# The 13th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

**Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda**
**Implementation of the mandate and programme of work –**
**Focused thematic discussions**
Conference Room 6, United Nations Headquarters, New York

# Advancing non-discrimination, equality and development for all: 40 years of the right to development and 25 years of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Wednesday 22 April 2026, 16:30 to 18:00

**Concept Note**
**Presented by Isabelle Durant**

## Introduction

On 31 August 2001, the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was convened in Durban. In 2002, the General Assembly endorsed the report of the World Conference, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), noting that it constitutes a solid foundation for further action and initiatives and recognising that the success of the Programme of Action requires political will, adequate funding and international cooperation (A/RES/56/266).

Adopted by the UN General Assembly in December of 1986, the Declaration on the Right to Development (DRTD) marked a historic commitment to placing human beings at the centre of development and to ensuring that development is an inalienable human right.

Both Declarations – in their own words - affirm that development, non-discrimination, and equality are inseparable. Each stresses that development cannot be achieved without the full respect of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and that discrimination of any kind - whether racial, ethnic, gender-based, or other - is an obstacle to development. Both Declarations link development to the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, apartheid, colonialism and contemporary manifestations, recognising that these practices constitute human rights violations and obstacles to development. The DRTD identifies racism, racial discrimination, colonialism and apartheid as "massive and flagrant violations of human rights" that impede development, while the DDPA explicitly recognises that the legacies of slavery, the slave trade, colonialism and apartheid continue to generate inequalities and hinder development, calling for the protection and participation of groups in marginalized situation and of civil society. They call for strengthened international cooperation as key to achieving development and eliminating racism, emphasizing that development must be a collective effort. They emphasise the need for equitable international economic relations and underline importance of meaningful participation of individuals and communities. They further emphasize the importance of education and awareness in promoting understanding of human rights, equality and inclusive development.

The Programme of Action (DDPA) provides a roadmap that illustrates how the international community will follow up on commitments and indicates the steps to be taken to prevent future occurrence of racism. Four anti-racism human rights mechanisms were set up pursuant to the DDPA, namely the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD), the Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (GIEE), the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (IGWG), and the Ad Hoc Committee on the elaboration of

complementary standards. An additional four anti-racism mechanisms also address racial discrimination.[1]

Regarding the right to development, the Human Rights Council has put in place several tools and bodies to formulate recommendations to Member States. An Open-ended Working Group was established in 1998 and most recently tasked to negotiate and elaborate a draft international Covenant on the right to development. The draft Covenant was submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration, negotiation and subsequent adoption. A Human Rights Council Special Procedure on the Right to Development was established in 2016 and our Expert Mechanism was established in 2019 to generate synergies and multiply initiatives, cooperation, exchanges of good practices and review the implementation of right to development.

This double anniversary provides a unique opportunity for reflection and recommitment. It is a moment for Member States, UN entities, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), civil society, the academia and private sector to consider how to mark this milestone in ways that are at the intersection of the two Declarations while remaining meaningful, action-oriented, and inclusive, particularly given the turmoil the world is currently experiencing.

## Purposes

**1.** To reflect on the achievements and challenges in promoting and realizing the DDPA and DRTD, looking at the relationship between development and racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

**2.** Encourage commitments or proposals from different stakeholders for measures to advance the right to development and eliminate racial discrimination, as well as strengthen international cooperation to realise both.

**3.** Promote inclusive participation to ensure that the voices of various stakeholders particularly groups in marginalized and discriminated situations and communities are meaningfully heard, considered and addressed – in shaping development and in combating racism.

## Guiding Questions

**1.** How can the DRTD 40th anniversary be leveraged to renew global political commitment against all forms of racism?

**2.** How to transform commitments into concrete change through meaningful and impactful actions and activities at local, national, regional, and international levels? What would a development agenda that truly centres on racially discriminated communities look like?

**3.** What role should Member States, UN entities, civil society, NHRIs, the academia and private sector play in this process? How can these actors better integrate the DRTD and DDPA in practice?

[1] Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement (EMLER), and Permanent Forum on People of African Descent (PFPAD).

**Expected Outcomes**

**1.** Renew awareness and recognition among Member States and other stakeholders about the mutually reinforcing link between combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and development.

**2.** Enhance exchange of good practices and reflections among Member States and other stakeholders, particularly groups in marginalized and discriminated situations, on how to operationalize the right to development by removing structural inequalities linked to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

**3.** Generate actionable recommendations for Member States and other stakeholders at different levels.

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