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Thirteenth Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development (EMRTD)

Thematic Discussion: "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", 22 April 2026, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Statement to be delivered by H.E. **Rachel Barros, Minister of Racial Equality of Brazil**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great honor that I address you all on behalf of Brazil to discuss an issue that remains central to the construction of a more just world: the right to development. This year, this reflection takes on even deeper meaning as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, a historic milestone in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related forms of intolerance.

Brazil has consistently reaffirmed its conviction that multilateralism is the most legitimate and effective path to promoting sustainable, inclusive, and equitable development. In an international landscape marked by complex and interdependent challenges, no country can prosper in isolation. Cooperation among nations, grounded

in mutual respect and dialogue, is essential to ensure that development is a right for all, not a privilege for a few.

In this context, I would like to begin by welcoming the recent decision of this General Assembly to recognize the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans and racialized slavery as the most serious crime against humanity. By naming this historical process as a crime, the international community takes a decisive step: while preserving the memory of millions of victims, it also establishes an ethical, legal, and political foundation that opens the way for the debate on reparations.

This recognition goes beyond symbolism. It affirms that the deep racial inequalities that persist to this day are not accidental, but rather the result of a historical system of exploitation that was central to the formation of the global economy. The wealth that supported the development of many countries was, to a large extent, built on the forced labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants.

However, Afro-descendant populations, which contributed so significantly to the consolidation of the economic system we know today, continue to benefit only marginally from its outcomes due to the enduring structures of racism. Racial inequality directly undermines human development by restricting access to opportunities, as racism operates as a structural marker that cuts across socioeconomic, educational, and well-being indicators. This is precisely why the recognition of this crime must call us to action.

Opening the path toward reparations also means affirming the right to development of these populations. It means promoting concrete policies that address the effects of colonialism and slavery, expanding access to opportunities, resources, and rights.

Above all, it means correcting historical distortions so that development ceases to be exclusionary and instead reflects justice, equity, and dignity for all.

For Brazil, a country that is home to the largest Afro-descendant population outside the African continent, this agenda is particularly significant. We have worked to translate this historical recognition into effective action, both domestically and internationally, reaffirming our commitment to the promotion of racial equality and to combating all forms of discrimination.

The full realization of the right to development, as enshrined by the United Nations, requires addressing the structural inequalities associated with racism and racial discrimination. Without this, equitable access to opportunities, resources, and benefits remains incomplete, and the very realization of what is understood as development is compromised.

The environmental dimension reveals these challenges with particular clarity. Environmental racism, as recognized in the Belém Declaration on Combating Environmental Racism, highlights the unequal distribution of climate risks and environmental impacts, which disproportionately affect Afro-descendant populations, Indigenous peoples, and traditional communities, deepening vulnerabilities and, in practice, limiting their prospects for development.

Initiatives such as SDG 18, aimed at promoting ethnic and racial equality—created and voluntarily adopted by Brazil—as well as the Belém Declaration on Combating Environmental Racism, both open to the accession of new States, acquire particular relevance in this context. By inviting Member States to join these efforts, we reaffirm that the promotion of environmental and climate justice, alongside racial equality, is an

essential tool for guaranteeing the right to development, including from the perspective of addressing historically constructed inequalities.

Environmental racism demonstrates how racial and social inequalities intersect with environmental crises, deepening vulnerabilities and limiting access to basic rights such as clean water, sanitation, health, and land. By bringing this concept to the center of the international agenda, Brazil reaffirms that there can be no sustainable development without racial and environmental justice.

Our actions have sought to integrate these dimensions, promoting public policies that value traditional knowledge, protect territories, and ensure the effective participation of these communities in decision-making processes. At the international level, we advocate for climate financing, technology transfer, and adaptation mechanisms that explicitly take these inequalities into account, contributing to more just and inclusive solutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 25th anniversary of the Durban Declaration reminds us that the fight against racism is inseparable from the promotion of development. There can be no full development while structural inequalities based on race, origin, or identity persist. Nor can there be lasting racial justice without guaranteeing dignified material conditions for all.

On this occasion, Brazil renews its commitment to the full implementation of the Durban Declaration and to strengthening the right to development as a fundamental human right. We reaffirm our belief in multilateralism as an essential instrument to

advance this agenda and call on the international community to redouble its efforts toward a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

May we, together, transform memory into action, recognition into reparation, and commitment into concrete results for present and future generations.

Thank you very much.