

**Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development
The twentieth annual session**



**Opening statement by
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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, I am honoured to welcome you to the twentieth session of the Working Group on the Right to Development. The High Commissioner wanted very much to be here with you today, but regrettably is not in Geneva.

She has asked me to assure you of her commitment and support to the effective implementation of the right to development and looks forward to a future opportunity to engage with this Group.

Under the Declaration on the Right to Development, States committed to formulate appropriate national development policies that aim at the constant improvement of the well-being of everyone, on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of its benefits.

They also committed to co-operate to ensure development and to eliminate obstacles to development, notably to take steps, individually and collectively, to formulate international development policies to facilitate the full realization of the right to development.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a blueprint for realizing sustainable development everywhere and for everyone.

Both, the right to development and the 2030 Agenda, recognize the importance of institutions, laws and policies for the realization of sustainable development. They position the individual as the active participant of development and its ultimate beneficiary. And the 2030 Agenda is premised on a pledge to “leave no one behind” and “to reach the furthest behind first”. Alarming, we are already off track to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Inequality threatens sustainable development with 26 individuals owning the same wealth as 3.6 billion others, the poorer half of humanity. In addition, over 700 million people live in extreme poverty.

Corruption is reversing development gains, as do illicit financial flows, tax havens, tax avoidance and tax evasion.

Developing countries lose over 170 billion USD in tax revenues each year, undermining domestic resource mobilization and undercutting people's access to food, water, health and education.

Unfair trade barriers perpetuate inequalities and intellectual property rights can deprive people's access to the medicines they need.

Vulnerable and marginalized groups including the poor, minorities and indigenous peoples, as well as women and children, are often left behind.

Climate change threatens the survival of entire communities, peoples and nations. And millions are forced to flee conflict, crises and poverty, in search of hope and dignity in distant places.

We need renewed commitment, bold decisions and strong leadership to make progress. We cannot be led by short-sighted and unambitious efforts.

The right to development has to be at the centre of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The right to development is a human right. It is a promise to people locked out of development, particularly those who are most excluded, disadvantaged and marginalised.

The right to development is key to addressing the structural, underlying causes that lead to or perpetuate global inequality. This goes beyond maximizing the financial resources available domestically and through international cooperation.

Underdevelopment, inequality, discrimination and poverty are not unavoidable. They reflect political choices. Systemic shortcomings in our prevailing economic model and in our global governance system result in too many people being left behind, unable to enjoy the benefits of development on a fair and equitable basis.

At the national level, it is essential to identify and prioritize the needs of people in particular those groups who are disadvantaged and vulnerable to systemic and intersectional forms of discrimination. Inclusive and more equitable development is not only the right thing to do, it is more sustainable.

Scientific and technological innovations can play an important role in making the right to development a reality for all. Technology, if managed well, can contribute greatly to development. But without the right regulatory framework and enabling domestic and international environments, we see that technology risks to further deepen existing patterns of discrimination, leaving large numbers of people behind.

Development goes beyond economic and material wealth. It is about empowering everyone to make their own choices and seize opportunities to live a life in dignity.

Building upon the key attributes of leaving no one behind, the right to development goes further to direct analysis towards root causes of multi-dimensional poverty, focusing on intersecting axes of discrimination affecting those most marginalised, enabling the vulnerable and marginalised to fully participate in society and empower them to shape their own future.

Sustainable development also requires us to protect our habitat, our environment and reduce our carbon footprint.

Tens of thousands of young people are demonstrating for climate action in a movement known as #FridaysForFuture. This movement that began in August 2018, after 15 year old Greta Thunberg sat in

front of the Swedish parliament every schoolday for three weeks, to protest against the lack of action on the climate crisis.

It is worth repeating once again that we are the first generation that fully understands climate change and the last generation that can effectively address it.

We need decisive action to address the two biggest challenges of our times, climate change and global inequality.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Working Group. This Working Group documented a wealth of research, analysis and guidance with expert input and support from the OHCHR, which enabled us to have a better, more comprehensive understanding of development.

I call upon you to work together in the spirit of urgency and collaboration needed and owed to future and present generation.

Thank you.