



**The contribution of development
to the enjoyment of all Human Rights**
(Human Rights Council resolution 47/11)

**Statement by UN Resident Coordinator
for Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau**

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Keynote Panel: Reflections on Development Strategy and Policy and
their contribution to all human rights

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**Distinguished President,
Executive Secretary,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Panelists and colleagues,**

Pacific greetings from **Rarotonga, Cook Islands**, one of the 14 countries and territories in the Pacific that the United Nations works with. I am honoured to join ***the last of the five regional seminars*** on the contribution of development to human rights and wish to thank the organizers for inviting me to address the distinguished audience today.

Before I speak about the Pacific context and the challenges to sustainable development faced by countries in this region, allow me to bring into perspective the **concept of development** itself.

We define development as both a structural change and a goal.

We mandate our governments and our legislatures to make development happen and give it back to us. I am one of those believing that development as a process is a smooth journey if people's rights are recognized and guaranteed. There is extensive literature including, on the lighter side, NYU Prof. William Easterly's book *The Tyranny of Experts* demonstrating that poverty is the absence of rights. Let us not move into a circle in trying to identify what comes first. Rights always come first as all we need is to come to life to claim them.

Historically, we have primarily looked at development as an **economic** process and measure it through GDP growth rates. We have not yet abandoned that tunnel vision despite the UN introducing the concepts of *human development* and *the rights-based approach to development* to direct economic ambitions to bettering lives, all lives. It was the 1989 Washington Consensus that **prompted** the UN to bring to light the importance of human-centered economic growth for global stability and peace, which translated in the first Human Development Report followed by the HDI.

We have seen the limits of the economic growth model whose downfall systematically affects the poorest, whereas the rich grow ever richer. Although growth is human-powered and human-made, its benefits have

not been distributed equally within and between States. Poverty continues to rise **and so do inequalities and the unprecedented levels of economic, political, environmental and climate stress**. As we have globalized our economies, we globalized risks and threats and rights and obligations have become globally interdependent. Rights should be a global public good meaning that their enjoyment in the more advanced world should not take away the rights of the less advantaged and geography-constrained nations such as SIDS. **Rights as a global public good places the multilateral system at the top of the duty-bear structure.**

As highlighted by the Secretary-General in his 6 Feb briefing to the General Assembly on the priorities of 2023, the “Doomsday clock” is ticking fast, and urgent course correction is needed.

The Human Rights Council resolution guiding these regional seminars stresses that the aim of development is to constantly improve the **well-being of the entire population** and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful **participation**. **Development and human rights** are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Participating and benefitting equitably are prerequisites for human progress.

The **right to development is the ultimate expression of leading a dignified life with a deep sense of freedom and belonging in a world of great diversity and potential**. We have seen, time and again, that countries denying people’s fundamental rights and freedoms are unable to advance as they suppress the power of their most important and reliable resource – their human capital – to create, innovate and bring about positive change.

In the words of the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights this morning, the right to development means the entitlement of **rights-holders** to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development.

States as duty bearers must act individually and collectively to realize this right. Rule of law, rights-centered social contracts and democratic public governance are fundamentally required. To honor social contracts, at this time of major economic distress, **many countries lack the means to provide, at a minimum, universal access to basic services, social**

protection, employment opportunities, social justice, and a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. *International cooperation and global solidarity* are needed to eliminate inequalities among countries and within for people everywhere to live in peace and dignity. **Leaving no one behind is the only way to ensure better economies foster better societies.** And we do have a blueprint, the SDGs, but when it comes to means, access criteria discriminate against those struggling the most.

Many countries are faced with unmanageable levels of debt, low long-term development potentials and high exposure to climate change and climate-related disasters. Among those, SIDS are by far the most vulnerable. SIDS developed over years a strong model of resilience, but their capacity to sustain their development ambition is highly constrained.

If we truly care about people's rights, no country should be left to face the risk of defaulting on their vitally needed borrowing. The cost of living must be affordable to everyone, and people must have access to clean energy, clean water, food, healthcare, and education **within the planetary boundaries.**

Climate related displacement is growing across the Pacific SIDS. Unhealthy food imports are the source of non-communicable diseases. Many families struggle to make ends meet. Growth has failed many and many continue to fall into poverty with every shock and disaster occurring.

The SAMOA Pathway called for genuine, durable partnerships, based on principles of national ownership, mutual trust, transparency and accountability to help SIDS overcome challenges that exceed their capacities.

At a time our humanity is facing deepening uncertainty, we need strong multilateralism in the form of equitable access to development financing including climate financing. We need fair trade, technology, and an education system calibrated to present and future opportunities.

In its response to the Secretary-General, the Alliance of Small Island States, currently chaired by Samoa, expressed concern with "the **influx of the plethora of processes** that instead of really providing solutions to current problems, continue to address the issues above the need of those left behind, going contrary to the commitment of reaching the furthest behind first".

We do not have the luxury of time to reverse this non-inclusive growth model. We are farther than ever from a universally recognized right to development. Unbearable costs of living due to sky-rocketing food and energy prices, disrupted trade, never-ending conflicts and declining planetary resources are self-inflicted and have taken our world to a breaking point. **We possess all the knowledge we need to restore the balance of the global system. We just need to remove its discrepancies through reforming the global financing and trade systems and observing climate justice.** We need to diligently and genuinely be willing to address gaps in people's access to development benefits. This is equally a national and a global agenda.

Our mere right to life on Earth is at stake and, as the Secretary-General put it, the clock is ticking and is ticking loudly.

Thank you very much for your attention, and I look forward to discussing these issues further.