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Global justice as a cornerstone of Agenda 2030 and its importance in the evolution of a safety culture in remediation, decommissioning and waste management.

The 17 SDGs set out in the 2030 Agenda are based on the recognition that the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable prerequisite for sustainable development. All countries and all actors will implement this plan in partnership, which is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international human rights treaties, the Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit Outcome” and on “full respect for international law”. Never before in the history of international relations have world leaders committed to joint action and efforts under such a comprehensive and universal political agenda, expressing that international or global justice is becoming more and more relevant given the extent to which global inequality and poverty are undermining the SDGs.

Past United Nations strategies and practice in international relations reflect the priority given to security (and some specific economic issues such as trade) in the architecture of the postwar international legal system. The Millennium Declaration opened a new chapter in the development of the international order and opened the door to new approaches to global justice that focus on economic and social issues that had been left behind in the previous traditional United Nations approach to international relations.

Given the historical evolution of the international safety culture for the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle, the question is whether the change described above is also reflected in the way safety standards are currently developed and applied by the relevant international organizations and the international community that champion this safety culture? And, is the current safety culture a rigid, absolute, non-negotiable framework, or given the role of global justice in the 2030 Agenda, is there room for maneuver that can be explored through more participatory mechanisms in the context of its development and application?

There is no universal answer to this question, as even the back-end aspect of the nuclear fuel cycle is still quite diverse: waste management and decommissioning are usually in the hands of commercial operators, while the remediation of orphaned sites is often a responsibility of governments. With regard to the application of Agenda 2030 strategies, the degree of international influence on sustainability aspects in the back-end therefore varies.

This paper examines whether there is ample evidence that the development of the international safety culture for the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle has broken away from the traditional UN approach to international relations and the extent to which aspects of global inequality and justice –in line with Agenda 2030 - have taken hold. Based on the experience of the author, special emphasis is placed in this context on the specifics of remediation of existing exposure situations.

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