Word Count: 652

Statement by Ambassador Asim Iftikhar, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN, at the 13th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development
(21 April 2026)

Mr. Chair,

We appreciate the continued work of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development and take note of the thirteenth session, taking place at a moment of particular significance. This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the adoption, by the General Assembly, of the Declaration on the Right to Development through resolution 41/128 (1986) - a landmark affirmation that development is neither charity, nor discretion, but an inalienable human right belonging to all peoples. This anniversary must be more than an occasion for commemoration; it should serve as a call for renewed commitment, implementation, and political resolve.

2. Four decades on, the normative clarity of the Declaration stands in stark contrast to the lived realities across much of the developing world. Persistent inequalities, unsustainable debt burdens, climate vulnerability, widening technological divides, and the continued under-representation of developing countries in global decision-making processes continue to impede the realization of this right. If the right to development is to be meaningful, it must be reflected not only in national policies, but also in the structure and functioning of the international system – including the regimes governing finance, trade, debt, and technology.

3. In this regard, the work of the Expert Mechanism remains highly valuable. By providing thematic expertise, identifying best practices, and advancing operationalization of the right to development, the Mechanism plays an important role in bridging the gap between principle and practice. The focus of this session, including on artificial intelligence, peace and security, regional cooperation, non-

discrimination, and migration, is timely and forward-looking, underscoring the need for an integrated, inclusive and development-centered approach.

4. We wish to underscore, in particular, the importance of the ongoing efforts towards an International Covenant on the Right to Development. The completion of the draft by the Working Group chaired by Ambassador Zamir Akram of Pakistan and its transmission to the General Assembly mark a significant milestone in the long journey from normative recognition to effective realization of this right. This process comes at a time when the right to development continues to face serious and persistent challenges. The right to development cannot remain only a declaratory principle; it requires stronger legal grounding and more coherent institutional support.

5. In this context, the consideration of the draft covenant presents a historic opportunity that should not be missed. A legally binding instrument would not replace the Declaration; rather, it would build upon it by providing greater legal clarity, strengthening collective commitment, and establishing a framework for implementation, cooperation, and accountability. It would also send an important message that the international community remains committed to placing development at the center of the multilateral agenda.

Mr. Chair,

6. While the states bear the responsibility for promoting development through inclusive and people-centered policies, the international community and the United Nations has a central role to play in advancing dialogue, fostering consensus, supporting capacity-building, and promoting international cooperation for the realization of right to development. Greater solidarity is also needed to ensure fairer access to finance, technology, trade, and development opportunities, while emerging challenges, including those arising from artificial intelligence and other new

technologies, must be addressed in a manner that prevents new forms of exclusion and ensures that innovation becomes a tool for inclusion rather than division.

Mr. Chair,

7. The right to development remains one of the most transformative principles of the international human rights framework. Its promise is clear: that human dignity must be at the center of development, and that the benefits of progress must be shared equitably among all peoples. Pakistan remains firmly committed to the realization of the right to development and continues to pursue policies aimed at its effective operationalization at the international and national level.

8. As we mark forty years of the Declaration, let us ensure that this milestone becomes a turning point - bridging the gap between recognition and realization, and advancing both the implementation of the Declaration and meaningful progress toward the adoption of the covenant.

I thank you!