United Nations

Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Thirteenth Session

New York, 20-24 April 2026

Agenda Item: Item 4 – Implementation of the mandate and program of work:

(b) Focused thematic discussions (with guest speakers)

The role of regional mechanisms in realizing the right to development

Statement by

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Thank you Madam Vice-Chair, honorable panelists, and respected attendees of the session. I'm honored to share my perspective as a representative of Humanity First.

While some may interpret the Declaration on the Right to Development slightly differently than others, based on which position of authority, state, or organization they represent, we all mostly agree on the principles put forth by the articles of this declaration.

Numerous people have identified that not enough progress has been made to implement the articles of this declaration. The declaration states, and I quote "Recognizing that the creation of conditions favorable to the development of peoples and individuals is the primary responsibility of their States," UNQUOTE, which is true but also recognizes the possible problem, we are relying too much on the states to act in the interest of their people as a top-down approach.

What the Declaration on the Right to Development put forward is an idea whose time will not come, but it is an idea that the people before us have already lived, we ourselves live it every day, and so will the people who come after us. It will not work as a flip of the switch in a state or an organization, rather it is a change in us as a people, from ordinary citizens to those who sit in positions of authority. Therefore, expecting it to be successfully adopted and widely implemented within a few decades may not be practical.

The right question to ask probably would be how we ensure that we continue on the path of progress, no matter how small it may seem, and what steps we could take to expedite this process. The answer may lie in a bottom-up approach: while we work through the systems, we must emphasize investing in people first and foremost, because it is ultimately people who create, sustain, and reform systems and institutions. Rather than relying only on states and formal systems to generate the right environment, we need to strengthen the human foundations of development.

The most sustainable path to realizing the right to development is to cultivate educated, healthy, and socially conscious citizens who enter positions of authority in politics, law, administration, education, and business. These individuals are more likely to support systems that reflect the Declaration's values of equality, participation, justice, and human dignity. It is not just a government's responsibility. It is a responsibility shared by civil society organizations, non-profits, faith and non-faith-based organizations, local communities, and many others.

Suleman Koulibably, he was a 4th grade student in one of the Humanity First schools in Mali. He rode his bicycle 7 km each way every day, 5 days a week. When I asked him why he go through this each day, his response was, because when I grow up, I want to be the President of Mali.

In Liberia, Humanity First was contacted by an Imam of a religious seminary located in a village called Kabanda in the middle of bush, more than 50 km away from paved road. He heard that Humanity First has built schools in his county. He had one request, please take my seminary and convert it into a primary school. He told me that he has realized that for his students to be successful in life and contribute towards the progress of their community and this country, they need formal education. We happily accepted the offer and now we have a primary school educating almost 200 students.

To summarize, real development will happen if, firstly, the three pillars of the UN, peace and security, development, and human rights work in sync at global, national, regional and local levels. Secondly, our approaches must see investment in people like Suleman and Imam of Kabanda, not as secondary to institutions, but as its foundation. Strong systems emerge most durably when empowered people are the ones who create them.