

**Statement delivered by Tangi Shikongo, 3rd Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of law, 17 November 2021. Geneva, Switzerland**

**Thank you, Madam Chair,**

1. As we are taking the floor for the first time during this Forum, Namibia joins others in thanking the OHCHR for organising this important forum and congratulate Ms Jan Beagle on her appointment as Chairperson. We also thank the Panellists for their insightful presentations.

**Madam Chair, distinguished Panellists,**

2. The cross-cutting challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic exposed pre-existing challenges that many countries especially in Global South have battled for decades. Climate change-related challenges such as floods and droughts, various conflict situations, the lack of adequate resources to bring public services closer to people especially those in rural settings and persons with disabilities, and humanitarian crises continue to negatively impact on the right of all individuals to access justice. These challenges also impede on the State’s capacity to ensure that this right is promoted and protected.

3. For Namibia the right to access to justice is a cornerstone of its democratic society, it is also a tool for the protection of all human rights and must be guarded selfishly. Namibia experienced court interruptions during the pandemic but the courts continued to operate. The e-justice filing system was tremendously helpful and the Chief Justice issued directives for the remote conferencing for legal practitioners affected by travel restrictions. However, the digital divide posed a serious challenge for the innovative solutions. The impact of the pandemic was therefore significant but access to justice was not denied nor withheld.

4. It is important that our judicial systems are emergency-responsive, could panellists elaborate on the key policy elements for improved judicial response to emergencies.

**Thank you, Madam Chair.**