

International financial institutions must show the way on human rights and good governance, says UN expert

GENEVA (21 September 2020) – International financial institutions (IFIs) must systematically take all necessary measures to ensure that their activities and the projects that they support do not lead to human rights violations, including those committed by clients, a UN human rights expert said today.

“Through their economic policies and the safeguards they have put in place, IFIs can have a direct influence on how national authorities as clients deliver on good governance and therefore abide by their obligation to respect the human rights of their population,” the Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international, Livingstone Sewanyana, told the Human Rights Council.

In his annual [report](#), the expert addressed stakeholder engagement and issues of public participation, transparency and reprisals; State responsiveness to the needs of the population and retrogressive measures; and the fight against corruption.

He called on IFIs to ensure that their safeguard frameworks contain a clear commitment to respecting human rights and to conducting human rights due diligence; conduct human rights impact assessments prior to imposing loan conditions that compel States to take retrogressive measures; and embrace a human rights-based approach to combating corruption that focuses on the victim, State responsibility, prevention and redress.

Importantly, IFIs must use their substantial leverage to ensure that their clients respect human rights and the principle of good governance, Sewanyana said.

“While IFIs should always aspire to be actors of positive change on the ground, it is first and foremost the responsibility of States, in particular in their capacity as IFIs’ clients, to ensure good governance and respect for human rights on the ground,” he said. “This responsibility starts with ensuring a safe environment that is conducive to the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms, and pursuing accountability.”

Crucially, respect for human rights, good governance and the interests of local communities must be at the very heart of what drives sustainable development. “This requirement is all the more important in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated several of the challenges identified in my report and increased the vulnerability of groups at risk,” the expert said.

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Mr. Livingstone Sewanyana (Uganda) was appointed as the second [Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order](#) by the Human Rights Council and took up his mandate on 1 May 2018. A lawyer by profession and advocate of the High Court of Uganda, he is the Founder and Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), a Ugandan civil society organisation. He has written and published widely on human rights, corporate governance, public sector management and access to justice.

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