

Response to the questionnaire on the contribution of development to the enjoyment of human rights, pursuant to A/HRC/RES/41/19

Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

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This document sets out a response to one of the principal questions posed by the questionnaire, which is “the contribution of development in promoting and protecting human rights, including its context, concept, specific aspects and means of implementation”. This response should be read in conjunction with the two attachments listed below.

In exploring what contribution development could make to the enjoyment of human rights, it is vital to first examine what “development” means and whom it is intended to benefit. The traditional model of development placed much emphasis on economic growth *per se*, as if it was a *sine qua non* of development and poverty reduction. However, empirical evidence shows that economic growth also produces significant negative externalities, such as environmental degradation and income inequalities, which pose a serious threat to the enjoyment of human rights. And people living in poverty are often the main victims of the negative externalities, although they contribute least to them.

In the face of economic recessions and a setback in the fight against poverty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, world governments are at a critical juncture to rethink the prevailing development model and to reflect what type of development is needed to truly “build back better”. In his report to the 75th session of the General Assembly in 2020 ([A/75/181/REV.1](#)), the Special Rapporteur stressed that development cannot be conflated with economic growth and that the existing development trajectories need to be redefined in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals and the full respect for human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic provides a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” to pursue an alternative development model, which is centred on the fight against poverty, inequalities and climate change. This model entails a “just transition” to low-carbon economies that respect biodiversity, while at the same time creating employment opportunities for people with low levels of qualification and ensuring access to goods and services essential to the enjoyment of human rights. The Special Rapporteur has identified the following six components of a human rights-compliant “just transition”: (a) financing the economic recovery through progressive taxation schemes; (b) protecting workers and communities affected by the ecological transformation from the impacts on their livelihoods; and (c) investing in areas such as energy, buildings, food and mobility, to capture the “triple dividend” of a cleaner environment, decent jobs and affordable goods and services; as well as moving away from unsustainable consumption-driven growth and the extractive and waste economy towards (d) prioritizing the reduction of inequalities over the unsustainable quest for economic growth; (e) fighting against the premature obsolescence of consumer goods; and finally (f) ensuring that the design and implementation of national action plans are based on social dialogue and the participation of people living in poverty. Thus, the Special Rapporteur considers that development can greatly contribute to the enjoyment of human rights, but only if it is underpinned by deliberate measures to mitigate climate change, halt the erosion of biodiversity, and open up opportunities to enhance the enjoyment of the human rights of people living in poverty.

Attachments:

- Report of the Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, *The “just transition” in the economic recovery: eradicating poverty within planetary boundaries*, 7 October 2020, [A/75/181/REV.1](#).
- A response submitted by the previous Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston to the Advisory Committee, pursuant to a Human Rights Council resolution 35/21 on “the contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights” (30 May 2018).