The 10th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda
Implementation of the mandate and programme of work –
Focused thematic discussion and interactive dialogue
Palais des Nations, Room XXI, Geneva

Bilateral, regional and multilateral trade: friends of enemies of RTD

Wednesday 30 October 2024, 10h to 12h

Introductory remarks
Presented by Isabelle Durant

Despite or because of an increasingly challenging and interdependent environment, the number of regional trade agreements has been on the rise, from fewer than 50 in 1990 to more than 350 today. Major players such as the United States, the European Union, and China have been major actors in this field. Some agreements are even "mega-regional," with partners in Asia, Australia, and the Western Hemisphere. The 2018 African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), spans an entire continent and is the world's largest regional trade agreement, covering more than 1.3 billion people. This kind of deep and large trade agreements aimed at reducing market fragmentation should be in principle welcomed and encouraged.

Many observers see regionalism and multilateralism as opposing forces. Some believe that global tensions that are weakening the multilateral trading system—including protectionism and rising nationalism—will inevitably push governments in this direction. Others are posing the exact opposite observation and think that their success is that multilateral and regional integration complement each other in several ways.

But from the point of view of the right to development and its implementation, can we consider that regional trade agreements are or can be more inclusive than existing multilateral rules? Does the proximity dimension make it possible to invite and integrate actors and populations more and better to take part in their negotiation and benefit from it in terms of development? These are the questions and experiences we want to address and share during this panel.