

Virtual CSW68 Global Consultation Day
“Nurturing equality and peace: Addressing poverty and food insecurity”

Keynote remarks by Ms. Isabelle Durant

Thursday, 29 February 2024
4:00 - 6:00 pm CET

Thanks for the invitation and congratulations for this initiative.

There is no doubt that the right to development is one of the tools that can help eradicate poverty, and in particular the poverty of women, who pay an ever-higher price for these situations.

But what is it all about?

Let me briefly remind what right to development means.

Since 1986, the right to development was declared as a right of people, (individually and collectively) to:

- actively participate
- Contribute to
- And enjoy development

A Declaration on the Right to Development implies that so far, this right is not binding.

The fight to make the right to development a binding treaty is not illegitimate and a negotiation will start in New York.

But all of us we know that a binding text cannot be considered a guarantee. It is only a tool among others, because even international law can be challenged or violated. We see it every day.

As I just mentioned, participate in and contribute to development, that is exactly what women are doing, everywhere and every time.

But they are enjoying development in a much less degree and almost never at all.

The right to development implies a large spectrum of responsibilities and duties that have to address this persistent gender injustice and inequality, and in the meantime, a gender-based development has to become a practice.

I would like to focus on 3 issues that we could prioritize from the most comprehensive perspective, to the most local.

1. Financing development

We know the problems that developing countries are facing regarding financing their development, education, health, ecological transition which affect them the most, particularly in this post COVID-19 period.

In UNCTAD, of which I was the Deputy Secretary General, we worked a lot on what is today, nearly unanimously, considered as a condition for development, namely: the reform of international financial institutions.

This requires a huge reform of decision-making processes in these financial institutions to allow the restructuring of debt, de-risking investment, reallocation of special drawing rights within the IMF, going beyond the GDP and take into consideration specific vulnerabilities, adaptation of the rules in the regional development banks, and so forth.

But even if this reform is mentioned now in each speech, there is a long way to go, a lot of political resistances, like in any model change.

Nevertheless, we can count on a few strong and engaged women on these issues, like for instance Mia Mottley and her Bridgetown initiative, or feminist economists, who are leaders in these field.

But we all know that better financing for development is not synonymous of a gender-based development.

Which brings me to my next point:

2. More women in decision making process at various levels and better access to ground and to finance for women entrepreneurs and projects driven by women.

In addition, we need more (more is not appropriated, because in these processes, there is often no one single women around the table) women in the political and peace processes.

Women are the first victims in conflict, as it is the case today in Soudan, in Gaza, in Ukraine, in DRC; and they are never involved in the negotiating process during, and at the end, of the conflict, and in monitoring the implementation of the peace agreement.

At the front line of today's multiple and converging crises, women human rights defenders courageously and tirelessly make an essential contribution to local, regional and global initiatives in favour of peace and security.

They do so loudly and softly, on the streets and in their homes, fighting against the weight of centuries of discrimination, disrespect, and violence.

3. My third priority is related to all women in rural areas of developing countries. I propose to support actively a very concrete proposal which can deeply change women's life and women's engagement.

More than one in three of the world's population use unsafe fuels for their stoves. Those 2.5 billion people are either burning kerosene or biomass – a collective term for fuels like wood, charcoal and animal dung.

These are both inefficient and harmful, especially when used indoors with poor ventilation. This is a key contributor to climate change and sea level rise. Trees and shrubs tend to be cut down at a much faster rate than their regrowth, leaving forests destroyed while trees and other plants are vital for absorbing and storing CO₂ from the atmosphere.

Inhaling the resulting smoke and fumes causes huge health problems and it's estimated that 3.2

million people (a vast majority of women and their children on their back) die prematurely every year because of household air pollution.

Gender norms (that we have to change!) and expectations around domestic responsibilities mean that cooking falls mainly to women and girls. Unfortunately, this means they have less time available to study, carry out paid work or engage in their community.

Today, the #metoo movement calls to move the lines on dignity and respect for women. The threshold of tolerance slowly decreases. But we have now to support and activate a #metoo economic and politic, in order to address women poverty and gender equality as well.

Thank you,