



Sovereignty and self-determination over natural resources in times of conflicts, climate change and (neo)colonialism

10 March 2026, 12-1pm
Concordia 1, Building A, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Permanent sovereignty over natural wealth and resources is an established principle of international law. As part of decolonisation, the UN General Assembly Resolution [523 \(VI\)](#) of 1952 recognised the right of under-developed countries to utilise freely their natural resources to achieve economic development. This right was reaffirmed in multiple subsequent resolutions and declarations. For example, Resolution [1803 \(XVII\)](#) of 1962 stated that the “right of peoples and nations to permanent sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources must be exercised in the interest of their national development and of the well-being of the people of the State concerned.” The 1974 [Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order](#) also recognised the full sovereignty of every State over its natural resources and all economic activities.

The principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources is closely related to the right of peoples to self-determination recognised, among others, by the UN Charter. Article 1 of both the ICCPR and ICESCR elaborates the linkages between peoples’ right to self-determination and freedom over natural wealth and resources with a view to achieve political, economic, social and cultural development. The human right to development brings together all these aspects. Article 1(2) of the 1986 [Declaration on the Right to Development](#) provides that the right to development “also implies the full realization of the right of peoples to self-determination, which includes, subject to the relevant provisions of both International Covenants on Human Rights, the exercise of their inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources.”

However, permanent sovereignty and self-determination over natural resources are coming under renewed threats in recent years due to several intertwined factors. Both scarcity and abundance of natural resources are drivers of many violent conflicts. Climate change provides another trigger, as the urgent need for a transition towards renewable energy is pushing countries to compete for control over critical minerals. Then there are neo-colonial trends – including “green colonialism” and unilateral coercive measures – where States or their corporate hands are trying to acquire natural resources of other sovereign States by any means and without any meaningful participation of the relevant people in these decisions.

Against this backdrop, the side event will offer a timely opportunity to discuss some of these complex issues in a constructive way. It is part of the initiatives of the [UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development](#) to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the 1986 Declaration. The side event is co-organized by the Special Rapporteur and the [South centre](#).

Objectives

This side event aims to:



- Reinforce the importance of sovereignty and self-determination over natural resources to realise all human rights, including the right to development, and the Sustainable Development Goals
- Explore ways to strengthen adherence to the UN Charter-based international order, including respect for sovereign equality, territorial integrity, peace and security and self-determination
- Examine ways to ensure that natural resources are used in line with the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the rights of future generations and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities
- Highlight the role of international cooperation, including in relation to regulating the overseas activities of corporations

Moderator

Ms Federica Donati, Officer-in-Charge, Special Procedures Branch, OHCHR

Panellists

1. H.E. Ambassador Rodolfo Benítez Verson, Permanent Representative of Cuba to the UN Geneva
2. H.E. Abdallah Possi, Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the UN in Geneva
3. Mr Ryad Awaja, Deputy Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to UNCTAD and WHO
4. Dr Carlos María Correa, Executive Director, South Centre
5. Ms Ana Maria Suarez Franco, Secretary General, FIAN International
6. Prof Surya Deva, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development