African Union

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HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

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FROM RESILIENCE TO SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY

Body

AFRICA COMMEMORATION OF THE **40TH ANNIVERSARY** OF THE

United Nations declaration on the right to development

CONCEPT NOTE

4 - 6 November 2026
African Union Headquarters
Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

IN COLLABORATION WITH

Centre for Human Rights
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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UNIVERSITÀ DI SIENA 1240 / DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE POLITICHE E INTERNAZIONALI — DISPI

University of Dayton Human Rights Center

Global Alliance for Human Rights

Background and rationale

The year 2026 marks the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development and the concluding year of the African Union Human and Peoples' Rights Decade in Africa (2016–2026). The commemoration provides a timely opportunity to take stock of Africa's normative leadership, assess implementation gaps and renew political and institutional commitment to the right to development (Right to development) as an inalienable human and peoples' right.

Africa's normative contribution predates the 1986 Declaration. Article 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights guarantees the right of all peoples to economic, social and cultural development, with due regard to their freedom and identity, and places an individual and collective duty on States to ensure its exercise. Read together with Articles 20, 21, 23 and 24 of the Charter, the Right to development encompasses self-determination, sovereignty over natural resources, peace and security, and an environment favourable to development. It is further reinforced by Articles 3(h) and 3(j) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union and the principles of popular participation, gender equality, human rights, good governance and social justice set out in Article 4.

Agenda 2063 translates this normative vision into a people-driven continental development agenda. Its Aspirations 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7, together with the seven Moonshots of the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2024–2033), launched pursuant to Assembly/AU/Dec.866(XXXVII), connect inclusive prosperity, responsive institutions, peace, cultural identity, the empowerment of women and youth, and Africa's role in global affairs. Assembly/AU/Dec.970(XXXIX) further calls for the domestication of the Plan through national and subnational development plans, budgets, sector strategies and results-based accountability.

The conference is also grounded in the Kigali Declaration on the 2016 Theme of the Year and the Human Rights Decade (Assembly/AU/Decl.1(XXVII) Rev.1), which reaffirmed the Right to development, including the rights to water and sanitation, health, shelter and education, and called for the participation of African universities, research institutes and civil society in strengthening a continental human rights culture. It supports the implementation of ACHPR Resolution 586 (LXXIX) 2024 on the preparation of a General Comment on the Right to development in Africa. It also advances the AU Theme of the Year 2026, "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063," adopted by Assembly/AU/Dec.912(XXXVIII), and its Action Framework and Africa Water Vision and Policy 2063 endorsed by Assembly/AU/Dec.950(XXXIX).

Against this background, the conference will situate the global anniversary within Africa's legal, policy and development priorities. It will promote an implementation-focused understanding of the right to development that places the human person and peoples at the centre of development as active participants and rights-holders, and that is anchored in

equality, participation, accountability, fair distribution of benefits, sustainability and international solidarity.

Objectives

The conference aims to reaffirm Africa's historical contribution, ownership, leadership and commitment to advancing the right to development and to accelerate its domestication and implementation through the African Charter, Agenda 2063 and its Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan, national development frameworks, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the 1986 Declaration, the conference will connect global normative progress with Africa's development priorities and lived realities, and promote an inclusive, participatory, rights-based and people-centred approach to contemporary global and regional challenges.

Specific objectives

- Reflect on the evolution, achievements, African jurisprudence and implementation gaps of the right to development in Africa.
- Strengthen high-level political commitment and African ownership to domesticate, implement and monitor the right to development through Agenda 2063, national development plans, budgets and accountability frameworks.
- Promote evidence-based and interdisciplinary knowledge exchanges, linking African legal and policy practice, community experience and academic research.
- Deepen partnerships among AUC, AU organs, Member States, Regional Economic Communities, the United Nations, National Human Rights Institutions, academia, civil society, the private sector and development actors.
- Contribute a distinct African and Global South perspective to ongoing international standard-setting and normative developments on the Right to development, including the draft international covenant on the right to development.
- Generate actionable recommendations for integrating the right to development across human rights, governance, peace and security, climate action, trade, financing and sustainable development policy, while reinforcing the AU's leadership in global discourse and implementation.

Expected outcomes

Advancing the thematic trajectories established at the Joint Convening of the Social Practice of Human Rights and the 6th (Ohio, 2023), the 7th (Lisbon, 2024) and the 8th (Siena, 2025) International Conferences on the Right to Development, the 2026 iteration is oriented around three high-impact, analytically rigorous deliverables:

a. A commemorative anniversary publication

A peer-review volume mapping Africa's historical and contemporary contribution to the Right to development and its intersections with human rights, governance, peace and security, socio-economic transformation and environmental justice. This compendium will feature strategic perspectives from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Chairperson of the AU Commission, alongside empirical and theoretical contributions from leading academic institutions.

b. An Addis Ababa Outcome Statement and policy recommendations

An action-oriented outcome document identifying priority commitments and practical pathways for domestication, implementation, financing, monitoring and accountability, aligned with Article 22 of the African Charter, Agenda 2063 and its Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan, the AU Human and Peoples' Rights Decade and the AU Theme of the Year 2026.

c. Colloquium on the Right to Development

The colloquium will provide a platform for knowledge exchange and academic engagement, bringing together diverse stakeholders to address emerging right to development themes and strengthen African research and policy networks.

Building on the multi-year collaboration between OHCHR and leading law faculties, the research forum will connect academic scholarship with the institutional expertise of the AU, OHCHR and other actors working on the right to development, business and human rights, and economic, social and cultural rights.

Conference Themes

The conference will be organized around three overarching streams marking the fortieth anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development and connecting the global normative agenda with Africa's legal, policy and implementation priorities. Contributions are invited on the following sub-themes:

Stream 1: Forty Years of the Declaration on the Right to Development: Progress, Challenges and Implementation

This stream will assess the legacy of the 1986 Declaration through the African human rights system, Agenda 2063 and national implementation, and examine the extent to which the right to development has been realized in Africa and beyond.

Sub-themes

• The evolution of the right to development since 1986

• Africa's contribution to the development of the right to development

• Achievements, challenges, lessons learnt, and implementation gaps of the right to development

• Domestication of the right to development in national development planning, budgeting, monitoring and accountability frameworks

• The right to development, Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals

• Governance, participation, accountability and the fair distribution of development benefits

• The role of the permanent forum of people of African descent in advancing the human rights and right to development of people from Africa and of African descent.

Stream 2: The Right to Development and Contemporary Global Challenges

This stream will examine the continuing relevance of the right to development as a framework for responding to emerging and persistent challenges in ways that are inclusive, participatory, equitable, sustainable and accountable.

Sub-themes

• Climate change and environmental justice

• Water and sanitation under the AU Theme of the Year 2026 and the Africa Water Vision and Policy 2063

• Critical minerals, the energy transition, sovereignty over natural resources, benefit-sharing and responsible business conduct

• Peace, security and development

• Technology, artificial intelligence, data governance, and digital inequalities

• Poverty, inequality, debt, illicit financial flows, financing for development and socio-economic transformation

• Gender equality, youth and inclusive development

Stream 3: The Future of the Right to Development: International Cooperation, Global Governance and Normative Developments

This stream will consider the future trajectory of the right to development, the responsibilities of States and international actors, and Africa's role in shaping equitable, representative and development-oriented global governance.

Sub-themes

• Multilateralism and the future of development governance

• African leadership in advancing the right to development

- The Draft International Covenant on the Right to Development

• International cooperation, solidarity, and climate finance and technology transfer

• South-South cooperation and Global South perspectives

• Business, trade and development justice, including responsible business conduct, human rights due diligence and the AfCFTA

Participants

Approximately 100–150 participants, including AU leadership and representatives of AU Permanent Representatives Committee, Representatives of AU Member States (ministries and institutions responsible for human rights, justice, planning, finance, trade, water and the environment); the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; relevant AUC departments and AU organs; Regional Economic Communities; National Human Rights Institutions; OHCHR and other UN entities, including UNECA and UNDP; members of the Expert Mechanism on the right to development, relevant UN Special Procedures mandate holders and other experts; academic institutions and think tanks; civil society, women's and youth organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities and representatives of affected communities; the private sector, workers' organizations and development partners.

Format

- Hybrid event (in-person and online participation) for an inclusive approach;
- Simultaneous interpretation in English and French (and potentially additional AU working languages, for example, Arabic and Portuguese);
- A combination of high-level segments, thematic panels, keynote addresses, and interactive discussions.

Partnerships and coordination

The conference will be co-convened by the Department of Political Affairs, Peace, and Security (PAPS) of the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The event will be implemented in collaboration with

the University of the Free State and the University of Pretoria in South Africa, the University of Addis Ababa Faculty of Law, and other partners.

Dates and venue

4-6 November 2026 at the African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.