

INFORMATION NOTE

The Right to Development and Peace

The United Nations is founded on three mutually reinforcing pillars: peace and security, development, and human rights. Conflict has devastating effects on development and the fulfilment of human rights. Studies have found, for example, that agricultural production is an average of 12.3 percent lower in conflict-affected countries than in those same countries during peacetime, severely impacting the right to food and food security.¹ Food insecurity undermines the capability of a society, affecting vulnerable populations disproportionately – such as women and children. According to UNICEF, 230 million children were living in war-torn countries as of 2014 and have been subject to related human rights violations. Studies have also found that access to education and other public services is severely constrained in conflict-affected countries. In a UNDP study of 29 conflict-affected countries, “just 3 reported any growth in GDP during the conflict and 9 experienced GDP declines of over 50 percent.”²

Military spending has adverse effects on the enjoyment of all human rights and prevents States from realizing internationally recognized development goals.³ As the Secretary-General has said, “the world is over-armed and peace is underfunded.” Moreover, the economic costs of wars and violence can transcend generations. The World Future Council has noted that worldwide, annually, over “1.7 trillion USD are spent on arms and the military, and... by redirecting only 10 percent of these expenses world hunger and extreme poverty could be eliminated.”⁴

International obligations to build peaceful, inclusive, prosperous and just societies

The 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development enshrines an “inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.” It recognizes that international peace and security are essential to achieve this objective. Article 7 of the Declaration calls on all States to “promote the establishment, maintenance and strengthening of international peace and security and, to that end, [to] do their utmost to achieve general and complete disarmament under effective international control, as well as to ensure that the resources released by effective disarmament measures are used for comprehensive development, in particular that of the developing countries.” The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights further calls for States to mobilize maximum available resources for the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

As a whole, the Declaration’s vision of development addresses many of the root causes of conflict establishing a normative framework through which conflict and militarization can be transformed into international cooperation and human-centred development with a view to achieving equality, justice and peace. The 2030

¹ Simmons, Emmy, “Harvesting Peace: Food Security, Conflict, and Cooperation” *Environmental Change & Security Program Report*, Vol. 14, no. 3, available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/HarvestingPeace.pdf>.

² *Ibid*, citing UNDP, *Beyond the Midpoint: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals*. (New York, 2010).

³ See, e.g., Oxfam, *Shooting Down the MDGs: How irresponsible arms transfers undermine development goals* (London, 2008), available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/shooting-down-mdgs>.

⁴ World Future Council, “Disarmament for Sustainable Development,” <http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/breadtank.html>, last visited 10 November 2015.

Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, Sustainable Development Goal 16 calls on States to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development emphasizes that conflict poses a direct threat to development and calls for the mobilization of resources for peacebuilding and development. These instruments clearly establish that States have human rights obligations requiring them to prioritize funding to fulfil the right to development for all persons and to pursue peace, security and disarmament.

Disarming for the Right to Development and Lasting Peace

While conflict threatens both development and the enjoyment of human rights, development and human rights are themselves essential to conflict prevention. The realization of human rights and of inclusive, equitable, human-centred development can alleviate root causes of conflict and enable peaceful and just methods of resolving tensions. Through international cooperation, States can capitalize on the savings from disarmament and global peace to further development and the realization of all human rights for all. The United Nations can play a key role in this effort by providing a space for peaceful conflict resolution and dispute settlement, and for the negotiation of disarmament treaties, as well as promoting global development and human rights.

The United Nations recognizes disarmament and development as two of the international community’s most important tools for ensuring freedom from fear and freedom from want for all persons. As former United States President Dwight Eisenhower once noted, over-investment in arms is “a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.” In order to realize the ultimate objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and leave no one behind, the world must move towards disarmament and reduction of military spending along with the corresponding reallocation of funds to fulfil the right to development for all persons.

During the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development in 2016, the United Nations Human Rights office (OHCHR) seeks to raise awareness, enhance understanding and promote dialogue on the right to development. More information including the text of the Declaration is available on the OHCHR website:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Development/Pages/DevelopmentIndex.aspx>

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