**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**32nd session of the Human Rights Council**

**Panel discussion on the promotion and protection of the right to development**

**(Commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development)**

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**Operationalizing the Right to Development for Implementing the SDGs**

Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,

The 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development which we celebrate this year, has come upon us in the backdrop of the adoption of our new and ambitious Sustainable Development Goals. And I am here to make a case before you all that if we are to realistically implement the SDGs as envisioned by the 2030 Agenda, then operationalizing the Right to Development is indeed indispensable and the only way forward.

The legal and textual justification for this position is inherent in the 2030 Agenda which grounds itself in the right to development and explicitly acknowledges that it is informed by the 1986 Declaration. But, I suggest that operationalizing the right to development is also the most sensible policy approach to implementing the SDGs, if they are to be successful. What this essentially means is embedding the implementation of the SDGs firmly within the normative framework provided by the 1986 Declaration.

I will make six specific points as to what operationalizing the RtD for implementation of the SDGs would entail.

Firstly, this requires focusing not only on the outcomes which must result from the implementation of the 2030 agenda, but equally on the processes by which those outcomes must be achieved. This includes, of course, participation of all stakeholders, as well as respecting the policy space of States and their people in determining and implementing their own development priorities. While the 17 SDGs focus on what is to be achieved, only by operationalizing the RtD can we also focus on how they are achieved as well.

Secondly, operationalizing RtD means that development, in order to be sustainable, must not be seen as a charity, privilege or generosity, but as a right of human beings everywhere, who are the central subjects of development and should be the active participants and beneficiaries of the right to development.

Thirdly, understanding that development is not a charity, privilege or generosity also means clearly acknowledging that all States are duty-bearers with respect to RtD. This duty extends not only internally towards their own citizens, but also beyond the States’ borders and permeates through international decision-making at international organizations, including the UN, WB, IMF, and the WTO. Thus, for instance, States would clearly be failing in their obligations if they create international conditions unfavourable to the realization of the RtD through the lending policies they support at the IMF or WB, or through WTO rules. In fact, WTO rules are explicitly required to be framed with the objective of promoting sustainable development by the very terms of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO.

Now, the 2030 Agenda, through Goal 17, lays special emphasis on strengthening the means of implementation of the SDGs through a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development. If global partnership and international cooperation are the means and the key for achieving the SDGs, it is far too important a goal to be relegated to the fungible and unpredictable nature of charity, generosity or privilege. Operationalizing the RtD essentially means contextualizing SDG 17 in the proper perspective by viewing it as an expression of the duty of States towards international cooperation, which is enshrined not only in the 1986 Declaration but also in the UN Charter of 1945.

Fourthly, operationalizing the RtD means insisting on a comprehensive, multidimensional and holistic approach to development as a human right. On the one hand, this means that all SDGs must be achieved in a manner which is aligned with human rights and promotes their fulfillment. On the other hand, operationalizing RtD requires us to ensure that no goal is achieved at the cost of some other human right, whether substantive or procedural. It ensures that there is no trade-off between rights, even when we need to prioritize some rights over others through the SDGs.

Fifthly, operationalizing RtD means going beyond a Human Rights based approach to Development or HRBA. HRBA focuses on linking and aligning the objectives of development projects to specific human rights norms, standards and principles. The RtD approach goes further and makes development itself a self-standing human right. Therefore, operationalizing RtD means encompassing HRBA within its fold, but it also requires understanding that States have duties to ensure development *as a matter of human rights*. In programmatic terms, HRBA has always insisted on recipients of development aid ensuring respect for human rights while implementing development projects through transparent and accountable institutions. While that is obviously necessary, it has not looked at international cooperation to ensure development and not impede it as a matter of duty of the donors. Operationalizing RtD for implementing the SDGs would, therefore, not only require the recipients of international cooperation to fulfil their human rights obligations internally through accountable and transparent institutions, but also requires the donors in international cooperation to be duty bound by human rights principles while providing financial or technical aid for the implementation of SDGs. This includes ensuring that developing countries have the necessary policy space in order to define their own development priorities in line with the SDGs and their own mechanisms for implementing them. It also requires ensuring that donors do not impose conditionalities on financial and technical aid which violate the national policy space and human rights. These principles, including RtD itself, are inherent to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, which has been reaffirmed by the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, operationalizing RtD for the implementation of SDGs means ensuring that the indicators for the SDGs and the targets are compatible with the objective of making the right to development a reality for everyone. This includes ensuring that there are clear, quantifiable indicators for both national and international action, with appropriate benchmarks for each of the SDGs, and most importantly, for Goal 17.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The SDGs should indeed be seen as an expression by States of their intention individually and collectively to fulfil their obligations under the 1986 Declaration. In other words, RtD is nothing but the human rights avatar of the SDGs; and the SDGs are nothing but a policy expression and plan of action for operationalizing the RtD. As such, operationalizing the RtD for implementation of the SDGs is the only way forward if we are to ensure a safe journey to a sustainable future.

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