

**“Engaging with the UN Human Rights Council,
during and after COVID 19 through the
LDC/SIDS Trust Fund:
Achievements, challenges and lessons
learned”**

STATEMENT

**The Honourable Alan Ganoo,
Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Regional Integration and International Trade
of the
Republic of Mauritius**

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**Your Excellency, Mrs. Victoria Ouédraogo Kibora,
Minister of Justice, Human Rights and Civic
Promotion, Keeper of Seals, Burkina Faso**

**Your Excellency, Ambassador Nazhat Shameem
Khan, President of the Human Rights Council**

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

Greetings

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all virtually to Mauritius and I look forward to receiving you in person once the travel restrictions have eased.

The pandemic unfortunately continues to have a severe impact both on human lives and on our rights. Millions of families across the globe have suffered grievous loss and I seize this opportunity to offer my deepest condolences to them.

Excellencies

Mauritius is honoured to co-host this workshop with Burkina Faso and looks forward to engaging constructively in the discussions on the Voluntary Trust Fund to see how we can make maximise the benefits thereof bearing in mind the evolving Human Rights landscape since the Fund was created almost ten years ago.

The idea of The Fund was born in 2011, when Mauritius was serving for a second time on the Council. At that time, there were only two Small Island Developing

States, Mauritius and Maldives which had served on the Council, since its inception.

When you are a small country where human rights are a pillar of your domestic and foreign policies, your participation in the work of the Council has to be delivered upon, regardless of the human resource or other constraints that you may have. But lack of capacity can affect your effectiveness, your ability to defend your country or to participate meaningfully in the debate.

Drawing from its own experience, the idea was born that SIDS and LDCs needed to have capacity to bring their views to the table at the Human Rights Council. Mauritius thus proposed the creation of a Voluntary Trust Fund to build capacity for delegates from LDCs and SIDS. It pursued the conversation with Maldives, the only other small island in the Council. The next step ensued, with Mauritius taking the idea forward through the African Group and Maldives through the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Burkina Faso responded rapidly and positively to join the core group of countries that would be behind securing support for the idea. Developed countries also came forward. The consensus that was built, resulted in the adoption of Resolution 19/26 in March 2012, with some 120 co-sponsors, one of the highest number of co-sponsors that any Human Rights Council resolution had ever known.

Although the resolution was adopted, it experienced some difficulties in getting started because no country was willing to donate money in a Fund which had no guarantee of succeeding.

This is when Ireland and the Netherlands became the first donors. We remain grateful to these two countries for their faith in this project. We remain grateful to all those of the core group who rallied around this idea and we remain grateful to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, donor States and other International Organisations which have since then, consistently support the Trust Fund.

The success of the Voluntary Trust Fund to-day, speaks for itself.

Over the past 07 years, the Trust Fund has supported 153 delegates across all regions including 59 from Africa. Thirty-five out of the thirty-six of the LDCs and SIDS in Africa have had at least one beneficiary of the Fund.

Excellencies,

Let me recall that SIDS and LDCs have a strong voice when united regardless of their size, geography, demography or Gross Domestic Product. Together, they account for almost half of the United Nations membership and therefore the perspectives they bring is highly significant.

It is gratifying that the challenges occasioned by the Pandemic has not dissuaded but rather further reinforced the strength and commitment of the Trust Fund. This was echoed in the landmark resolution, L. 23, which was adopted by the 46th session of the Council in March 2021, calling for the high-level panel on LDCs/ SIDS to take place next year, during the tenth anniversary of the Fund; for which we are grateful to Switzerland for their initiative.

I applaud the Secretariat of the Trust Fund for the able manner in which it adapted to the situation by organising online courses including the induction courses which took place before the Council's session.

This virtual seminar is one such example.

Allow me for a moment to address the Former Beneficiaries amongst us today.

You will spend the next three days discussing and preparing a soft declaration, which I understand, relates to the achievements, challenges and opportunities of the Voluntary Trust Fund.

While you are doing so, I would encourage you to pay particular attention to the ground realities of our Continent - to the countries that make up Africa whether SIDS, LDCs, landlocked or coastal countries with a multiplicity of cultures and ways of living and thinking and how these shape the way we perceive Human Rights.

Human rights issues, while being indivisible and non-discriminatory in nature, are multiple in our region. For some, the issue of Refugees may be the focus and for others, Climate Change. Different countries here have different aspirations and priorities.

However, the end goal is the same, that is, how can we build capacity through the Trust Fund to uphold universal values, to make of our delegates Human Rights Champions who will guide others, how to empower them to build or contribute to new rights as situations evolve. Already in recent times, we see the emergence of a multiplicity of linkages between Health and Human Rights, Trade and Human Rights or Business and

Human Rights. These require deep thinking and practical thinking if we are to bring genuine progress in the advancement of Human Rights.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Let me share two thoughts with you for discussion:

First, in order to encourage more LDCs and SIDS to become members of the Council, can the Fund develop the financial means to sponsor a delegate for, at least, the first year whenever a SIDS or LDC is elected to serve on the Council?

Secondly, would it add value to our discussions to hold intersessional webinars on specific human rights issues which affect LDCs and SIDS to help them chart out directions and proposals that may then be put forward at the Human Rights Council?

Before I conclude, I want to add a special word of thanks to the Chairperson of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Khan, who I understand opened the regional seminar held in Nadi and who has indicated that she will be listening to the discussions of this seminar as much as she can, a sign of her genuine commitment to guiding young people on Human Rights issues.

With these words, I would like to wish you all a successful seminar and I hope you are able to enjoy the session, albeit, virtually.