Thank you Chair for giving me the floor,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues. I am honored to appear today before the Council of the International Maritime Organization in my capacity as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes.

The toxics and human rights mandate was born 26 years ago, given the grave concern of the global environmental injustices resulting from the dumping of hazardous waste in the Global South. In 2011, the Human Rights Council reframed the mandate to address the whole lifecycle of hazardous substances and wastes. Last year, the Human Rights Council renewed the mandate by consensus, pointing to the importance of identifying developments, gaps and shortcomings in effectiveness of international regulatory mechanisms.

The scope of the mandate is thus broad, including issues such as environmental emissions, exposure to hazardous substances, and waste management. At the same time the mandate is focused, on the human rights implications of the sound management of hazardous substances and wastes.

The mandate on toxics and human rights, like other special procedures of the Human Rights Council, is a monitoring and reporting mechanism. To carry out its work, it sends communications to Governments and prepares thematic reports. For example, I had the chance to present my report on the right to science to the Human Rights Council in September, as well as my report on plastics and human rights to the UN General Assembly in October.

Mandates also conduct visits to countries, regional entities, and UN specialized agencies. In that context, a few days ago I concluded a visit to Mauritius, where I could observe first hand the implications of the spill of heavy fuel oil from the MV Wakashio last year. My end-of-mission statement is already available on the mandate’s website.

I have also had the opportunity to begin an official visit to the International Maritime Organization. The mandate and work of the International Maritime Organization are of great importance to my mandate. The Organization’s work on safety of life on ships and protection of the environment directly concern human rights and the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes.

I wish to mention a couple of examples that highlight the significance of the thematic interaction between my mandate on toxics and human rights and the work of the Organization. These examples include:

* the global threat of plastics;
* the contribution of the Organization’s Audit Scheme to access to information and capacity building;
* the challenges faced by port reception facilities for wastes;
* the need for effective compensation procedures in case of oil and chemical disasters;
* the plight of seafarers during the pandemic;
* the global climate change emergency and the challenge of reducing emissions of greenhouse gases;
* the serious issues around ship-recycling, also known as shipbreaking or ship-dismantling.

My visit to the IMO contemplates an online component and a physical component. The online segment has taken place largely in December of last year. I wish to sincerely thank IMO officials for what has been a very constructive dialogue.

During the course of my visit, I have also sent out a questionnaire to Governments, and a call for submissions to civil society and the private sector. I have convened consultations with academics, civil society organizations and business associations. I wish to express my sincere thanks to all the Governments and organizations who have responded to my call for input.

In terms of next steps, I look forward to conducting the presential component of the visit at a time when the coronavirus pandemic measures allow it, hopefully sometime in the coming months. I should point out that is customary practice for mandate-holders to refrain from discussing substantive findings of the visit until it has officially concluded.

I will present a report on my visit to the IMO to the United Nations Human Rights Council. It is customary practice for a draft report to be made available to the Organization, to allow for factual comments that may be considered prior to the report’s release.

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates,

Before concluding, I wish to express particular gratitude to Secretary-General Kitack Lim for enabling what is in my view a very fruitful and timely visit. And to Mr Frederick Kenney, Director of Legal and External Affairs, who is acting as liaison during my visit to the Organization.

To conclude, may I express to you my hope that my visit will open the doors for productive engagement with the Organization in the years to come. During my tenure as Special Rapporteur, I stand ready to provide support to the Organization on ways to implement a human rights-based approach in its important work.

Thank you very much for your attention.