is anchored on five pillars. The first is food security, and the second is human capital development, youth and employment scheme, technology, and of course, finally infrastructure and transformation of public service architecture.

We view civil society as development partners, especially in advancing gender equality, youth empowerment, local governance, climate resilience, and social accountability, and not just as an appendage. Grassroots civil society organizations play essential role in mobilizing communities, amplifying marginalized voices, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

During a universal periodic review, for example, consultations with civil society have been central in shaping our priorities and commitment. Similarly, a post-conflict situation saw deep involvement of civil society doing justice processes and has been a trusted bridge between communities and the States.

Let me now conclude by highlighting three fundamental enablers for realizing the right of development at the grassroots level.

The first, in my opinion, would be to ensure that we recognize civil society as a partner. I speak to States in this context. We should see civil society as partners. They are not adversaries at all. And it is only through the process we could see that the participation would be not just meaningful, but will be very much engaging as well. And secondly, realizing the right to development at the grassroot level also requires inclusive people-centered development framework that is also instrumental. And it was one of the very much central themes in yesterday's panel on participation. I think I want to echo that as well.

I thought as I spoke earlier on is international cooperation, which means very vital as well. Because the right to development cannot be realized in isolation. As emphasized in the Resolution 42/23, the global community must support the principles of equity, partnership and solidarity. This is crucial in ensuring that we take along civil society organizations and development partners.

I thank you and stop there for now, Chair.

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