



General Assembly

Distr.: General
13 September 2024

English and French only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-seventh session

9 September–9 October 2024

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Centre Europe - tiers monde, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 August 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The United Nations Summit of the Future and the Right to Development

The UN Summit for the Future will be held in New York in September 2024 with the aim of "strengthening cooperation" and "bridging the gaps in global governance " (1).

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the creation of the UN (2020), the UN General Assembly asked its Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres, to identify the gaps in the multilateral system coupled with a multidimensional global crisis and to recommend solutions for the future in the context of the COVID -19 pandemic (2). Following this request, the Secretary-General presented his report entitled "Our Common Agenda" (3). Published in 2021 and intended as a roadmap to prepare for the Summit of the Future, this report points to fundamental issues such as worsening poverty, conflict prevention and the environmental crisis. While advocating global solidarity, the report states that "Our Common Agenda is first and foremost a programme for action, aimed at accelerating the implementation of existing agreements, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals".

Sustainable Development Goals Doomed to Failure

The avowed aim of this summit is to "save" the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), even though their failure is now programmed. Indeed, following the UN report on the SDGs, made public in June 2024, the Secretary General acknowledges that: "This report is known as the annual review of the SDGs and it shows that the world is failing (4)." According to this report "nearly half of the 17 goals show minimal or moderate progress, while more than a third have stalled or gone backwards, since they were adopted by UN member states in 2015 to bring peace and prosperity to people and the planet (5)".

For Centre Europe - tiers monde (CETIM), this fiasco comes as no surprise. As we have already stated on numerous occasions, the SDGs were doomed to failure from the outset for several reasons. Firstly, the achievement of the SDGs depends on the goodwill of governments, so there is no way of forcing them to commit to their implementation. Secondly, the SDGs do not call into question the current economic and trade policies that are at the root of maldevelopment, while inequalities continue to grow in the world, to such an extent that today the basic needs (food, drinking water, housing, health, social security, etc.) of almost half of humanity are not being met. Thirdly, the achievement of the SDGs is entrusted mainly to the private sector, i.e. to transnational corporations (TNCs) and to a financial system that is out of control. Yet the problems posed by most of these entities, motivated solely by immediate and maximum gains, are well known: failure to respect human rights, labour and environmental standards (6). What's more, to maximize their profits and escape all control, TNCs use complex legal arrangements that make it difficult to trace the chain of responsibility. Worse still, these entities have become a threat to democracy, the sovereignty of States and the right of peoples to decide their own future. Fourthly, so-called "development aid" from the countries of the Global North is conditional on the donors making a profit. In other words, what is given with one hand is taken back with the other, without necessarily meeting the needs of the populations concerned.

The Summit of the Future Compromised

In this context, trying to salvage the credibility of the SDGs by organizing a UN summit without questioning the underlying causes of their failure is absurd, to say the least. Moreover, the two initial draft declarations of the Summit on which we were consulted confirm our fears, given that they contain nothing but empty formulas and mention neither the root causes of the failure of the SDGs nor the imperative need to implement economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. These draft declarations continue to praise the current world trade system as an "engine for sustainable development" without any criticism, and do not even mention the impact of the international financial architecture on development, which has led 85% of the world's population under the regimes of austerity.

It should be noted that the proposals we made with a group of civil society organizations before and after the civil society conference held in Nairobi in May 2024 were simply ignored.

Against a backdrop of rising military spending and the arms race, massive human rights violations, large-scale land grabbing, food insecurity and the climate crisis, neo-colonial strategies and foreign interference, and in the face of corporate impunity, the mention of inequality or "sustainable development" in the draft final declaration is a face-saving alibi. It can therefore be said that the stated aim of the New York summit to provide "multilateral solutions for a better future" is well and truly compromised.

What Can be Done?

If the majority of UN member states want to save this summit and free themselves from the TNC lobby, it is imperative that they address fundamental issues such as the in-depth restructuring of international financial institutions, the introduction of tax justice (through progressive taxation of wealth and financial transactions, capital controls, etc.), food sovereignty and the development of public services (water, health, education, transport, energy, etc.). They must also ask themselves how to put an end to all-out privatization, how to combat property speculation and corruption, and how to cancel illegitimate debt. They must also actively promote peace and conflict prevention, prohibit unilateral coercive measures, and break with the precepts of the "Washington Consensus", which promotes the myth that economic growth leads to prosperity. Finally, UN member states must allow people and citizens to participate in decision-making and work actively towards a legally binding framework for the activities of TNCs (7).

In this context, the effective implementation of the right to development is essential. In addition to being a recognized human right, the right to development offers another approach. This right is not limited to the economic field, but also includes social, cultural and political development. Individuals and peoples are both the subject of this right and the central actors in the development of policies and programs to realize it. The right to self-determination and the sovereignty of peoples over their natural resources and their future, essential conditions for the very existence of any community, are at the heart of the right to development, which concerns the populations of the South as much as those of the North.

(1) <https://unric.org/fr/sommet-de-avenir/>

(2) A/RES/75/1, 28 September 2020.

(3) https://www.un.org/fr/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Notre_programme_commun.pdf

(4) <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2024/06/1146731>

(5) *Idem*.

(6) Transnational corporations' impunity, CETIM, Geneva, 2016,

<https://www.cetim.ch/product/transnational-corporations-impunity/>

(7) On this subject, see *Maldevelopment: claims and proposals for breaking with it*, CETIM, Geneva, 2023, <https://www.cetim.ch/maldevelopment-claims-and-proposals/>