**The Human Rights Council’s 3rd intersessional meeting for dialogue and cooperation on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development  
14 January 2021 (3 p.m. – 5 p.m. CET)**

**Opening remarks by Ms. Keva L. Bain, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of The Bahamas to the United Nations, Vice President of the Human Rights Council**

Excellencies,

Distinguished panellists,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good day,

On behalf of the Bureau of the Human Rights Council, I would like to extend best wishes for 2021 and to welcome you to the third intersessional meeting for dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I would like to congratulate my distinguished colleague, Ambassador Sek Wannamethee, Permanent Representative of Thailand, on his appointment as Chair of this meeting. Ambassador, under your able leadership, I look forward to a successful meeting.

I would also like to welcome the Honourable Minister of Health and Social Welfare of Kerala State of India, Her Excellency Ms. K. K. Shailaja, as well as the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, and to thank them for their participation in today’s intersessional meeting.

A very warm welcome is also extended to our panellists and participants joining online, including representatives of Member States, United Nations entities, National Human Rights Institutions and civil society organisations. Your experience and expertise will ensure an inspiring and rich discussion.

In the midst of the health crisis currently affecting the entire world, this meeting is timely as we discuss, share good practices and lessons learned, and make recommendations on the topic “Building back better: Integrating human rights in sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”, with a particular focus on SDG 10 on reduced inequalities and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. COVID 19 is now part of our everyday reality and therefore remains high on our agenda, as the numbers of deaths and illnesses from the pandemic rise, economies falter, inequalities persist, human rights threatened and progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals slowed, interrupted and in some cases reversed, impacting all, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised. This underscores the inherent interconnectedness and interdependence underlying the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underlines the importance of “leaving no one behind". This also means that the acceleration of the progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women around the world must be of critical importance if we are to meet our ambitious commitments and international pledge, **to give all of us on our planet a better future** by 2030. Our efforts to achieve sustainable development and peace are more likely to succeed if a broad-based mobilization of the necessary forces is built and a bottom-up approach adopted. This is why we must support Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other actors in their continued efforts to build integrated and sustainable development at the local level. Furthermore, given the key role played by women and young people in matters relating to peace and development, support for civil society fighting for gender equality and the empowerment of women is even more indispensable, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While recognising the countless challenges stemming from the pandemic, the Human Rights Council has appealed to States to ensure that human rights are at the front and centre of national responses to the pandemic. Human rights are an essential element to recovery from this crisis and cannot be side-lined. Indeed, on 29th May 2020 the Council adopted a President’s statement on the human rights implications of COVID 19 and during the 44th and 45th sessions of the Council, the human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic were addressed in 36 of the resolutions adopted. These resolutions stressed the importance of a human rights-based approach, gender-responsive measures, good governance and the critical role of national human rights institutions in COVID-19 responses and recovery. They also highlighted the importance of protecting civic space and freedom of expression as journalists and media workers continue to face violations because of their reporting on the pandemic. Moreover, the resolutions recognized the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on persons in vulnerable situations including women and girls affected by an increase in domestic violence, as well as the increasing inequalities within and between states.

The Council will continue to deliberate COVID-19 and human rights-based recovery measures in its future sessions, including at the 46th session in March 2021, when the outcome of these discussions will be presented for consideration and onward transmission to the July 2021 session of the High-level Political Forum in New York.

I wish you a productive dialogue and look forward to the summary report and recommendations.

Thank you.