**Remarks at the opening of the Global Workshop on cooperation between UN and regional Human Rights arrangements**

Excellencies, distinguished representatives of regional, sub-regional and national human rights mechanisms, distinguished experts and civil society representatives, His Excellency Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Belgium, Geert Muylle:

It is a great honor, on behalf of Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Coordinator of the International Decade for People of African Descent, to welcome you to this important workshop, mandated by the Human Rights Council in recognition of the vital roles that regional, sub-regional and national human rights mechanisms play in the defence and advance of human rights. Indeed, since 2007, at the Council’s instruction, the UN’s Human Rights office has brought together human rights mechanisms from across the world to exchange promising practices and lessons learned, with a view to enhancing cooperation between us all.

Our focus this year, as mandated by the Council in 2017, is on the role of regional arrangements in combating racism and discrimination, including through implementation of the Durban Program of Action. This workshop will build on regional consultations such as those we held jointly with the Inter American Commission on Human Rights and with the African Commission on Human and People Rights and builds too on the outcomes of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance’s anniversary which was held in Paris.

Friends,

The 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action; the 2009 Outcome of the Review Conference and the Political Declaration adopted by the General Assembly in 2011 in commemorating the Durban Declaration’s tenth anniversary: taken together, these form a comprehensive framework by which to address, on a global scale, the scourge of racism, placing victims at the centre. Likewise, the commitment of the 2030 Agenda to ‘leave no one behind’ is an authoritative platform on which to engage countries the world over to ensure that the SDGs’ implementation is grounded in a human rights-based approach to combatting discrimination and inequality.

This work is urgent and the need for it, pressing. It’s not as if the injustice, ignorance, injury, hatefulness of racism is simply fading away with the passage of time. To the contrary, bad old-fashioned racial, ethnic, religious hatreds are being lent fresh air by the political echo-chambers of today; spreading at lightning speed through social media that is just so anti-social; manipulating into a manufactured malicious contest between us, the rich tapestry of our diversities by race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, gender identity; shoving us into fabricated winner-loser contests of “us versus them” – in which we are told we can strengthen “us” if we scapegoat, demean, delete “them” - “the others” - those who not “like us".

National newspapers and national leaders attacking refugees and migrants as "organized invaders", "cockroaches" even. Members of Parliament using blogs to reignite antisemitic lies. Political campaigners devising posters depicting flocks of white sheep kicking out the black sheep. Governments allocating social protection to the deliberate disadvantage of a particular religious or ethnic group. Governments manipulating even their country’s population census so that certain ethnic and religious groups are not counted - do not even count: Millions of people across the world live daily still with the cruel costs of this “maximum of hatred for minimum of reason”⁠1 that is racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia – living stifled by these intrusive, intricate, tangling, strangling, toxic confinement’s of human opportunity, capability and contribution - malicious justification for fundamentally unjust distributions of power, possibility and promise.

Racism’s callous, multi-laned intersections too with such as poverty, age, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, meaning that race-based contempt, and the inequalities it fosters, is all the more hateful for women of African descent; for indigenous people fighting for land rights against rapacious developers; for those in desperate flight across borders from conflict and crisis; for those who at risk even to their lives, bravely stand up against hatefulness. Contempt for the “other”; distrust of those who look or love or worship differently; hatred of the foreigner; closure of national borders to people fleeing persecution; persecution of those who seek to protect their communities’ heritage: We know only too well where those toxic pathways lead – humanity has travelled far down them before.  They lead to a dead-ends – to death-ridden ends.  Those small, mundane, banal acts of everyday contempt for difference building into brutal confidence that discrimination against the “other” is right; flourishing into pervasive persecution of others – a descent into conflict's callous catastrophe.

Racism is a clear and present drain and drag on our prosperity - on equality of participation and contribution, seeding not opportunity but grievance; festering not respect but contempt and violence. Well may our leaders call for greater efficiency in our economies; greater return on investment from our resources; more effectiveness in our public policies, but in an era of austerity, at a time of frugality, when our planet strains under resource scarcity, how can we tolerate one moment more of racism’s reckless waste of our most precious resource - the talent, capability and contribution and courage of all people.

Friends,

It is a myth, however, that the ideals of universal and indivisible human rights set out in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) were simply imposed by “the West on the rest”. In truth, those who, 70 years ago, negotiated that text were drawn from all corners of the earth, meeting 81 times in debate of 168 resolutions before settling on the Declaration’s 30 Articles.

Latin America promoted social and economic rights. India and Pakistan insisted on affirmation of equal pay, equal distribution of property, and against child marriage. The Soviet Union pushed for strong focus on race discrimination. It was a woman MP from India who made sure that the Declaration’s very first Article would affirm not that “all men” but “All human beings” are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Later, in 1950, when the UK worked to close down the UN Commission on Human Rights and – with the US – it sought to shut down the Sub-Commission on Prevention on Discrimination Haiti, Egypt, Mexico mounted successful rescue. And again, against opposition from the West, Jamaica, Liberia and Ghana helped win the very first modern breakthroughs in international human rights law that led to 1965 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the first of the nine core international human rights instruments that now help cascade the UDHR into national operation.

That a promise made is so poorly kept, brings no shame to the promise. But we will be far better equipped to challenge the promise breakers, if as human rights mechanisms – international, regional, national – we work together. In this place, at this time and for this purpose, if we work to seek fulfilment of that promise for which there is simply no conscionable alternative – the promise of tangible recognition that indeed born we all are free and equal in in dignity and rights. Rights for every one of us – with the exception of none of us, for the inclusion of each of us, in the interests of all us.