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First Annual Panel Discussion on the "Impact of Human Rights Mainstreaming in the Area of Development as well as on Cooperation in Human Rights Mainstreaming at the National Level"

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Madame President, Excellencies and Colleagues,

On behalf of Helen Clark, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, I am pleased to be part of this panel today. This morning I will both reaffirm UNDP’s strong commitment to mainstreaming human rights into development, as well as share some of our experiences from the field of how this work is being carried out.

But let me begin by first thanking the President of the UN Human Rights Council, H.E. Ambassador Laura Dupuy Lassere, for the opportunity to participate in this important discussion.

And also allow me to congratulate the entire membership of the Council for its farsightedness to ensure the fuller consideration of mainstreaming of human rights in the area of development and how cooperation in such mainstreaming is being put into effect at the national level.

We at UNDP believe such a discussion is both timely and necessary. Timely in the sense that later this year the world’s attention will once again be focused on the issue of sustainable development at the Rio +20 Summit. And it should be noted that discussions are already underway to consider the post-2015 development agenda. So now is an appropriate time to ensure that human rights are indeed mainstreamed into development, from the grassroots and national levels up.

Excellencies and Colleagues,

UNDP has neither a normative nor monitoring mandate on human rights. We are a development agency, and as such focus on building national capacity. Inasmuch as the legitimacy of the United Nations is based, first and foremost, on its foundational document, the Charter as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, each UN body is obligated to promote human rights through all its work.

Indeed, for us at UNDP, human rights has been an integral part of human development for well over nearly twenty years now. Human development is more than just economic growth. It is about expanding the choices people have to lead lives they value, in accessing resources to make those choices meaningful, and enjoying security to ensure those choices can be exercised in peace. And of course human development is linked to the human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation and accountability.
Societies that are more just, equitable and inclusive are more stable and secure. Conversely, societies that are subject to discrimination, exclusion, and lack of accountability are at risk of instability.

From our work at the country level, we have learned that integrating a human rights approach in our development activities builds more inclusive and just societies. The effort to mainstream human rights means that we must engage governments and people to better understand human rights and at the same time to build national capacity to ensure adherence to applicable standards. We also believe instruments such as the Universal Periodic Review Process of this august body support this approach.

As the manager of the Resident Coordinator (RC) system, UNDP ensures that the UN presence at the country level works together more coherently to ensure mainstreaming. In the area of human rights, we work closely with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), drawing on its technical expertise, and to enhance our programming support to partner countries.

Jointly, we have facilitated three major regional consultations on the Universal Periodic Review Process to share best practices and to improve human rights programmes at the country level.

Together with OHCHR and the International Coordinating Committee for National Human Rights Institutions, we have been able to scale up support to National Human Rights Institutions which are so crucial to bring civil society and government together. This is a key part of our work in building capacity of national human rights institutions; supporting the harmonisation of national legislation with international human rights standards; and supporting the preparation of national reports to UN human rights mechanisms.

UNDP is part of the UN Development Group’s Human Rights Mainstreaming (HRM) mechanism which promotes a coherent UN system-wide capacity development approach towards human rights mainstreaming. It focuses on strengthening the capacity of national partners and supports UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators to jointly work on promoting human rights through their projects and programmes.

As a former Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative myself in both Viet Nam and Liberia, I know personally how important the partnership between UNDP and OHCHR is, and how vital support to the RC system of both UNDP and OHCHR is in this critical area.
Excellencies and Colleagues,

Let me now share some concrete examples of how we have worked with national partners to integrate human rights into national development planning.

In Moldova, UNDP and UN Women in partnership with the government and the Swedish SIDA are implementing the Joint Integrated Local Development Programme to, develop capacity of local governments, rural communities and civil society organizations for rights based and gender responsive planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development initiatives.

In Bosnia Herzegovina, we worked with municipal authorities on a Rights-Based Municipal Development Programme in 15 municipalities to use human rights standards as benchmarks for education, health and social protection.

In Belize and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia we have supported MDG-based local development strategies giving access to water and sanitation to minority groups that had been excluded.

From Benin to Comoros to Liberia, we ensured that human rights standards and principles are integral elements of the national of the countries’ Poverty Reduction Strategies promoting access to public services and institutions to those formerly excluded and marginalised.

Despite these positive examples, challenges remain. Far too often, we observe a lack of political will to go beyond the usual legal and formalistic approach of human rights. Developing and building a culture of human rights requires a long term investment. As a central part of human development, it requires continued support from all of us.

So let us use the occasion of this meeting as well as the Rio+20 Summit later this year to turn words into action and make a difference in people’s lives by adhering to the standards set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Thank you.