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Statement by Mr Surya Deva
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27th Session of the Working Group on the Right to Development

Interactive Dialogue

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Dear Chair-Rapporteur, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address you as the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development at the 27th session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development.

At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Akram for his leadership in developing a dynamic programme of this session by connecting the right to development to a range of thematic issues.

Mr Chair

In my remarks today, I will focus on four aspects. First, highlight why the right to development matters more than ever. Second, outline various initiatives that I am taking to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development. Third, mention the focus of my forthcoming thematic reports. Fourth, describe the negative impact of the ongoing budget crisis on my mandate.

One unique aspect of the human right to development is its transformative nature in challenging structural injustices. Historically, the right owes its origin in demanding justice for exploitation of people and the planet during colonisation. In contemporary times, the right to development can be invoked to fight against neocolonial structures of power and exploitation.

States and other stakeholders should see the right to development as a solution to multiple crises that the world is currently facing. Let me illustrate the transformative potential of the right to development in relation to three crises: inequality, climate change and conflicts.

Oxfam's 2026 Global Inequality Report notes that the number of billionaires has surpassed 3,000 for the first time and that the world's 12 richest billionaires have more wealth than the poorest four billion people. The right to development requires States to formulate appropriate national development policies that aim to achieve the fair distribution of the benefits of development. States should also act collectively to reform international governance regimes concerning trade, investment, financing and taxation that undermine efforts directed at the fair distribution of benefits. To discuss these issues further, I am co-organising with OHCHR and

the South Centre a side event, "Addressing inequalities between countries: Role of the right to development", on 19 May 2026.

A just response to climate change would require holding historical polluters accountable for the current climate catastrophe. It would also require thinking beyond the interests of the present generation. The right to development again provides guidance because there can be no climate justice unless agreed climate actions ensure participation of people in decision making, intergenerational equity, common but differentiated responsibilities and international cooperation.

The right to development also offers a recipe for securing peace. Despite States spending about three trillion US dollars annually on military expenditure, the world is witnessing the highest numbers of conflicts. The evidence is clear that more weapons do not result in more peace. Instead of funding war economies, States must embrace the path of disarmament and spend the saved resources in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To raise awareness about this issue, I recently launched a social media campaign titled "Cost of conflicts – A plea for peace". Just to illustrate, a country is estimated to have spent about USD64 billion on an illegal war against Iran – that amount could have funded the entire UN's regular budget for 18 years.

Considering such a transformative value of the right to development, greater efforts should be made to implement this right at national, regional and international levels. In this context, it is disappointing that there has not been much progress in New York in negotiating and adopting the proposed Covenant on the Right to Development. I very much hope that States will accelerate the process of adopting the Covenant.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now outline various initiatives that I am taking to mainstream the right to development in 2026, as we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration.

I have launched a dedicated series for the **40th anniversary events** in all world regions. The final event in this series will be an international conference in Geneva on 4 December 2026 to commemorate the adoption of the Declaration by the UN General Assembly on 4 December

1986. Further information about these events will be posted on the mandate website on a rolling basis.

The leaflet, "Decoding the right to development", seeks to explain in simple ways the contours of the right to development. To **translate this leaflet** in multiple languages, I am now collaborating with external partners. It is already available in eight languages: Burmese, Chinese, Filipino, French, Nepali, Russian, Spanish and Thai. I will invite different delegations to support translation and dissemination of this leaflet in additional languages.

To provide practical guidance to States in realising the right to development and responding to various development dilemmas, I will be developing several **policy briefs**. One brief will showcase various entry points to implement the right to development, while another one will provide guidance about climate action, energy transition and the right to development. I also plan to develop a few policy briefs around business models for inclusive and sustainable development.

In line with my 2023 vision report to the Human Rights Council, I have paid special attention to engaging children and youth in all mandate activities. The mandate now has a dedicated **Instagram** account (@unsr_development) to extend our outreach to young people. Moreover, I have recently established the **Youth Alliance for the Right to Development** (YARD). YARD will comprise a small group of youth between the age of 15 and 29 years from diverse backgrounds, representing all world regions and working on diverse issues. We hope to launch the inaugural YARD in June 2026.

Moreover, I have just launched a new multi-year **global mapping project** to document how the right to development is recognised and implemented in different UN Member States. Mapping for each State will be conducted by university academics and graduate students using a questionnaire prepared by the mandate. All mapping reports will be made publicly available on the mandate's website after an internal review. In addition to documenting good practices and challenges in realising the right to development, I hope that this project will assist States in negotiating, ratifying and implementing the proposed Covenant.

Mr Chair,

I would now like to briefly mention the thematic focus of my reports for this year and for 2027. My report to the Human Rights Council's 63rd session will focus on "Participation in development". This report will unpack what active, free and meaningful participation in development-related policies, programmes and projects should look like. On the other hand, my report to the General Assembly will focus on "Pace for development". It will elaborate linkages between human rights-based peace and sustainable development.

In response to my open call for input, we have received over 70 submissions from States and other stakeholders. I have also been organising consultations to collect additional input for my reports. I would like to thank all stakeholders who have made a submission or participated in these consultations.

In 2027, my Council report will focus on the nexus between new technologies (including AI) and the right to development, while my thematic report to the General Assembly will unpack the relation between migration and the right to development.

Mr Chair

Let me conclude by highlighting how the current UN budget crisis is impacting the effectiveness of my mandate. Lack of funds have meant that I have not been able to participate in person in any session of the Expert Mechanism in the last three years. Nor was there any funding available for me to participate in the sessions of the Working Group or the High-Level Political Forum in New York. Therefore, I will strongly encourage States to mobilise dedicated resources to support the implementation of the right to development.

Thank you for your kind attention.