

## **UNPO Response to Call for Input – EMRTD study “Peace and Security and the Right to Development”**

**April 2026**

**Submitting Organisation:**

**Stichting Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)**

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) is an international, nonviolent, and democratic membership-based organisation. Its members include indigenous peoples, minorities, unrecognised States, and occupied territories that have joined together to defend their political, social, and cultural rights, as well as their right to self-determination.

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## I. Introduction

UNPO Members share a common condition. They are unrepresented and denied the right to self-determination, lacking equal recognition and meaningful representation in the decisions that determine their political, economic, social, and cultural development. This exclusion is often tied to external interests in their lands, natural resources, or geopolitical position – bringing extraction, militarisation and dispossession that drive conflict and instability. It is unrepresented peoples who bear these consequences most directly and disproportionately. Where exclusions persist, it exacerbates the root causes of instability, undermining trust, and hindering genuine transitions to peace and development.

These harms – displacement, dispossession, environmental degradation, and the erosion of traditional governance systems – are not incidental. They strip peoples of the land, resources, and governance systems on which their right to development depends. Their experiences demonstrate that the right to development cannot be realised where peoples are excluded from decisions that shape their lands, resources, and futures.

Self-determination functions as a central mechanism through which the objectives of peace, security and development frameworks can be realised in practice. Affirmed in the *Declaration on the Right to Development* as a universal right belonging to all peoples, self-determination recognises peoples as rights-holders with authority to shape decisions affecting their lands, resources, and development pathways. Sustainable peace and the genuine realisation of the right to development are dependent on forms of governance that are inclusive, legitimate, and responsive to the communities they purport to serve. Where self-determination is meaningfully respected, it enables the participatory exercise of political, economic, social, and cultural agency, thereby addressing structural drivers of instability while grounding development in equity, justice, and local legitimacy. The denial of self-determination is therefore not only a driver of instability, but a structural barrier to development itself.

As the experiences of UNPO members demonstrate, respect for self-determination operates as the bridge between peace and development in practice, as peace is made durable when exclusion and structural injustices are confronted, and development becomes more genuine when peoples are recognised as rights-holders with meaningful authority over the conditions that shape their futures.

## II. The Denial of Self-Determination as a Driver of Instability and Underdevelopment

The right to development and self-determination are closely intertwined, as meaningful development cannot be realised where peoples are denied authority over their futures. Self-determination is a right of process, enabling people to determine their own destiny and exercise meaningful authority in the decisions that shape their economic, political, and social development. Denying people such authority undermines the right to development at its core, because meaningful development cannot be achieved where it is imposed from above, detached from local priorities, or pursued without the participation of those whose lives, lands, and resources are most affected. Therefore, where either of these rights are denied, grievances deepen, community needs remain unaddressed, and tensions intensify. In such contexts, exclusion and marginalisation contributes to instability, disrupts livelihoods, restricts access to

land and resources, weakens governance institutions, and prevents communities from determining their futures in accordance with their own needs and priorities – creating structural barriers to peace, security, and the right to development that reinforce one another.<sup>1</sup>

The following examples demonstrate this pattern in the experiences of unrepresented and Indigenous peoples and minority communities. While these experiences represent only a few examples, the challenges they reflect are shared by many other UNPO Members across various contexts.

### **West Papua**

West Papua's Indigenous Melanesian peoples have pursued self-determination against a backdrop of colonisation and imposed political transition.<sup>2</sup> Despite preparing for self-rule following Indonesian independence from the Netherlands, control over West Papua was transferred to Indonesia in 1963, without the free and genuine consent of its people, and without resolution of their right to determine their own political and developmental future.

Under Indonesian governance today, West Papuans experience severe environmental degradation, land dispossession, and cultural erasure, driven by three interlinked mechanisms: large-scale extraction of gold, copper, and natural gas; the expansion of palm oil plantations and agribusiness through widespread deforestation; and land grabs under food and development projects, all carried out without the free, prior, and informed consent of the affected communities.

The region is among the most heavily militarised in Indonesia. In early 2025, reports indicated the deployment of around 6,100 members of the Indonesian armed forces (TNI), in addition to existing police and Brimob units. Military operations in remote areas have displaced thousands, particularly affecting children, women, and the elderly, many of whom are left without access to basic services.<sup>3</sup> In this context, militarisation functions not as a response to instability but contributes to its cause, creating and sustaining the conditions under which the right to development of West Papuans cannot be realised.

### **Balochistan**

In Balochistan, the denial of Baloch people's right to self-determination has taken the form of systematic marginalisation, exclusion from political processes, and sustained repression.<sup>4</sup> The region's natural resources (including natural gas and minerals) are exploited with little benefit to the local population, contributing to some of Pakistan's highest rates of poverty, malnutrition, and illiteracy.

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<sup>1</sup> UNPO, *EMRIP Study on "the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations"* (2026). <https://unpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/UNPO-response-to-call-for-input-EMRIP.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> UNPO, *West Papua*. <https://unpo.org/member/west-papua/>

<sup>3</sup> UNPO, *Indonesia's Silent Occupation: Human Rights, Militarization and Environmental Destruction in West Papua, Aceh and the South Moluccas* (2025). <https://academy.unpo.org/indonesias-silent-occupation-human-rights-militarization-and-environmental-destruction-in-west-papua-aceh-and-the-south-moluccas-2/>

<sup>4</sup> UNPO, *Balochistan*. <https://unpo.org/member/balochistan/>

Baloch activists and those who speak out against these conditions, alongside highlighting historical wrongs and claims for self-determination, have faced enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, practices that human rights organisations have extensively documented. The Pakistani state has contributed to persistent unrest through its military aggression and crackdowns on peaceful protestors, entrenching their exclusion from dialogues, decisions, and genuine realisation of the right to development.

Major infrastructure projects, particularly those connected to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), have deepened this pattern, proceeding without meaningful Baloch participation, concentrating benefits elsewhere, and intensifying repression against those who oppose or criticise them.<sup>5</sup> Where development is imposed without the participation or consent of the people it affects, and its benefits concentrated elsewhere, it entrenches rather than addresses the structural conditions that deny the right to development. For the Baloch people, CPEC represents precisely this – a process carried out in their territory, yet excludes the Baloch.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Niger Delta and Ogoniland***

A similar pattern is visible in the Niger Delta, where communities including the Ogoni<sup>7</sup> and Ijaw<sup>8</sup> have long been denied meaningful control over the lands and natural resources on which their livelihoods, identity, and survival depend. Decades of oil extraction, gas flaring, and pollution have devastated the region – eroding farmlands, contaminating waterways, and destroying the fishing and farming economies on which communities depend. The oil industry generates over 90% of Nigeria's export revenues, yet local communities remain among the most impoverished and marginalised in the country.

Rather than addressing these grievances through inclusive governance or recognition of community rights, the Nigerian state has repeatedly responded with military force. This pattern, extraction without consent, grievance without remedy, dissent met with repression, sustains a cycle of exclusion and instability that forecloses the conditions necessary for the realisation of the right to development. For Niger Delta communities, development has meant the opposite: dispossession, environmental destruction, and the deliberate denial of any authority over their own futures.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Hmong***

The Hmong's denial of self-determination and non-recognition as Indigenous peoples has resulted in systematic exclusion from political decision-making processes, cultural erasure, and

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<sup>5</sup> UNPO, *Indigenous Peoples Free, Prior and Informed Consent, Business and Human Rights* (2025). <https://unpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/UNPO-Response-to-Call-for-Input-%E2%80%93-Indigenous-Peoples-Free-Prior-and-Informed-Consent-Business-and-Human-Rights.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> UNPO, *Detrimental Impacts of Development and Infrastructure Projects in Pakistan* (2022). [https://academy.unpo.org/our-word/upr\\_pakistan\\_2022/](https://academy.unpo.org/our-word/upr_pakistan_2022/)

<sup>7</sup> UNPO, *Ogoni*. <https://unpo.org/member/ogoni/>

<sup>8</sup> UNPO, *Ijaw*. <https://unpo.org/member/ljaw/>

<sup>9</sup> UNPO, *Niger Delta*. <https://unpo.org/member/niger-delta/>

land dispossession.<sup>10</sup> In Laos, development projects have proceeded without free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) of the Hmong, often accompanied by military violence, land grabbing, forced displacement, extrajudicial killings, and torture. Following her recent visit to Laos, the Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights confirms this as a serious and ongoing pattern, finding that resettlement policies fall disproportionately on “highland ethnic communities”, that compensation mechanisms fail those without formal land titles, and that without proper safeguards, such policies “amount to forced and illegal land-grabbing.” She further concludes that the government has reduced participation to mere notification, that communities face pressure to agree to plans with no real avenue to refuse, and that legal provisions may actively prohibit opposition to resettlement.<sup>11</sup>

The Hmong have been subjected to human rights abuse since the 1970s, with military campaigns reportedly killing thousands and displacing approximately 300,000 Hmong into Thailand. More recently, crackdowns in May 2025 resulted in arbitrary arrests, death, and denial of basic services to Hmong communities.

This systemic repression and exclusion has produced instability by entrenching fear, violence, and marginalisation within Hmong communities. Rather than enabling the Hmong to determine their own political, social, economic, and cultural futures, state policy has stripped the Hmong of their livelihoods, deepened impoverishment, and obstructed the conditions necessary for development to be realised in any meaningful way. Thus, for the Hmong, the denial of development is not incidental, but the direct result of a system that denies them recognition as right-holders with meaningful authority over their futures, actively enforced through military means and exclusion.<sup>12</sup>

In each of these cases, and similarly in the cases of South Moluccas, Tibet, and Gilgit-Baltistan, among many other unrepresented nations and peoples, the denial of the self-determination and the exclusion of peoples from decisions over their lands, resources, and futures have deepened instability, entrenching fear and marginalisation. In this context, FPIC further represents a vital mechanism through which self-determination and the right to development can be realised in practice.<sup>13</sup> By ensuring unrepresented peoples have meaningful authority over decisions directly impacting them, FPIC helps address the structural exclusion underpinning instability and underdevelopment.

In this way, the denial of self-determination actively drives instability and underdevelopment, as it deprives communities of the authority, security, and material conditions necessary to pursue development and foster durable peace.

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<sup>10</sup> UNPO, *Hmong*. <https://unpo.org/member/hmong/>

<sup>11</sup> UNPO, *UNPO Welcomes UN Report Confirming Cultural Rights Violations Against Indigenous Peoples in Laos* (2026). <https://unpo.org/unpo-welcomes-un-report-confirming-cultural-rights-violations-against-indigenous-peoples-in-laos/>

<sup>12</sup> UNPO, *Escalating Attacks Against the Hmong in Lao: UNPO, CWHP and BPSOS Alert UN Bodies* (2025). <https://unpo.org/escalating-attacks-against-the-hmong-in-lao-unpo-cwhp-and-bpsos-alert-un-bodies/>

<sup>13</sup> Supra Note 5.

### III. Realisation of Self-Determination in the Maintenance of Peace and Security in Contributing to the Right to Development

The following case studies demonstrate that even where peace processes exist, they remain ineffective in practice when their implementation prioritises state actors over the peoples who hold the right to self-determination and development. Where instability is rooted in exclusion, marginalisation, and inequitable resource governance, peace processes and development initiatives that fail to address their fundamental rights do not resolve the underlying conflict, rather they perpetuate it. Sustainable peace and development therefore depend on initiatives that are genuinely inclusive, grounded in the realities and aspirations of the peoples concerned, and respect affected communities as rights-holders with the authority to shape their own political, economic, social, and cultural futures.

#### ***Acheh: Human Rights Accountability, Self-determination, and the Right to Development***

Acheh exemplifies how measures to address massive and flagrant human rights violations can contribute to the realisation of the right to development, only when those measures are tied to self-determination, meaningful autonomy, and local participation, beyond merely state-centric frameworks.

Acheh's conflict was rooted in a longer history of denied self-government, and respect for their distinct political, cultural, and religious identity by the Indonesian state.<sup>14</sup> These grievances deepened from the 1970s onwards as oil and gas extraction in the region was carried out without inclusion of the Acehese people, accompanied by underdevelopment, marginalisation, and increasing militarisation.<sup>15</sup> As tensions grew from the exclusion of peoples and the denial of fundamental rights, the resulting conflict intensified dramatically during the Military Operations Zone period from 1989 to 1998, when Indonesian security forces committed widespread abuses including unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, rape, torture, arbitrary detention, and village destruction.<sup>16</sup>

From 1976, the Free Aceh Movement fought for independence and the meaningful realisation of their right to self-determination. This culminated in the 2005 Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement, marking a significant moment toward human rights-based corrective measures aimed at dismantling the conditions that sustained the conflict. The MoU affirmed Indonesia's commitment to the ICCPR and ICESCR, provided for a Human Rights Court and Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and granted amnesty, political participation, stronger self-government, and a greater share of natural resource revenues.<sup>17</sup> Its design reflected the critical principle that eliminating mass human

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<sup>14</sup> UNPO, *Acheh*. <https://unpo.org/member/acheh/>

<sup>15</sup> Aguswandi and J. Large, *Reconfiguring Politics: The Indonesia - Aceh Peace Process* (2008) [https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Reconfiguring\\_politics\\_the\\_Indonesia\\_Aceh\\_peace\\_process\\_Accord\\_Issue\\_20.pdf](https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Reconfiguring_politics_the_Indonesia_Aceh_peace_process_Accord_Issue_20.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement* (2005) <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/id050815memorandum20of20understanding.pdf>

rights violations requires more than stopping violence, it must restore dignity, create accountability, and give affected peoples a genuine role in governing their own affairs. The impact on the right to development was concrete. Following the agreement, improved security and political access enabled reconstruction, service delivery, and human development.<sup>18</sup> Poverty declined from 28.7% in 2005 to 16.4% by 2016, unemployment fell from 14% to 7.6% over the same period, and improvements were recorded across health, education, infrastructure, and local political participation.<sup>19</sup> These gains reflect the direct relationship between the realisation of self-determination and the right to development.

However, Aceh also demonstrates the limits of peace processes that are only partially implemented, without deeper respect for self-determination. Twenty years on, many MoU commitments remain unfulfilled, accountability for serious abuses is still lacking, and Acehese communities continue to face barriers to justice and services.<sup>20</sup> These failures were starkly exposed by the severe flooding of November 2025, in which at least 456 people died and thousands were displaced. The Indonesian government refused to declare a national disaster, restricted foreign humanitarian assistance, and violently confronted civilian aid convoys, responses that reflected deeper patterns of marginalisation, weak protection of local agency, and the continued sidelining of Acehese communities from decisions affecting their land, safety, and recovery.<sup>21</sup>

Indonesia's resistance to fully honouring Aceh's autonomy commitments, such as continued disputes of Aceh symbols, limits on political aspirations, and incomplete delivery on justice and resource-governance promises, has constrained the full realisation of development.<sup>22</sup> Where conflict is rooted in political exclusion, resource dispossession, and repression, sustainable peace and the realisation of the right to development depend on addressing those root causes through genuine self-determination, accountability, and reparative justice. When those elements are only partially implemented, development remains uneven, trust in institutions remains fragile, and the legacy of conflict continues to obstruct long-term sustainability.

### **Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT): Limits of Peace and Disarmament Without Self-Determination**

In the CHT, the denial of Indigenous Jumma peoples' demands for self-determination, constitutional recognition, and protection of their lands and institutions following Bangladesh's independence led to prolonged instability. In response, the Bangladesh Government opened the region to state-sponsored demographic change, and increasingly governed the CHT through

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<sup>18</sup> Aguswandi and J. Large, *Reconfiguring Politics: The Indonesia - Aceh Peace Process* (2008).

<sup>19</sup> CMI, *Peace has Given Aceh New Lease of Life* (2017)  
<https://cmi.fi/2017/08/07/peace-given-aceh-new-lease-life/>

<sup>20</sup> UNPO, *Indonesia's Silent Occupation: Human Rights, Militarization, and Environmental Destruction in West Papua, Aceh, and the South Moluccas* (2025)  
<https://academy.unpo.org/indonesias-silent-occupation-human-rights-militarization-and-environmental-destruction-in-west-papua-aceh-and-the-south-moluccas-2/>

<sup>21</sup> UNPO, *Aceh Floods: Humanitarian Crisis Deepens Amid Aid Restrictions and Allegations of Abuse* (2026)  
<https://unpo.org/aceh-floods-humanitarian-crisis-deepens-amid-aid-restrictions-and-allegations-of-abuse/>

<sup>22</sup> UNPO, *Indonesia's Silent Occupation* (2025).

militarisation, repression, and marginalisation, producing large-scale displacement, land dispossession, and prolonged violence. The 1997 CHT Peace Accord, entered into between the Bangladesh government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS),<sup>23</sup> was intended to end more than two decades of armed struggle through political autonomy, devolved regional governance, land dispute resolution, and demilitarisation, including the repositioning of arms and withdrawal of temporary military camps. As such, it formed part of a broader framework aimed at addressing underlying grievances and enabling genuine self-governance.<sup>24</sup>

However, core commitments relating to demilitarisation, land restitution, and the transfer of authority to regional institutions remain unfulfilled. The CHT continues to be governed through militarised security rather than the promised self-governance, deepening marginalisation and perpetuating the conditions the Accord was designed to resolve. The failure to uphold the Accord has had direct consequences for the right to development and self-determination. CHT remains one of the poorest regions in Bangladesh, with 52% of its population below the poverty line compared to 32% nationally, and experiences persistent deficits in healthcare, education, and infrastructure.<sup>25</sup> State sponsored land grabbing, often accompanied by state security forces and militarisation, has led to devastating human consequences for the Indigenous peoples of the CHT, including the intimidation, criminalisation, and violent repression of human rights defenders.<sup>26</sup>

The CHT demonstrates that disarmament and peace processes cannot achieve durable peace where the demands at the heart of the conflict and respect for self-determination remain unaddressed. Military presence has persisted, land dispossession continued, and the promised transition from securitized control to self-governance failed. Peace has remained fragile because the underlying grievances that had driven instability were never substantively addressed. This has directly impacted the right to development, as communities continue to be excluded from meaningful authority over their lands, resources, and futures, development cannot proceed in terms of inclusivity, dignity, and equity at the core of the right.

### ***Somaliland: Self-determination as a Foundation for Peace, Security and Development***

Somaliland demonstrates a related but distinct dynamic. In a region marked by protracted conflict and chronic insecurity, Somaliland reflects how governance, stability, and democratic institutions have been developed through the exercise of self-determination, but where the absence of international recognition continues to limit the full realisation of both self-determination and the right to development.

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<sup>23</sup> The main organisation representing the rights of the Indigenous peoples of the CHT.

<sup>24</sup> UNPO, *Between Reform and Repression: Geopolitics and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (2026) <https://academy.unpo.org/between-reform-and-repression-geopolitics-and-human-rights-in-the-chittagong-hill-tracts/>

<sup>25</sup> ICIMOD, *A Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh* (2015) <https://lib.icimod.org/records/e76bx-7zx81>

<sup>26</sup> UNPO, *UN Experts Raise Concerns Over Indigenous Rights Violations in Chittagong Hill Tracts* (2025) <https://unpo.org/united-nations-experts-raise-concerns-over-indigenous-rights-violations-in-chittagong-hill-tracts/>

In the 1980s, the population of Somaliland faced systematic political exclusion and economic marginalisation under the Siad Barre regime, culminating in a brutal military campaign against the Isaaq population, the bombardment of Hargeisa, and the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure.<sup>27</sup> The collapse of the Barre regime in 1991 created the conditions for Somaliland to exercise its right to self-determination, withdrawing from the union and declaring independence not simply as a political act, but as a transformative process through which Somaliland sought to address the root causes of conflict through locally legitimate governance.<sup>28</sup>

Peace and security were reconstructed through an internally driven, bottom-up process of reconciliation conferences convened by Clan Elders. Grounded in traditional governance structures and ensuring inclusive participation, these conferences enabled dialogue between previously conflicting groups, addressed grievances stemming from the civil war, and fostered the trust necessary for the peaceful settlement of disputes and prevention of renewed violence. Over time, these efforts resulted in the formalisation of the 2001 Somaliland Constitution and the establishment of democratic institutions, including multi-party elections and peaceful transfers of power.<sup>29</sup> The significance of Somaliland's trajectory lies in the direct link between self-determination, peace, and the realisation of the right to development. Stability enabled investment in economic infrastructure, the growth of a private sector, and the gradual expansion of education, healthcare, and basic public services. These gains reflect what the realisation of the right to development looks like in practice when communities are empowered to shape the development structures that govern their lives.

However, despite having established peace, stability, and functioning governance, Somaliland's capacity to fully realise the right to development remains structurally constrained by the absence of international recognition. This translates into direct and tangible consequences: mobility restrictions, limited access to global markets and international financial institutions, and barriers to long-term economic planning.<sup>30</sup> International engagement with Somaliland has too often been contingent on its strategic and maritime value rather than on consistent support for its people's right to self-determination, treating the territory as a geopolitical instrument while withholding the legal entitlements and protections that recognition would afford. Somaliland thus bears the full responsibilities of statehood without its corresponding rights, demonstrating that the right to development cannot be fully realised where the exercise of self-determination remains unrecognised.

#### IV. Limitations of the International Legal Framework

Within contemporary international legal frameworks, participation, inclusion, and equality are frequently framed in procedural rather than substantive terms. As a result, affected peoples are

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<sup>27</sup> World Economic Forum, *What Somaliland Can Teach the Rest of Africa about Peace and Stability* (2016) <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2016/03/what-somaliland-can-teach-africa-about-peace-and-stability/>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> UNPO, *Somaliland Between Recognition and Geopolitics: Stability Without Sovereignty in The Horn of Africa* (2026) <https://academy.unpo.org/somaliland-between-recognition-and-geopolitics-stability-without-sovereignty-in-the-horn-of-africa/>

consulted without being granted meaningful influence over the political, economic, and development decisions that shape their lives. In practice, development and peacebuilding initiatives are therefore designed and implemented through state-centric, top-down approaches that inadequately reflect the priorities and lived realities of the communities most affected. Rather than addressing the structural drivers of instability, such approaches risk reproducing the very patterns of exclusion and inequality that contribute to instability and insecurity in the first place.

A further limitation lies in the persistent mischaracterisation of self-determination as synonymous with secession, threatening state sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>31</sup> This narrow understanding obscures the fact that self-determination is a right of process. It encapsulates a people's ability to shape their political, economic, social, and cultural development within existing state structures, including through the maintenance of their institutions, protection of their relationship with lands and natural resources, and preservation of cultural and environmental foundations on which their identity and survival depends. When self-determination is reduced to a narrow political claim and treated as a threat, its wider function as a framework for legitimacy, inclusion, justice, and sustainable governance is obscured.

As a result, the right to development cannot be meaningfully realised where these dimensions of self-determination are denied. Development in any meaningful sense requires that people are able to determine their own priorities, exercise agency over their land and resources, and participate as rights-holders in determining their futures, rather than passive recipients of externally imposed policies.

For unrepresented peoples, this dynamic becomes a mechanism through which they are excluded from the institutions that define and implement the very frameworks that most directly affect them. By filtering their claims through state-centric frameworks that fail to recognise unrepresented peoples as rights-holders, participation under existing frameworks remains superficial rather than substantive. This perpetuates conditions where grievances remain unaddressed, and development initiatives risk entrenching conditions of inequality and marginalisation that give rise to instability and undermine peace.

## **V. Towards a Differentiated and Intersectional Approach**

Addressing these limitations requires integrating self-determination as a critical mechanism within peace, security, and development frameworks, one capable of addressing the differentiated ways in which instability affects communities and the structural conditions that produce it. By enabling peoples to exercise meaningful authority over the decisions shaping their present conditions and future development, self-determination addresses structural drivers of instability while strengthening the participatory and equitable vision of development at the core of the right. It creates pathways for grievances to be addressed through participation,

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<sup>31</sup> UNPO, *Madeira 2025: Reimagining Self-Determination for a Changing World* (2026). <https://unpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/UNPO-Madeira-Conference-2025-Reimagining-Self-Determination-for-a-Changing-World-updated.pdf>

legitimacy, and accountable governance, strengthening the foundations of sustainable peace by ensuring it is built through justice and inclusion rather than imposed through control.

## VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

For unrepresented nations and peoples, self-determination enables the exercise of meaningful authority over the political, economic, social and cultural development that shape their lives, safeguard their lands and resources, and define their futures. Conversely, the denial of self-determination leaves grievances unresolved, deepens marginalisation, fuels instability, and creates the conditions in which peace remains fragile and development remains obstructed. This reality is reflected in unrepresented communities' lived experiences of militarisation, dispossession, displacement, environmental degradation, and exclusion from governance structures that determine their futures.

UNPO members illustrate a critical position: without self-determination, peace and development operate at the level of symptoms rather than causes. This leaves their core objectives only partially realised, and undermines their ability to address the structural conditions that give rise to instability and obstruct the full realisation of the right to development.

In light of the above, the UNPO respectfully submits the following recommendations to the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development:

- **Recognise self-determination as a central operational pillar to the right to development within peace and security frameworks** - The EMTRD should call on states and relevant non-state actors to recognise self-determination as a central enabling condition of the right to development. This includes incorporating self-determination and respect for the rights of peoples, including Indigenous peoples and minorities, into national legislation, policy frameworks, agreements, and monitoring frameworks, including through the consistent application of FPIC in decisions affecting land, territories and resources. Such recognition is essential to ensure durable peace and the full realisation of the right to development.
- **Promote differentiated and intersectional approaches to the right to development** - The EMTRD should encourage states to adopt context-specific and intersectional frameworks that recognise the differentiated impacts of conflict, instability, and development policies on unrepresented communities. This includes ensuring that the specific realities and priorities of unrepresented peoples are taken into account in development strategies, particularly in post-conflict contexts and disarmament initiatives where exclusion risks reinforcing conditions of instability.
- **Ensure that participation in peace, security, and development frameworks is substantive rather than merely procedural** - the EMTRD should promote clear standards and best practices for state and non-state actors that move beyond formal consultations toward meaningful participation in decision-making. Unrepresented peoples must be able to have genuine influence over, and inclusion in, development priorities related to land, resource governance, and institutional design. It should be recognized that uniform participation models are insufficient and that frameworks should be adapted to ensure



unrepresented peoples can meaningfully participate and that context-specific measures facilitate influence over decision-making processes.

- **Clearly define and operationalize the role of non-state actors in advancing self-determination within peace, security, and development frameworks** - building on the EMTRD policy briefs on the *Duty to Cooperate and Non-State Actors* and *Inequality, Social Protection, and the Right to Development*, the EMTRD should provide further clarity and guidance on the roles of civil society, academia, and the private sector in advancing self-determination and the right to development. A coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach beyond state actors alone, that clearly articulates the role and responsibilities of civil society, academia, and the private sector can facilitate bottom-up, participatory governance processes through accountability mechanisms, best practices, critical research on evidence-based policymaking, and the implementation of development initiatives that reinforce the realisation of affected peoples collective rights.
- **Encourage international and regional organizations to align peace, security, and development initiatives with self-determination and inclusive governance principles** - the EMTRD should call upon international and regional organizations to systematically integrate self-determination into their peace and development initiatives, ensuring interventions are designed and implemented in partnership with unrepresented communities, with safeguards that promote inclusive participation, equitable resource governance, and respect for collective rights.