Opening Statement by

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The Thirteenth Session
of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

delivered by Mr. Rio Hada, Chief, Equality, Development and Rule of Law Section, New York Office

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Madam Chair and Members of the Expert Mechanism,
Dear colleagues,

We convene at a moment of considerable global strain. Polarization is deepening, multilateral cooperation is under pressure, and human rights are increasingly contested. At the same time, with fewer than five years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the progress is uneven and, in many contexts, reversing.

In this environment, the right to development is not peripheral—it is central. It speaks directly to today's intersecting crises of inequality, conflict, climate disruption, debt, and exclusion, and to the urgent need for development that is inclusive, equitable, and grounded in human rights.

As the Secretary-General recently reminded the Human Rights Council, *"When human rights fall, everything else tumbles—peace, development, social cohesion, trust, solidarity."* Inequality, exclusion, and unjust global economic arrangements are not only moral failures; they actively undermine sustainable development and human dignity.

Inclusive and equitable development is therefore both a **human rights imperative** and a **preventive strategy** against instability and conflict. The right to development translates this integrated vision into practice through concrete principles of participation, equity, accountability, and international cooperation. It offers a framework for aligning development policies with human rights obligations, and for measuring progress not merely through economic growth, but through the real expansion of freedoms and dignity for all.

Excellencies,

This year, we mark the **40th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development**, adopted during a period of profound global transformation. Forty years on, its relevance is unmistakable. Structural inequalities—within and between countries—continue to shape access to opportunity, security, and dignity.

This year, we also commemorate **60 years of the two International Human Rights Covenants**, alongside other important milestones: **25 years of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**, and **20 years of the Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and on Enforced Disappearance**.

Taken together, these instruments remind us that the **right to development is not a standalone aspiration**, but an **inalienable human right that connects and reinforces the entire human rights framework**. It provides a people-centred lens through which all rights can be realized in an integrated manner—by emphasizing participation, equality of opportunity, international cooperation, and the fair distribution of the benefits of development.

As we reflect on these milestones, our challenge is not simply to commemorate past achievements, but to **translate their normative promise into lived reality**. Advancing the right to development requires dismantling structural barriers, empowering rights-holders, and ensuring that no one is left behind. It also requires recognizing that all human rights are interconnected and mutually reinforcing—and essential to building just, equitable, and sustainable societies.

Here, the Expert Mechanism plays a critical role. Through its sessions, studies and dialogues, it provides a space to clarify the content of the right to development, share best practices, and **promote its practical implementation** across regions and contexts.

During this session, the Expert Mechanism will engage in interactive discussions on key current issues, including artificial intelligence and cultural rights, peace and security, the role of regional mechanisms, migration, the anniversaries of the Declaration on the Right to Development and the Durban Declaration, and unpacking the content of the draft international covenant. I am confident that these discussions will deepen reflection and reinforce the continued relevance of the right to development in today's challenging global context.

Madam Chair,
Members of the Expert Mechanism,

This thirteenth session also marks the conclusion of the mandates of four members of the Expert Mechanism. Your contributions have been particularly impactful during a period defined by overlapping global crises. You have helped clarify the content of the right to development, strengthen its operational relevance, and situate it clearly in relation to challenges such as inequality, unsustainable debt, climate change, digital transformation, and shrinking multilateral space.

Your work has demonstrated that the right to development remains not only relevant, but indispensable. I wish to extend the Office's sincere appreciation to each of you, and to wish you every success in your future endeavours.

I am confident that the new members will build on this strong foundation, advancing the right to development, and the realization of all human rights, for all people, everywhere.

I wish you productive and meaningful deliberations at this thirteenth session.

Thank you.
