

International Progress Organization



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Hans Köchler

Professor emeritus of Philosophy, University of Innsbruck, Austria
President, International Progress Organization
Founding Member, International Patriotic Pact Organization

**RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT AND NATIONAL INTEREST
IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT**

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I

The General Assembly of the United Nations, in its resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986, defined the right to development as an “inalienable human right” in the individual and collective sense (Article 1 of the *Declaration on the Right to Development*). According to Paragraph 2 of Article 1, this implies that all peoples enjoy the “inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources.”

The values and principles of the General Assembly’s Declaration stand in stark contrast to the legacy of colonialism and imperialism. They are entirely incompatible with the policies of exploitation of the countries of the Global South pursued by industrially advanced and militarily powerful states for their own benefit and wealth creation. The historical injustice has only been partially redressed. For several decades, the bipolar power struggle of the Cold War and, later, the hegemony of *one* global superpower overshadowed the efforts aimed at establishing a *New International Economic Order* which the United Nations General Assembly had called for in 1974. The International Progress Organization subsequently had outlined, in a meeting of experts in 1979, the moral, legal and social imperatives of such a system.¹

As it is the “primary responsibility” of states “to cooperate with each other in ensuring development” (according to Article 3, Paragraph 1 resp. 3 of the Declaration), the right to development needs to be implemented **on the basis of mutuality**. Each sovereign nation must accept all other nations as *equal partners* in that regard. This means that any state’s pursuit of *national interests* should recognize the equal right of all other states to develop according to their own sovereign choice.

Thus, in our global era, *patriotism* needs to be defined and practised in a *reciprocal* manner. As stated by the President of the International Patriotic Pact Organization in his New Year Message of 31 December 2024, the principle “‘love our own country’ cannot sacrifice the interests of other countries.” The International Progress Organization in 1979 had described this as respect of “ethical principles of mutual

¹ “The New International Economic Order – Philosophical and Socio-cultural Implications.” Vienna, Austria, 2-3 April 1979.

responsibility on a transnational level," involving a commitment by every state to the common good of humankind.²

An exclusivist, *unilateral*, policy of "my country first!" as it is presently being pursued – and propagated – by one of the major global powers will only lead to conflict and tension, risking the outbreak – and further escalation – of vicious trade wars. Such an approach will destabilize the global economy and is not in any way compatible with the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the international rule of law in general. Any form of unilateralism, whether in the economic or diplomatic field, is incompatible with the spirit of *equal development* and the principle of peaceful co-existence among all states. As was emphasized at the International Progress Organization's (I.P.O.) roundtable meeting at the United Nations in Vienna in 1996, "the issue of development cannot be separated from that of a just world order."³

II

Notwithstanding the declarations of the UN General Assembly and other international bodies, the imperialist mindset of earlier centuries – that from the outset was at odds with the peoples' right to development – has prevailed in the form of today's *unilateral sanctions policies* pursued by major Western powers in defiance of the global majority. Through their coercive economic measures, imposed in violation of the United Nations Charter and in neglect of numerous resolutions of UN bodies, those states are trying to subdue entire peoples to their will, impoverishing in the process the targeted countries, further escalating conflicts, and destabilizing entire regions (as has been the case e.g. in the Middle East/West Asia). Those measures are not only a form of collective punishment, and thus a violation of basic norms of international law, but totally undermine the right to development. After the end of the Cold War, these policies have been enabled by the *absence of a balance of power*, and they continue to be somewhat encouraged in an environment where a new multipolar order is not yet firmly established. However, putting the national – in particular strategic – interests of

² Hans Köchler (ed.), *The New International Economic Order: Philosophical and Socio-cultural Implications*. Studies in International Relations, Vol. III. Guildford (UK): Guildford Educational Press, 1980: "Communiqué, Global Aspects of the New International Economic Order," § 6, p. 103.

³ Hans Köchler (ed.), *Economic Sanctions and Development*. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1997, p. 11.

a single country or a group of countries (such as the EU) above the interests of all others is a major threat to global peace and security.

An effective antidote to unilateralism, with its concomitant challenge to the right to development, may be the emergence, and gradual entrenchment, of a *multipolar balance of power* where each nation, including the major actors, will have to negotiate the pursuit of their national interests on the basis of mutuality. Thus, the incentive for *multilateral action* may come from the realities of a new power constellation, which results from novel initiatives, at regional and global level, such as BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. This may also help to reduce the dominance of the outdated neo-liberal system of the economy that only perpetuates colonial power structures.

Of major importance in this context will be the creation of *alternative models* of economic and financial cooperation, including transactions in other denominations than the US dollar, so as to reduce, or eventually avoid, pressure or threats of interference – in particular through so-called “secondary” (i.e. extraterritorial) sanctions – by unilateral actors who try to impose their own agenda, putting their national interest “first.”⁴

The creation of the *New Development Bank* by the countries of BRICS has been an important step in the direction of economic sovereignty, paving the way for a more just system of global financial and commercial exchange. Such initiatives offer the chance to make development **sustainable**, shielding in particular the countries of the global South from interference and arbitrary action by outside parties. Only sustainability makes the right to development meaningful.



⁴ On the illegality of such policies cf. Köchler, "Sanctions and International Law," in: *International Organisations Research Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2019) ("Economic Sanctions, Global Governance and the Future of World Order"), pp. 27-47.