

**Statement by Mr. Saad Alfarargi**

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**Side event of the High Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2019**

**“Promoting participation in national review processes: Jointly advancing the right to development and the SDGs.”**

**11 July 2019 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm**

Your excellences, distinguished delegates, representatives of civil society, ladies and gentlemen.

Today, I have the honour to convene this side-event entitled *“Promoting participation in national review processes: Advancing the right to development and the SDGs.”*

I chose to focus today’s discussion on participation in national reporting mechanisms because I believe the process of gathering information and of drafting Voluntary National Reports provides an excellent opportunity for states to involve all relevant stakeholders in the evaluation of existing development policies and programmes, and in the planning for the future. The process can also constitute an avenue of accountability, by giving communities and their representatives the chance to bring their concerns and grievances to the relevant implementing authorities.

In September 2017, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 36/9, in which it requested me to hold regional consultations on the implementation of the right to development. Accordingly, I convened a series of regional consultations in 2018 and 2019 that sought to identify good practices in designing, implementing, monitoring and assessing policies and programmes that contribute to the realization of the right to development. I invited all States, according to their United Nations regional group, to participate in the consultations process, and, in September 2019, I will present a set of guidelines to the Human Rights Council that recommend ways of practically implementing the right to development based on the consultation outcomes.

One of the topics that came out very strongly in the discussions was the need to ensure genuine **participation of all stakeholders in the elaboration of development programmes and policies**, as well as in their monitoring and evaluation.

 The Declaration on the Right to Development recognizes that “the human person” is the primary central subject of development. Therefore, individual persons, both individually and collectively, should be empowered to decide their own development priorities and their preferred methods of reaching those priorities. With that foundational principle in mind, participation becomes an important basis for assessing the interests of rights holders and ensuring that those interests are met. Ensuring “Participation” for the sake of realizing the right to development involves more than merely consulting individuals and communities; it implies meaningfully placing rights- holders at the centre of decision-making processes affecting their own economic, social, cultural and political development.

The voluntary national review process is a chance for States to do just that. Building on the consensus framework of the 2030 Agenda, the process is an occasion for States to inquire from constituents at all levels about progress towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. This institutionalization of participation is a positive development, since it means feedback from individuals and communities is continuous and can be effectively streamlined into national policies. In addition, the VNR process provides an opportunity for States to gather the experiences of those furthest behind and to share those experience at the international level. In so doing, the VNR process can help address the fact that agreements and decisions made at the international level greatly affect individual rights-holders on the ground, and should therefore be informed by them.

Another topic that was repeatedly emphasised was that giving effect to the right to development necessitates **adequate accountability mechanisms in cases where individuals and communities have claims** that development related processes have infringed on their rights.

The voluntary national review process is one way for States to hear from communities about policies that affect them. In addition to enabling participation, the process provides an avenue for accountability. For example, the process provides opportunities for individuals and communities at the national level to communicate their concerns to the very authorities charged with implementing development policies on their behalf. At the same time, by sharing national-level development challenges with the international community, States can mobilize international cooperation efforts to meet these challenges.

The voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum suggest that voluntary national reviews should: be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people; support reporting by all relevant stakeholders; be people-centred and gender-sensitive, and respect human rights; and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind. They should ideally also include information regarding what mechanisms have been used to engage stakeholders from civil society, academia and the business sector, and how the national report to the high-level political forum has been discussed at the national level and who was engaged in the discussions. The reporting guidelines also suggest that the voluntary national reviews could assess how the principle of leaving no one behind has been mainstreamed in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and how vulnerable groups have been identified, as well as what policies and programmes are being implemented to address their needs and support their empowerment.

How can we do that in practice? The regional consultations produced some guidelines in this regard:

* Governments at all levels could mobilize and empower constituencies to advocate for their own development agendas
* Governments could institutionalize civil society participation as part of development planning processes as well as of the VNR processes. This includes planning in advance and accounting for civil society participation in data- gathering and assessment exercises at all levels
* Governments should actively involve the communities about whom the information is being gathered in the process of data collection for the VNRs
* Civil society’s capacity to gather disaggregated data should be enhanced and innovative approaches should be developed to bridge gaps in data collection. In that is regard, civil society should work closely with national statistical institutes
* States should enhance the international cooperation provided for capacity-building activities aimed at improving data collection in developed and developing countries.

In my report to the Human Rights Council last year (A/HRC/39/51), I explored the connection between the right to development and equality, and the consequences of inequalities within countries on the enjoyment of the right to development. In the consultations which led to the preparation to that report, several States provided information on participatory mechanisms, either for designing policies to implement the Sustainable Development Goals or drafting voluntary national reviews. Engagement with different stakeholders was noted as an important success factor in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals by multiple countries. In that report, among others I put forward the recommendation that States should systematically and coherently assess their progress towards implementing Sustainable Development Goals 10 and 5 and other targets related to progressing towards equality in their voluntary national reviews. To this recommendation I would like to add today that assessing the progress cannot realistically happen without involving the communities concerned. One of the ways in which we should step up our efforts to leave no one behind is to ensure that those groups and members of our societies whose right to development has been neglected for so long are genuinely involved in the process of preparing voluntary national reviews.

I look forward to hearing today more examples of inclusive national review processes that States and civil society members have implemented.

I hope that today’s discussion will help contribute to the advancement of the right to development, as well as a step towards attaining the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank you all for your kind attention.