



General Assembly

Distr.: General
2 September 2024

English 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 Sikh Human Rights Group, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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

[12 August 2024]

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



Redefining Development: Embracing Cultural Diversity and Sustainability in Global Development Goals

Right from its coining, the concept of development has been widely contested. For some it's the best strategy for poor countries to modernize, for others it is, yet another, imperial tool of domination. And for other, development, embodies their aspirations for a better life. This concept is so contested that it is criticized from the international politics arena, from the regional politics and from the practitioner's side. As a result of this confrontation, the meaning of development, it has been reconfigured multiple times. Thanks to movements such as the decolonization and feminist and environmentalist movements, the development is not understood solely as the economic growth wished by the Global North. Progressively, it has been including reference to the environmental preservation or women's rights. The last personification of this concept is personified in the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, despite the theoretical advances in development studies that call for an overcoming of single approach and narrowly focussed development schemes in favour of development models that integrate different worldviews and practices favouring an ecological and social just development, these models have not permeated the international political agenda. By breaking away from the cultural and ideological bases of development, we will be able to bring in alternatives that go beyond the "greenwashing" development that relies on unclear and doubtful techno-fixies market remedies. These alternatives to the hegemonic model of development are not as visible as they should be, although they are not few in number.

Present in every continent, these alternatives point out to the relationality of all lives, therefore avoiding the distinction between nature and culture, individual and community and between us and them. For example, in the African continent we find the notion of Ubuntu, meaning "I am because we are". This value system stresses the interconnectedness of individual with their surrounding societal and physical worlds, acknowledging one's responsibility to their fellow humans and the world around them. In the Asian continent, we find the concept of *Surbatt Da Bhalla* (welfare of all / may all prosper), a central axiom of the Sikh worldview. This concept invites Sikhs to not only daily pray and act towards their own wellbeing, but also for all the peoples of the world, regardless of their background, religion, or status. Another example, coming from the South American continent come the concepts of *Suma Qamaña* (living together well) and *Allin Kawsay* (the good life) are the response of the different Andean indigenous peoples to the failures of anthropocentrism and imbalance prevailing today.

Furthermore, in an effort to revalue this ancestral wisdom of the indigenous peoples, the Plurinational State of Bolivia created the platform of the "Codes of Living Well" in which knowledge in languages, textiles, ceremonies, sciences, dances, myths and sacred places are preserved. The aim is to present this knowledge to the world, thus improving the current state of polycrisis, as well as fostering an intercultural dialogue that promotes respect for all forms of life on the planet. Thanks to this initiative, people from New Zealand, Mexico, Colombia, among others, have presented their cultural heritage on this platform.

As the platform of the Living Well Codes is a meeting point for different cultures and the ontologies behind them, the ontological plurality inherent in the diversity of life is accentuated. Consequently, it is not possible to predicate an identical essentialist solution for all cultures and all places. However, we can identify four characteristics that are common to the different codes. First, these codes discard the idea of a linear development of historical sequences that must be repeated.

Second, nature is recognised as a subject of rights, thus promoting harmonious coexistence with it. Third, social relations are outside the dynamics of the market and not everything should be commodified. Fourth, these codes reject the idea of reducing the quality of life to the possession of material goods or the amount of income, rejecting an exclusively materialistic development. In other words, they take happiness and spirituality into consideration.

In the Sikh worldview of *Surbatt Da Bhalla*, two features stand out. Sikh Gurdwaras provide 'Langar' or free community kitchen that is accessed by anyone from any background, regardless of belief or class.

Rich and poor sit together to eat. Secondly it also inspires welfare of environment and other species as farmers plant trees and shrubs to ensure birds and wild animals can survive.

To conclude, the preservation and promotion of alternatives to development will allow us to rethink the prevailing conception of development based exclusively on economic growth, regardless of its effects on the planet, peoples or cultures. Not only will development be more culturally inclusive and pluralistic, it will also be more sustainable.
