

South Centre Statement during the 12th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development (EMRTD), at the interactive dialogue on the upcoming 40th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development

28 October 2025, Geneva

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The South Centre welcomes this timely and essential dialogue.

As we prepare to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development, we must recognise that the right to development is a fundamental, inalienable human right whose implementation remains the most critical challenge for achieving global justice, equity, and the 2030 Agenda.

The full realisation of the Right to Development (RtD) currently faces significant systemic barriers, including an inequitable global economic architecture, an unsustainable debt burden, the erosion of policy space for development, and the impact of unilateral coercive measures.

A primary challenge is the **fragmentation of the international system**. The lack of cooperation and coordination among different branches of international law and institutions has created systemic incoherence between the multilateral rules governing trade, investment, and finance and States' human rights obligations.

The indivisible nature of the Right to Development has an enormous potential to serve as the normative **bridge to overcome this fragmentation**. It is the legal and ethical framework required to re-integrate economic governance with human rights and sustainable development.

Therefore, as we reflect on 40 years of an implementation gap, ongoing reform processes must be critically assessed. Future reforms to the **World Trade Organization and the broader United Nations development system** cannot ignore the principles of the Right to Development, in particular social justice and equity, international cooperation and participation. These frameworks must be consciously shaped to actively contribute to the effective realisation of the Right to Development by correcting existing asymmetries and fostering an enabling international environment.

To this end, the South Centre wishes to make the following pledge:

The South Centre will continue to work with its Member States and other developing countries for the adoption of an international covenant that recognises the Right to Development as an inalienable human right and holds States legally accountable to upholding the duty to cooperate for its realisation.

This duty to cooperate is the key mechanism for addressing the systemic barriers that developing countries face.

Let the 40th anniversary of the Declaration serve as the political catalyst to finalise the draft covenant, transforming its powerful principles into binding, actionable, and enforceable commitments.

Thank you.