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Human rights must be integrated into sustainable development, UN official stresses



High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay. UN Photo/Violaine Martin

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Countries must integrate human rights into the upcoming sustainable development conference taking place in Rio de Janeiro, as well as its outcome, a top United Nations official stressed today, warning that not doing so will undercut efforts to advance socio-economic development and protect the environment.

“Strategies based on the narrow pursuit of economic growth without due regard for equity and related environmental, social and human rights considerations, will both fail in their economic

objectives, and risk damaging the planet and the fundamental rights of people,” said the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay.

She said in a [letter](#) to all Member States that, regrettably, the draft outcome document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development ([Rio+20](#)), to be held in Brazil in June, fails to take sufficient account of human rights imperatives, according to a [news release](#) issued by her office.

“In recent years, people have taken to the streets in every region of the world, passionately demanding their fundamental human rights – in many instances at great personal risk,” Ms. Pillay noted. “For Rio+20 to be successful, its outcome must ensure that explicit human rights safeguards are in place.”

The High Commissioner said that States must ensure that explicit attention is paid to protecting the human rights to food, water and sanitation, health, housing and education, and participation in public affairs.

“A strong outcome at Rio, seamlessly integrating the environmental, social, economic, and human rights elements of sustainable development, will do much to help us advance our collective mission to create a world free from fear and from want,” she added.

There were numerous examples of projects aimed at sustainable development seriously impinging on the rights of already vulnerable communities, leading to landlessness, homelessness and economic dispossession, she pointed out. They have resulted in the exclusion of women from decision-making, the diversion of scarce food-growing lands for the production of biofuels and threats to the lands and livelihoods of indigenous peoples from some emission reduction schemes.

“Simply put, participatory, accountable, non-discriminatory and empowering development is more effective, more just and ultimately more sustainable,” said the High Commissioner.

More than 100 heads of State, along with thousands of parliamentarians, mayors, UN officials, CEOs, and civil society leaders will come together at Rio+20 to shape and adopt new policies and measures to promote prosperity, reduce poverty and advance social equity and environmental protection.

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