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

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Unofficial transcript of the oral statement by Ms. Ejim Dike,
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Good afternoon, all, and happy Earth Day.

Thank you to the Expert Mechanism for inviting me to this panel. I'm honored to be speaking with my fellow panelists.

In the spirit of Sankofa, I'd like to begin by establishing a common understanding of the role of race and racism in development. And from this I borrow from, I believe, your country person, Peruvian sociologist Quijano. We're operating today in a global economic system that was and is predicated on our Eurocentric construction of racial identity in order to legitimize whose labor to exploit, whose resources to plunder, and which markets to service. And as decolonial feminists like Sylvia Tamale remind us, in this racialized world order, it is women, especially black, brown, and indigenous women, who bear the double burden of having both our productive and our reproductive labor exploited and invisibilities, and the earth ravaged. So, it's in this world order that development functions, and a number of you have alluded to this.

The field of development itself, as Radhika alluded to, was conceived for countries that were formerly colonized, not as a path towards industrialization, but as a call to modernize. And in the public narrative, to be modern is to be Western; to be Western is to be white. So, it's critical as we have any conversation about race and development to recognize that there's no such thing as a racially neutral or a gender-neutral development. It's important to start there.

Precisely this understanding of the world order that makes the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development and the 25th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action critical moments for us to recommit ourselves to a reimagined development.

Unlike the majority of human rights instruments that preceded them, these instruments were championed with the active leadership of African, Asian, and Caribbean States and civil society who recognized the need for a new international economic order and importantly for reparations in compensation for wealth and exploitation those derived from trafficking, chattel enslavement, and colonization of Africans, African descendants, and Asians and indigenous peoples. Of course, we also know that due to the opposition of the Global North, the final language of reparations was negotiated down to what we now speak of as international cooperation in the Declaration on the Right to Development, and the DDPA also stopped short of calling for full reparations.

We all know, as well as we talk about challenges, that the DDPA has been undermined consistently by the rather unfortunate stance taken by States who have systematically boycotted the Durban

Review Conference in protest of what they have called criticism, that singles out Israel's apartheid system.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the Declaration and DDPA have spearheaded groundbreaking work to advance justice, and I hope we can talk about them. Nevertheless, the question before us today is how we leverage this important milestone to reimagine development: one that is anti-racist; one that is decolonial; one that is feminist; one that is people centered and based on human rights.

I have a few considerations. The first is that we must issue linking the right to development to market orthodoxy. While the draft covenant, which you will be looking at tomorrow, defines development as more than economic growth, which is great. I would urge that the language of economic growth in the covenant be removed completely, not because there's no association between the two, but rather because such a link lays the foundation for the more insidious consequences of a neoliberal approach to development, consequences that accommodate human rights violations as long as there's economic growth, consequences that tolerate the displacement or environmental degradation of predominantly black and brown communities as collateral damage for development, consequences that cede sovereign power to transnational corporations who, among other things, promote specious solutions to climate crisis as a way to distract from corporate accountability, and the people who bear the brunt of neoliberal development's growing pains are racialized communities and women. Relatedly, we know that women and in particular African and African descendant women bear some of the harshest consequences of neoliberal development prescriptions.

So, I would look at proposals that focus on women's inclusion into flawed systems. Without promoting conditions for women's self' sufficiency or recognizing women's undervalued care work, these solutions, if they don't recognize women's undervalued care work, will always be limited and limiting.

Finally, I feel like I would be remiss if I don't talk about what's happening in this current predatory world order where the mighty can breach international law and human rights brazenly and with impunity. I think in this order, it's imperative for States and civil society who align on interests of anti-racist development to build strong and principal alliances. The world's silence, hypocrisy, and silence in particular of certain States with respect to genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, displacement of Lebanese, mass murder and displacement of Sudanese, and indiscriminate murder of fishers in the Atlantic Ocean, kidnapping of a sovereign president, the degradation of immigrants, the mass murder of dissidents. And now, of course, we have an illegal attack on a sovereign nation. I think that it has caused immeasurable cynicism and distrust of a much-needed international human rights and rules-based order.

So, I think that it's important that we leverage these important milestones of the Declaration and the DDPA to recommit ourselves to a real conversation about what we need to have: development that is anti-racist, one that's based on dignity and mutuality. I would suggest as a first step that we really look to this covenant on the right of development and try to ensure that it represents our highest aspirations as a human family with respect to the Earth and not the floor.

Thank you.

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