The thirteenth session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Concluding remarks by Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

23 April 2026, New York

This conclusion will be read by all the experts present in the room.

The Expert Mechanism concludes its thirteenth session and expresses its appreciation to Member States, regional mechanisms, civil society, United Nations entities, experts, and academics for their substantive engagement and active participation throughout the session. The Mechanism noted that this session was held in the context of the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, providing a timely opportunity to reflect on progress achieved and remaining challenges.

The Expert Mechanism takes note of the contributions, comments and exchanges during the session, which will inform the conclusions, outcomes and recommendations of its annual report to be submitted this year to the Human Rights Council at its session in September and to the third Committee of the General Assembly in October. The Mechanism welcomes the continued support expressed by Member States for the right to development and its mandate.

The Mechanism noted that discussions during the session took place against a backdrop of evolving global challenges, including persistent inequalities, shifting development paradigms, and emerging technological and geopolitical dynamics.

During the general debate, the Expert Mechanism noted the broad reaffirmation by Member States and other stakeholders that the right to development is a

universal and inalienable human right, with human beings at the centre as both participants and beneficiaries of development. Participants highlighted the continued relevance of the right to development in addressing persistent global inequalities and interconnected challenges, including those related to climate change, conflict, and technological divides. The Mechanism further noted the emphasis placed on international cooperation, solidarity, and the need to create an enabling global environment for development, as well as the strong support expressed by many delegations for advancing the elaboration of a legally binding instrument on the right to development.

During this session, the Expert Mechanism considered two thematic studies entitled "Artificial intelligence, cultural rights, and the right to development" and "Peace and security and the right to development." The Mechanism acknowledges the inputs received from Member States and other stakeholders in the preparation of these studies and encourages continued engagement in their further development.

In its consideration of the thematic study on "Artificial intelligence, cultural rights, and the right to development," the Expert Mechanism noted that participants highlighted both the opportunities and risks associated with the rapid development of artificial intelligence. While artificial intelligence has the potential to enhance access to cultural life, education, and public services, concerns were raised about its impact on cultural diversity, unequal access to technology, and the risk of reinforcing existing inequalities. Participants emphasized that artificial intelligence is not a neutral technology and may reproduce structural biases, particularly where data and technological infrastructures remain concentrated in a limited number of actors.

The Mechanism further notes the importance of ensuring that artificial intelligence governance is grounded in human rights principles, including equality, participation, and human dignity. Particular attention was drawn to the situation of vulnerable and underrepresented groups, including Indigenous Peoples, as well as to issues of data sovereignty and fair representation. Participants also highlighted the need for strengthened international cooperation and more effective regulatory frameworks, including addressing the role of private sector actors, to ensure that artificial intelligence contributes positively to the realization of the right to development.

In its consideration of the thematic study on "Peace and Security and the Right to Development," the Expert Mechanism noted that the panellists and participants confirmed that peace and security constitute preconditions for the realization of the right to development, which, in turn, constitutes a precondition for peace and security. States' obligations in the area of peace, security and development are enforceable at both the national and international levels. In this regard, the speakers and participants also confirmed the relevance of highlighting, in the EMRTD's thematic study, three principal State obligations at the intersection of peace, security and the right to development: (i) to ensure the establishment, maintenance and strengthening of peaceful and inclusive societies; (ii) to ensure general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control; and (iii) to eliminate massive and flagrant violations of the human rights of peoples and individuals affected by situations of breach of peace and security.

The exchange during the panel likewise shed light on how these respective State obligations can be classified as preventive, concomitant and subsequent in nature. In preventive terms, States must maintain peace through the peaceful settlement of disputes, preventive diplomacy and mediation; through compliance with the general obligations to respect and guarantee the human rights of all persons under

their jurisdiction, without discrimination of any kind; and through general and complete disarmament, which undoubtedly strengthens confidence, cooperation and solidarity among States. Concomitant obligations require action in accordance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law when situations of armed conflict arise. Compliance with these international obligations may allow, at least indirectly, for the emergence of peacebuilding and transitional justice processes. Subsequent obligations, in post-conflict scenarios, require the fulfilment of the requirements of truth, justice, memory, reparation and institutional reform, with a view to putting a definitive end to situations of breach of peace. As a cross-cutting dimension, it is essential to recognize the role of women and youth as agents of peace.

To continue enriching the thematic study, the call for inputs is hereby reiterated until 15 July 2026, highlighting the importance of receiving examples of good practices and statistics that will strengthen the study's impact on the realization of the right to development of individuals and peoples.

Now I will pass on to my colleague Isabelle Durant to continue sharing these conclusions.

The Mechanism also held four focused thematic discussions under its programme of work and expresses its appreciation to all panellists and participants for their contributions.

In the discussion on "The role of regional mechanisms in realizing the right to development," the Expert Mechanism notes that participants emphasized the critical role of regional mechanisms in translating international human rights norms into implementation at the national and local levels. Regional mechanisms were highlighted as key platforms for monitoring, accountability, and the

development of jurisprudence and legal frameworks that give practical effect to the right to development. The Mechanism further notes that participants highlighted the role of regional mechanisms in facilitating cooperation among States, strengthening institutional capacity, and sharing good practices.

In the exercise of their functions, regional mechanisms protect the right to development through its direct invocation — whether by reference to the Declaration on the Right to Development, or by reference to specific binding regional instruments that recognize it, as is the case of the African human rights system with Article 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, or through the invocation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In the Inter-American human rights system, the integral development recognized in the Organization of American States' Charter serves as the basis for the recognition of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights and the corresponding State obligations. Regional mechanisms were identified as essential partners in bridging global standards and national implementation, and in advancing the realization of the right to development in practice.

In the panel on "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," the Expert Mechanism noted that participants highlighted the intrinsic interrelationship between the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the Declaration on the Right to Development, noting that, while distinct in their approaches, they are complementary in nature and pursue common objectives. It was emphasized that both instruments reaffirm that development cannot be achieved without the full respect of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that discrimination in all its forms constitutes a major obstacle to development. Participants further underscored that both frameworks

place people at the centre of development processes, as active stakeholders and meaningful participants.

The Mechanism further noted that discussions drew attention to the historical and structural dimensions of inequality, including the legacy of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, and their continuing impact on development. In this regard, participants referred to the growing recognition of the transatlantic slave trade and its consequences, including through discussions on reparatory justice, highlighting that development has not been neutral from a racial perspective. Such recognition was seen as contributing to ongoing efforts to address historical injustices and the transformation of the international order. The importance of advancing a more inclusive and human-centred understanding of development, including approaches that move beyond purely economic indicators such as gross domestic product, was also emphasized.

I will now pass onto my colleague Mihir Kanade to continue reading these conclusions.

In the interactive chapter-by-chapter discussion on the draft international covenant on the right to development, the Expert Mechanism noted that the discussion provided a structured and technical exchange aimed at enhancing understanding of the architecture, content, and implications of the draft instrument. It was highlighted that the draft covenant represents the outcome of a consultative and iterative process within the United Nations system, based on the Declaration on the Right to Development and reflecting inputs from Member States and other stakeholders. It was underscored that the draft instrument seeks to further elaborate the normative framework of the right to development and to advance its realization through a legally binding framework.

In the panel on “Participation, inclusion and the right to development of migrants,” the Expert Mechanism noted that the presentations emphasized that the right to development applies to all individuals, including migrants, and requires that they are able to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from development. Restrictive policies, unequal access to services, exploitative labour arrangements, and discriminatory narratives undermine migrants’ participation and agency, and in doing so, undermine development itself.

When migrants are excluded from access to their rights and to essential services, development planning, civic participation, or are subjected to exploitation including trafficking in persons, their right to development is undermined. Such exclusion also weakens social cohesion and sustainable development in host societies.

Aligning migration governance with the Right to Development ensures that migrants are recognized as rights-holders and community members whose inclusion and contribution benefits society as a whole.

The Mechanism recognizes that the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development represents an important milestone to renew commitment, strengthen partnerships and promote concrete action towards the realization of the right to development for all.

The Expert Mechanism will continue to build on the outcomes of this session in its future work, including its thematic studies and policy recommendations, and remains committed to supporting Member States and other stakeholders in advancing the operationalization of the right to development.

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