

OPENING REMARKS

Virtual LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Workshop for the Africa Regional

President of the Human Rights Council

H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan

Wednesday 28 April 2021

Remarks

Votre Excellence, Madame Victoria Ouédraogo Kibora, Ministre de la Justice, des Droits humains et de la Promotion civique, Garde des Sceaux, du Burkina Faso.

Your Excellency, Honorable Alan Ganoo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade of the Republic of Mauritius,

Dear colleagues, H.E. Mrs. Usha Chandnee Dwarka-Canabady and H.E. Mr. Dieudonné W. Désiré Sougouri, respectively Ambassadors of Mauritius and Burkina Faso in Geneva,

Mr. Mahamane Cissé-Gouro, Director of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division and Mr. Eric Tistounet, Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch of the OHCHR.

Distinguished delegates and former beneficiary delegates of the Trust Fund from the Africa, Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific regions,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bula vinaka

It is a pleasure and honour for me to participate in this opening ceremony of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Workshop for the Africa Region. I deeply regret that, given the circumstances, I will not have the opportunity to meet all of you in person. However, I do wish to thank the organizers for having made this meeting a reality, despite the challenging circumstances.

I would therefore like to thank our hosts Burkina Faso and the Republic of Mauritius as well as the OHCHR and its LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund whose efforts have been important to the organisation of this workshop.

Allow me to also recall the important role our hosts have played in establishing the Fund.

We have not forgotten that the Council adopted resolution 19/26 on 23rd March 2012, which established the Fund. Nor have we forgotten that Burkina Faso and the Republic of Mauritius were among the many core group members for the resolution.

I would like to finally take this opportunity to thank the African Group in Geneva for its continued support as well as for its dedication and rich contribution to the work of the Human Rights Council. In the same vein, I would like to commend the initiatives and actions of African countries in the field of human rights and their collaboration with the special procedures and commissions of enquiry of the Council, including by facilitating visits of these mechanisms to their countries.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

This Workshop is both useful and timely as it provides a unique opportunity to consider how the engagement of the LDCs and SIDS with the HRC and its Mechanisms can be improved, particularly when sessions are held in virtual or hybrid formats. This workshop will also enlighten us on the achievements, challenges and lessons learnt in Africa regarding how SIDS and LDCs can effectively interact with the Council and its mechanisms. It is my firm position that the engagement of SIDS and LDCs is essential for the Council to function properly.

Indeed, in 2019, my country, Fiji, hosted the Workshop for the Pacific Region. It was an honour for Fiji to welcome the beneficiaries of 12 Pacific SIDS, and also delegates from the Caribbean and African regions.

The outcome of this event was the Nadi Declaration Towards 2022. This document, the first of its kind for the Pacific, contains a series of actions to be put in place, with the aim of improving the Fund and ensuring that SIDS/LDCs can more effectively engage with the Council and its mechanisms going forward.

For example, the Nadi Declaration suggested holding a universal session of the HRC on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Trust Fund. This suggestion was translated into action at the recently concluded 46th session of the Council.

Indeed, on 23 March, the Council adopted by consensus decision 46/115, which decided to convene a high-level panel discussion on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund in March 2022. The discussion will focus on the benefits of universal and meaningful participation of all Member States of the United Nations in the work of the Human Rights Council.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

If I may, I would like to take a moment to inform you all that I know personally how the Trust Fund benefits SIDS and LDCs. My country, Fiji, has twice benefitted from the Trust Fund. Our beneficiaries were female delegates who had the opportunity to engage closely with the work of the Council and use the experience to improve our knowledge of the institution and build our capacity. And I am happy to see one of the beneficiaries, Florieann Wilson, is with us today.

These experiences, fostered by the Trust Fund, are critically important given not just the need for a more inclusive Council, but also because SIDS and LDCs are taking up more prominent roles in the Council's work.

Indeed, consider some of the landmark achievements made by SIDS/LDCs in the context of the Council:

The Permanent Representative of Senegal, an LDC, and my own country, a SIDS, have had the honour to preside over the work of the Council. This year, we are also very pleased that a SIDS from the Caribbean region, the Bahamas, is serving as a Vice President of the Council, along with an LDC from the African Region, Sudan.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

The COVID 19 pandemic, one of the greatest global challenges ever faced by the United Nations, has posed and will continue to pose organizational and institutional challenges to the HRC.

I take this opportunity to commend the leadership of my predecessor H.E. Ms. Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger. Thanks to her exceptional stewardship, the HRC was the only intergovernmental body that managed to fulfil its 2020 programme of work in its entirety, using new hybrid modalities. This year, with the support of my Bureau and the secretariat, I was pleased that the Council was able to meet fully virtually during the 46th session, and complete its programme of work. In the lessons-learned meetings, which I organized with States and other stakeholders, I was pleased to note an overwhelming sense of achievement and a high level of satisfaction over the measures which had been taken, particularly regarding the remote electronic voting system.

As indicated at the beginning of these remarks, this Workshop is timely because it seeks to make recommendations on how the Trust Fund should operate when the HRC is not in a

position to meet in Room XX and how to ensure that the virtual modalities impact positively on the engagement and participation of LDCs and SIDS.

The HRC has important tasks this year and it is essential that LDCs/SIDS, be also fully engaged.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

In closing, I would like to say that this Workshop opens a unique window of opportunity for us, LDCs/SIDS from all the continents, to advocate for the promotion and protection of human rights and set out challenges to the implementation of those rights.

Therefore, I encourage all participants, in particular, the former beneficiaries of the Fund, to take an active part in the discussions and make concrete suggestions in the outcome document of the workshop.

I look forward to the discussions.

Vinaka vaka levu

Thank you.