

## 45th session of the Human Rights Council

### Biennial panel discussion on the right to development

*Theme: COVID-19 and the right to development: we are all in this together*

*Concept note (draft as of 9 September 2020)*

- Date and venue:** 17 September 2020, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., Assembly Hall, Palais des Nations, Geneva  
(will be broadcast live and archived at <http://webtv.un.org>)
- Objectives:** This biennial panel discussion on the right to development will focus on strengthening international cooperation and solidarity in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. It will consider ways to operationalize the right to development (which is premised on the duty of international cooperation and solidarity) to advance global solidarity and shared responsibilities, and to strengthen international cooperation, unity and solidarity to operationalize the right to development in responding to COVID-19. **The objectives are:**
- **To enhance understanding of the right to development, international cooperation and solidarity** with a view to their realization including through United Nations system-wide collaboration and collective action by all stakeholders
  - **To consider ways to strengthen global solidarity and shared responsibilities** including through collaboration in identifying health and socio-economic needs, exchange of information, scientific knowledge and best practices
  - **To discuss joint action** by States, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, academia and other stakeholders including through North-South, South-South and Triangular Cooperation at the national, regional and global levels
  - **To identify opportunities** to advance global partnership and means of implementation for sustainable development and its financing through integrated approaches and coherent and coordinated action at all levels
  - **To share good practices and success stories** in operationalizing the right to development, international cooperation and solidarity including through South-South cooperation, multi-stakeholder partnerships and other collaboration.
- Chair:** H.E. Ms. Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger, President of the Human Rights Council
- Opening statement:** Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Video messages:** H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Maldives  
Mr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization
- Panellists:** H.E. Mr. Vaqif Sadiqov, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva  
Ms. Isabelle Durant, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development  
Mr. Carlos Correa, Executive Director of the South Centre  
Ms. Maria Mercedes Rossi, Main representative of the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII to the United Nations in Geneva and Coordinator of the Working Group on the Right to Development of the Forum of Catholic-Inspired NGOs in Geneva
- Outcome:**
- This biennial panel discussion on the right to development will focus on strengthening international cooperation and solidarity in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. It will consider ways to operationalize the right to development (which is premised on the duty of international cooperation and solidarity) to advance global solidarity and shared responsibilities, as well as to strengthen international cooperation and solidarity to operationalize the right to development in responding to COVID-19.
- The anticipated outcomes of this discussion include:**

- **Enhanced understanding of the right to development, international cooperation and solidarity** towards their operationalization including through United Nations system-wide collaboration and collective action by all stakeholders
- **Suggestions for strengthened global solidarity and shared responsibilities** including through collaboration in identifying health and socio-economic needs, exchange of information, scientific knowledge and best practices
- **Identification of opportunities for joint and coordinated action** by States, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, academia and other stakeholders including through North-South, South-South and Triangular Cooperation at the national, regional and global levels
- **Dissemination of good practices and success stories** in operationalizing the right to development, international cooperation and solidarity including through South-South cooperation, multi-stakeholder partnerships and other forms of collaboration
- **Recommendations to advance global partnership and means of implementation** for sustainable development and its financing through integrated approaches and coherent and coordinated action at all levels
- **A summary report** on the panel discussion to the Human Rights Council

**Mandate:** In its resolution [42/23](#) on the right to development, the Human Rights Council decided to organize a biennial panel discussion on the right to development, starting at its forty-fifth session, with the participation of Member States, relevant United Nations bodies, agencies and other relevant stakeholders. The Council also requested the conference services to make the biennial panel discussion fully accessible to persons with disabilities, including sign language interpretation, and requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on the panel discussion and to submit it to the Human Rights Council.

**Format:** The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including opening statements, panellists' presentations and their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two slots of interventions from the floor for States and observers (2x12), national human rights institutions (2x1) and non-governmental organizations (2x2).

The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet.

**Accessibility (to be confirmed):** In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, this panel discussion will be made accessible to persons with disabilities. During the debate, international sign interpretation and real-time captioning will be provided and webcasted. The accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities is available for further information (available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/Accessibility.aspx>).

**Background:** As humanity faces the profound, unprecedented and multiple crises from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), "more than ever before, we need solidarity, hope and the political will and cooperation to see this crisis through together".<sup>1</sup> The pandemic is exposing and exacerbating inequalities within and between countries. Poorer nations are facing 'a perfect storm' of collapsing global trade, falling remittances, sharp reversals of capital flows, and currency depreciation. The debt burdens and debt servicing

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, "Shared responsibility, global solidarity: responding to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19", p. 2, [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg\\_report\\_socio-economic\\_impact\\_of\\_covid19.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_report_socio-economic_impact_of_covid19.pdf)

obligations of many developing countries - low and middle income countries and emerging economies - deny them of breathing space, undermining their ability to respond, and reducing their fiscal space to deliver on economic and social rights including food and water, health and education. Legacies of structural adjustment through decades of austerity in resource-constrained countries have left public health systems unable to cope, curtailed labour rights and weakened social protection schemes. Worldwide, millions suffer from the multiple effects of the pandemic – particularly women, who are heavily concentrated in the informal and service sectors.

In an interdependent world, the health of all its people is only as strong as its weakest health system. As no country can beat this alone – to end the pandemic, address its socio-economic impacts and recover with resilience, saving lives and livelihoods, societies and economies – the Secretary-General of the United Nations has led calls for global solidarity and shared responsibilities to Build Back Better. He has called for a focus on people, especially the vulnerable and marginalized – notably people living in poverty, women, young people, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, minorities, indigenous peoples, low-wage workers, the displaced, the homeless, migrants and refugees.

Global solidarity and shared responsibilities call for renewed multilateralism, political will and strong leadership reflected in concerted action at all levels. As highlighted by the Secretary-General in “The highest aspiration: A call to action for human rights,”<sup>2</sup> human rights-centred collective action by all stakeholders – States, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and all others – is key. So too, human solidarity between generations, voice, rights and agency of people at the centre.<sup>3</sup> The Secretary-General<sup>4</sup> has called for global solutions to COVID-19, echoed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights,<sup>5</sup> the General Assembly<sup>6</sup> and the entire United Nations system. This includes pleas for a global ceasefire<sup>7</sup> to ‘silence the guns’, and for easing of sanctions.<sup>8</sup> Global solidarity is indispensable to debt relief<sup>9</sup> and Financing for Sustainable Development including financial and technical support, investment in the Sustainable Development Goals, inclusive growth, job creation and prevention of illicit financial flows.<sup>10</sup> International cooperation is also essential in the digital sphere, in sharing the benefits of scientific and technological progress and in developing a vaccine and treatment for the pandemic as a global public good, ensuring transfer of essential medical supplies and equipment, and addressing intellectual property issues.<sup>11</sup>

COVID-19 mandates a new human, social and international solidarity. It calls on ‘We the Peoples’ to recommit to the spirit and values, principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, to ensure global solutions to global challenges; to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which calls on all human beings to act towards one another in a spirit of solidarity and entitles all to a social and international order in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be realized; and to the United Nations

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<sup>2</sup> Available at

[https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The\\_Highest\\_Aspiration\\_A\\_Call\\_To\\_Action\\_For\\_Human\\_Right\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See [www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_framework\\_report\\_on\\_covid-19.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_framework_report_on_covid-19.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Available at <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus>

<sup>5</sup> Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/COVID-19.aspx>; also see [A/HRC/44/28](https://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2020/20200328.hrc4428.html).

<sup>6</sup> General Assembly resolution [74/270](https://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2020/20200328.hrc4428.html), “Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)” and General Assembly resolution [74/274](https://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2020/20200328.hrc4428.html) “International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19”.

<sup>7</sup> Available at <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2020-03-23/transcript-of-the-secretary-generals-virtual-press-encounter-the-appeal-for-global-ceasefire>

<sup>8</sup> Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25744>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_debt\\_relief\\_and\\_covid\\_april\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_debt_relief_and_covid_april_2020.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/financing-development>

<sup>11</sup> See [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_human\\_rights\\_and\\_covid\\_23\\_april\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_human_rights_and_covid_23_april_2020.pdf)

Declaration on the Right to Development<sup>12</sup> which is underscored by the duty of international cooperation.

The Declaration on the Right to Development proclaimed development to be a human right of all individuals and peoples, with active, free and meaningful participation in development and fair distribution of its benefits, both locally and globally. It placed on States and on the international community, duties to make national and international development policies aimed at the constant improvement of human well-being and to cooperate to ensure peace, human rights and development, and to eliminate obstacles to development. It called for international cooperation for disarmament and the use of the released resources for development. The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action reaffirmed that the right to development must be fulfilled to meet equitably the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.<sup>13</sup>

Joint and collaborative action in solidarity mandates operationalizing the right to development to support an enabling environment for sustainable development, global partnership and means of implementation for all people in all countries - including in Africa, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States, and countries in conflict and post-conflict.<sup>14</sup> This means effectively strengthening all forms of international cooperation including South-South and Triangular Cooperation to Build Back Better at the national, regional and global levels. The right to development is key to a united response to COVID-19: We are all in this together.

**Background documents:**

- [1986 Declaration on the Right to Development](#)
- [1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action](#)
- Consolidated reports of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner on the right to development ([A/HRC/39/18](#), [A/HRC/42/29](#), [A/HRC/45/21](#))
- Reports of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner on international cooperation in the field of human rights ([A/74/351](#), [A/HRC/44/28](#))
- Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution [70/1](#) of 25 September 2015)
- [2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development](#)
- [Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19](#)
- [A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19](#)
- [Debt and COVID-19: A Global Response in Solidarity](#)
- [COVID-19 and Human Rights - We are all in this together](#)

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<sup>12</sup> General Assembly resolution [41/128](#).

<sup>13</sup> Principle 3, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development ([A/CONF.151/26](#)); and paragraph 11, Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action ([A/CONF.157/23](#)).

<sup>14</sup> See para. 16, General Assembly resolution [70/1](#), 'Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'.