

Working Group on the Right to Development
The sixteenth annual session
27 April – 1 May 2015



Opening statement by
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United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Palais des Nations, Salle XVI

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to join you at the opening of the sixteenth session of the Working Group on the Right to Development. This is a meeting of vital importance to determining the future course of action for ensuring effective operationalization of the right to development.

We are living in a rapidly changing world. Economic and political power dynamics are shifting. Africa is moving closer together through the negotiation of a Continental Free Trade Agreement – with a long term vision of regional integration in the form of an African Economic Community and the creation of a Pan-African Economic and Monetary Union by 2028. The United States of America and the European Union are negotiating a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement and negotiations are underway on a Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement between various States. New international infrastructure investment arrangements are taking up operations, such as the New Development Bank of the BRICS countries, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Infrastructure Fund to fund long-term investment in infrastructure.

At the same time, poverty, mass unemployment, growing inequality within and between countries, environmental degradation, an out-of-date international economic order, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, armed conflicts, violent extremism and terrorism are all working to undercut global efforts to advance peace and security, human rights and development, which all meet in the right to development.

Indeed, for millions of people around the world, the right to development remains at the level of a mere political commitment, and a distant hope.

No doubt, these challenges are difficult to overcome and their human rights implications are severe, as they continue to undercut human, socio-economic and ecological wellbeing, security and even survival.

In my view, however, there is reason for optimism.

In September, United Nations leaders will gather in New York for a summit to adopt the post-2015 Development Agenda.

Encouragingly, the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the Open Working Group reflect the substantive content of several human rights obligations, including of the right to development. The draft text of the solemn declaration, which is to precede these goals and targets, makes it amply clear that the post-2015 Development Agenda is to be guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and grounded in international human rights standards, including the right to development.

OHCHR has been working to integrate all human rights, including the right to development, into the post-2015 Development Agenda as well as into the two other main international development processes this year, namely the Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa in July and the Climate Change Conference in Paris in December.

Adopting a financing framework that lives up to the ambition of the post-2015 Development Agenda is of paramount importance to mobilizing the means of implementation for these challenging goals and targets.

During the Human Rights Council panel discussion on human rights and climate change in March this year, participants recommended urgent, collective and concrete action including steps to realize the right to development, in order that all may achieve sustainable development, taking due account of human rights and of climate vulnerabilities and injustices.

The new, legally-binding agreement on climate change, to be adopted in Paris, must be fair and equitable, recognising the legitimate development aspirations of people in developing countries and supporting their transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy.

Next year, the international community will mark the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development.

Anniversaries provide an opportunity to look back at past achievements, to reflect on lessons learned and to evaluate what went well and where progress is lagging.

Here, I would like to welcome your initiative aimed at making this Working Group more effective and efficient. We have taken note of the draft framework developed by the Chairperson-Rapporteur, Ms. Tamara Kunanayakam, and the concrete suggestions she has put forward with regard to the working methods of this Working Group.

Equally fundamentally, you are called upon to reflect critically on the Working Group's methods of work, and to assess whether they are adequate to the task of making this Working Group relevant in today's world, including in the context of the implementation of the sustainable development goals and targets.

This Working Group was set up 17 years ago in order to monitor and review progress in the promotion and implementation of the right to development. In going forward, it is of utmost importance for this Group to consider and agree on efficient and effective working methods that will help equip the international community to cope with the ever increasing challenges to the realization of the right to development.

You have a busy schedule ahead. It is my sincere hope that you will have a fruitful meeting. In this, we commit the full support of the Office, and I wish you all success in your deliberations.

Thank you very much.