



Ouagadougou - Port Louis Declaration Towards 2022

DECLARATION OF VIRTUAL LDCs/SIDS TRUST FUND WORKSHOP FOR THE AFRICA REGION

"Engaging with the UN Human Rights Council, during and after COVID-19 through the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund: achievements, challenges and lessons learnt"

I. INTRODUCTION

We, the former Beneficiary Delegates and Members of the Africa region of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the work of the Human Rights Council (hereinafter "LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund"), having convened remotely from 28 to 29 April and 6 May 2021 at the virtual LDCs/SIDS Workshop for the Africa region, which centred on the theme of "Engaging with the UN Human Rights Council, during and after COVID-19 through the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund: achievements, challenges and lessons learned", agree to adopt the Outcome Document to be known as *"Ouagadougou - Port Louis Declaration Towards 2022"* as well as our engagement towards the goals and objectives established for the holding of regional Workshops as provided for by HRC resolution 34/40 on "Promoting the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of LDCs and SIDS in the Work of the Human Rights Council", which was adopted by the HRC on 24 March 2017.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

The Workshop was held pursuant to HRC resolution 34/40, with particular focus in its encouragement of the Trust Fund to conduct, before its tenth anniversary in 2022, Workshops in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and the Caribbean regions in order to:

Assess the contribution of the Trust Fund in building the capacity of LDCs/SIDS for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Africa region, including by providing Member States with opportunities to share their collective expertise, experience and good practices among themselves and with States from other regions that can in turn be shared with the HRC and its mechanisms;

Identify practical actions that Beneficiary Delegates of the Trust Fund can recommend to the OHCHR (LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Secretariat) for implementation, assess the impact these courses of action are likely to have and determine the relevance of the experience of Beneficiary Delegates/Fellows to this implementation at the national and regional levels;

Serve as a forum for open and interactive dialogue regarding approaches and procedures for ensuring that human rights challenges of concern to SIDS are placed and remain on the HRC's agenda and that opportunities are identified to address them; and

Make specific recommendations to further strengthen the participation of LDCs/SIDS in the work of the HRC and its mechanisms (UPR, special procedures) when the Council is meeting in person and when the Council is meeting virtually due to COVID-19.

III. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We, the former Beneficiary Delegates of the Africa region:

Express our gratitude to the governments of Burkina Faso and the Republic of Mauritius, and also to the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), for hosting this virtual Workshop and providing us with all necessary support;

Express also our most sincere gratitude to the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Secretariat administered by the OHCHR Human Rights Council Branch for all the support they've provided us since they were established;

Commend the fact that this virtual Workshop was able to benefit from simultaneous interpretation in both English and French, the two working languages of the United Nations Secretariat;

Express our gratitude to Her Excellency Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan (Fiji), President of the Human Rights Council, 15th cycle, for her participation in the Workshop;

Further express our gratitude towards the former Beneficiary Delegates of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund from the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific regions for their active participation and the sharing of their experiences, the lessons they learned and the challenges they identified, and appreciate the cross-regional initiative aimed at bringing together LDCs and SIDS;

Express our thanks to all LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund donors, and encourage them to continue their support and to call on other potential donors, in particular those of Beneficiary countries, to contribute to the ongoing efforts of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund aimed at building national capacities in the area of human rights;

Also thank the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, the Commonwealth and the Forum of Small States for their participation in this Workshop for LDCs/SIDS for the Africa region, as well as the "think tanks" which took part in these talks.

IV. NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE LDCS/SIDS TRUST FUND

We recognize the following, among the notable achievements of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund:

The support provided to a total of 59 delegates and fellows (33 of whom are women) between 2014 and 2021, coming from 35 of the 36 eligible African countries;

The Workshop for LDCs/SIDS for the Africa region is the third in a series of four (4) workshops to be organised before 2022, the year marking the tenth anniversary of the Fund, pursuant to HRC resolution 34/40;

For the first time ever, this Workshop is bringing together the Beneficiary Delegates of the Africa region. It has given us a unique opportunity to exchange our experiences, to share our information and our ideas and to document good practices that can further enhance and strengthen the effective participation of our countries in the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, nationally, regionally and internationally.

V. TOWARDS UNIVERSALITY OF THE HRC– LDCs/SIDS PARTICIPATION

We, the former Beneficiary Delegates of the Africa region:

Note with appreciation that, for the first time since the Human Rights Council was established in 2006, the current President of the Council is a native of an SIDS in the Pacific region and is assisted by two Vice Presidents, one who comes from a SIDS (the Commonwealth of the Bahamas) and the other from a LDC (the Sudan), both of whom are members of the Council Bureau for 2021;

We are pleased that of the five members of the Bureau three are women, thus contributing to gender balance;

Commend the Council's adoption on 23 March 2021 of Decision L. 23; A/HRC/DEC/46/115 (L23) entitled "High-Level Panel discussion on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council", through which the Council has decided to convene, during the high-level segment of its forty-ninth session, a high-level panel discussion on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council, focused on the benefits of universal and meaningful participation of all Member States of the United Nations in the work of the Human Rights Council. Decision L. 23; A/HRC/DEC/46/115 was sponsored/co-sponsored by 160 UN Member States and is thus the most sponsored Human Rights Council resolution/decision since it was established in 2006.

Encourage the OHCHR to take all measures making it possible for high-level discussion panellists to participate in person and carry out bilateral discussions;

Highly welcome the provision in this decision which requests that the OHCHR secure, through the LDCs/SIDSTrust Fund, the participation of those Member States that do not have a permanent mission in Geneva so as to achieve universal participation of UN Member States at the 49th session of the HRC and in the high-level panel discussion;

Are pleased to note the policies of the LDCs/SIDSTrust Fund aimed at encouraging the participation of women and persons with disabilities in its Programmes, pursuant to the HRC's resolutions regarding that issue.

VI. PROPOSED ACTION POINTS FOR THE 2022 REVIEW OF THE MANDATE OF THE TRUST FUND

Following three half-days of online deliberations, sharing of experiences, good practices and lessons learnt, we, the former Beneficiary Delegates and Members of the Africa region who took part in this Workshop, make the following recommendations to be considered for inclusion in the report which is to be prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner and presented at the 49th session of the Human Rights Council (session of February/March 2022):

VII. THE WAY FORWARD – PRIORITIES

1 Impact of COVID pandemic and suggestions for supporting LDCs and SIDS

We note that, in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Human Rights Council was the only intergovernmental body which succeeded in carrying out its 2020 work programme using hybrid arrangements (face-to-face and virtual);

In addition, we note 2021 was the first time the Council was able to meet in a completely virtual manner, pursuant to its work programme;

We note that, in spite of the measures taken, the Council's virtual meetings held because of the pandemic has affected the amount of work involved, especially that of smaller delegations. In that context, we highly welcome the implementation by the Fund Secretariat of a support desk for smaller delegations as well as the implementation of a variety of technical means (email, phone, WhatsApp, etc.) intended to facilitate access to the support desk;

We believe that the appointment of Focal Points by the President of the Human Rights Council, who are responsible for addressing the challenges which face the delegations of small developing countries (in particular SIDS and LDCs) and for ensuring monitoring of the implementation of measures related to the use of modern technologies, is a practice which should continue. We invite these Focal Points to also consult those LDCs and SIDS that do not have a permanent mission in Geneva;

We stress that participation in virtual sessions requires, in particular, a mastery of various platforms as well as a fast, stable Internet connection which is essential for effective participation;

We encourage the Trust Fund Secretariat to consider the possibility of financing, based on its resources and United Nations regulations, the costs for providing smaller delegations with access to better-performing Internet connections, before and during Council sessions and in their respective capital cities. It would also be necessary to organise training courses for the various meeting platforms as well as those used by the Council, in order to teach participants how to register on the list of speakers (SPREG) and to upload a project/decision project and/or sponsor one (E-delegate).

We suggest that the national and regional offices of the High Commissioner for Human Rights provide delegates who so desire equipment for monitoring the work of the Council and that the international organisations of which LDCs and SIDS are members (Commonwealth, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie) can likewise take similar steps;

We feel that Trust Fund programmes should not be suspended as a result of the pandemic and that support should continue to be provided regardless of the health situation in Geneva and in the home country.

[2 Strengthening LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Programmes](#)

[3 The E-learning tool of the Trust Fund](#)

We propose that this online training tool, which constitutes a useful, efficient tool, be updated so as to integrate modules for the following items: the United Nations human rights system, the drafting of resolutions and decisions, techniques for negotiating those texts over the course of informal discussions and techniques for drafting speeches (including joint speeches). In order to do this, the online training tool should also be structured in such a way that it can be best adapted to different levels of delegate knowledge (beginner, intermediate, expert). In this context, the Fund Secretariat should consider implementing a feature which makes it possible for delegates to exchange thoughts with the Secretariat and with other delegates at any point during the training. The USB keys of the online training tool should be provided to all interested LDCs and SIDS members.

It is also proposed for the full and proper implementation of para 4(a) of Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/19/26 including amongst others, collaboration with academic training institutions which can provide/issue duly recognised certificates.

We encourage the Trust Fund Secretariat to also consider the possibility for this training to be validated by a certificate officially issued by the OHCHR.

[4 Delegate and Fellow selection](#)

We propose that LDCs/SIDS that do not have a permanent resident mission in Geneva as well as those which are members of the Human Rights Council be given priority in participating in Fund programmes and receiving funds. We suggest that former Fund Beneficiaries have the opportunity after several years

(3 years) to take part in one of these programmes a second time, provided that they are still working for their government in areas related to human rights issues.

5 Training in Geneva of selected Beneficiary Delegates prior to regular HRC session

We propose that the training sessions in Geneva (currently 3 days) be held for a week and concentrate mainly on practical issues, thereby complementing the online training which is more theoretical;

The social events organised by the Secretariat, which represent opportunities to meet representatives of other Member States and Observers, NGO representatives and other key actors is an important component of the programme and should be continued;

We suggest that Delegates and Fellows be invited by their respective regional groups and the international organisations to which their countries belong to take part in the meetings and events they organise so as to make it possible for Fund Beneficiaries to share their experiences and exchange thoughts between one another, thus promoting optimal immersion/integration;

The possibility of having a "buddy" system (sponsor/patron) can be considered if a Beneficiary so desires.

6 Facilitating and supporting the participation of LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Beneficiaries in the work of the 3rd Committee of the Assembly in New York

We encourage the Trust Fund Secretariat to support the delegates who take part in a session of the Human Rights Council in such a way that they may also be present during the work of the 3rd Committee in New York, after having completed training on the policies and operational procedures of that Committee. This would provide delegates with a better understanding of the respective roles of those two bodies and of the interactions between Geneva and New York.

7 The Fellowship Programmes of the Trust Fund

We recommend that the fellowship programme have a duration of 6 months (provided administrative and financial conditions make this possible) for those LDCs/SIDS which are not Council members, and 12 months for those LDCs/SIDS which are members of the Human Rights Council;

We encourage the Trust Fund Secretariat to suggest a period different from that currently in effect (September-November) for operation of that programme, and to ensure that the programme contain more practical exercises which make it possible for Fellows to develop their know-how.

8 Sharing of information on activities of the Council and of its mechanisms

We welcome the efforts of the Fund Secretariat aimed at sharing information on Council developments before, during and after these sessions are held. The meeting summaries produced by the United Nations Information Service (UNIS) are appreciated since they make it possible for those LDCs and SIDS delegations which cannot always follow the work carried out on site, in particular those who are not in Geneva, to remain fully informed of the content of Council discussions. We encourage the Secretariat to continue and reinforce that policy.

We also encourage the Trust Fund Secretariat to continue its information sessions with the African Group in Geneva ahead of the HRC's regular sessions.

We suggest that the African Group in Geneva strengthen its contacts with the African Group in New York, especially ahead of the times Third Committee work begin.

9 Strengthen support to LDCs/SIDS for Special Sessions and intersessional activities of the Council

We propose that the Fund support LDCs and SIDS participation, as best as possible, in the intersessional activities and Special Sessions of the Council, provided administrative conditions (time required to organise trips) and financial conditions allow for this.

10 Building up the capacities of SIDS/LDCs that do not have a permanent resident mission in Geneva to participate meaningfully in HRC sessions

We encourage the Trust Fund Secretariat to organise information sessions on Fund programmes, especially for those SIDS/LDCs which have Beneficiary Delegates/Fellows, before those programmes are offered;

We also suggest the implementation of practical training sessions (face-to-face or virtual) on the operational procedures of the Council and its mechanisms, in order to strengthen the capacities of those LDCs/SIDS which have smaller delegations in Geneva. LDCs/SIDS without a permanent resident mission can likewise be included in those sessions.

11 Assistance that LDCs and SIDS missions can provide to LDCs/SIDS delegations without a permanent resident mission in Geneva

We encourage those LDCs and SIDS that have the capacity to do so, to provide logistical support and any other necessary assistance, based on their resources, to delegates who come from countries not represented at Geneva. Such support could likewise be provided by intergovernmental organisations whose members are LDCs and SIDS, such as the assistance provided by the Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO).

12 Key strategies for ensuring Trust Fund sustainability: increasing donor base

We encourage the Trust Fund Secretariat to organise, at least once a year, a meeting between countries which are already donors and those which can be, in order to keep them informed of their activities and to make it possible for them to hear testimonials from former Beneficiary Delegates and Fellows.

13 Organisation of the next regional workshops following 2022

We encourage the Trust Fund Secretariat to continue to organise regional workshops centred on one or more human rights themes which are of major interest to the region and to ensure it is also possible to invite representatives of other regions as well as representatives of relevant international and regional organisations. We would recommend that these workshops be held over the course of a

year rather than at the end of a year, in consideration of the especially busy schedules of LDCs and SIDS, in particular those with a permanent resident mission in New York.

[14 Review of regional Workshop declarations](#)

We request the Trust Fund Secretariat to organise a meeting in Geneva (face-to-face if possible) prior to preparation of the OHCHR report and with the support of the Fund, with a representative selection of representatives who took part in the four regional LDCs/SIDS Workshops, in order to review Declarations and to consolidate the recommendations contained in each of the four reports.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

We request the Trust Fund Secretariat and hosts of this current regional Workshop for Africa to brief donors on the results of each session;

We request the Trust Fund Secretariat to hold extensive consultations for organising the fourth workshop in order to ensure it does not overlap with any other major international meeting;

We encourage the current President of the Human Rights Council to take part in the fourth regional Workshop for Asia, whether it be held face-to-face or virtually;

We recommend to future Presidents of the Human Rights Council to encourage and facilitate the participation and engagement of LDCs and SIDS in the work of the Council and its mechanisms;

We suggest to the two countries hosting this current virtual Workshop that they share the present Declaration with the current President of the Human Rights Council, for circulation to all permanent resident missions in Geneva and to all LDCs and SIDS which are not represented at Geneva.

Done in Geneva on Thursday 6 May 2021