

*[Check against delivery]*



**Opening remarks**

**by**

**His Excellency Mr. Coly Seck**

**PRESIDENT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

**LDCs/SIDS TRUST FUND WORKSHOP FOR THE PACIFIC REGION**

**“Engaging with the UN Human Rights Council through the LDCs/SIDS Trust  
Fund: Achievements, Challenges and Lessons Learned”**

*Nadi, Republic of Fiji, 19-21 November 2019*

**19 November 2019**

Your Excellency Ambassador Khan,

Madame Chitrlekha Massey, Regional Representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Pacific,

Mister Eric Tistsonet, Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch,

Excellencies, distinguished participants and invitees,

Allow me first to express my sincere thanks to Ambassador Khan and, through her to the Government and citizens of the Republic of Fiji, for the very warm and familiar welcome that I have received in this beautiful country. Bula Vinaka!

It is truly an honour and a privilege to be with you on the occasion of the second regional seminar for SIDS and LDCs, organized by 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 (HRC).

I am very pleased to see here many delegates that have participated in the programs of the Trust Fund and who I have had the pleasure to meet during their missions to Geneva to attend the meetings of the Human Rights Council. This is my first visit to this region, and after having personally experienced the long and numerous flights to arrive here, I appreciate even more the efforts you have made to join us in Room Twenty of the Palais des Nations in Geneva. I thank you wholeheartedly for your time and efforts in this regard.

Distinguished participants,

The effective participation of all States in the work of the Council is crucial. Every country, regardless of size and geographic situation, should have its voice heard. On behalf of the entire Human Rights Council, I wish to particularly commend the least developed countries and small island States for their active participation, which is essential to realizing the fundamental principle of universality in the Council as well as the United Nations as a whole.

This year, the SIDS and LDCs Trust Fund has supported the participation of 33 delegates from 32 countries in the work of the Council. I am both proud and grateful of this achievement.

To be with you here today, so far from Geneva, fits fully within the framework of the priorities that I set when I had the honour of being elected to preside over the Human Rights Council for 2019, -- notably that of strengthening cooperation with regional institutions.

For the Council's work to make real impact on the ground, the Council must strengthen its cooperation with regional institutions and establish direct contact with them, in order to keep them informed of the discussions that take place in Room Twenty. This would facilitate a more

effective interaction with all stakeholders who work for human rights in their countries, regardless of the distance that separates us.

This is precisely why I visited the Council of Europe and the African Union during the first part of my presidency, and is also why I am here today.

Last month, Senegal, my country, the land of “Teranga”, which means “hospitality”, hosted the 2019 Human Rights Council retreat. This retreat provided an occasion for representatives of member States of the Council, coordinators of regional and political groups, civil society, and other UN partners to come together in a friendly and informal environment to discuss and debate various current emerging issues that are of great importance to the international community and that affect the full realization of human rights. Our discussions focused on four important topics: environment, climate change and human rights; mass migration and human rights; human rights in the face of growing inequalities and corporate social responsibility; and human rights in the digital age.

I will go into more detail on the content of these discussions during my keynote address later this morning. But I wish to stress here that it is undeniable that the voices of small island states and least developed countries must be heard on these issues. The purpose of the Voluntary Fund, and indeed the purpose of this regional seminar, is to determine how best to integrate your priorities and the challenges your countries face into the deliberations of the Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished participants,

Tomorrow I will travel to Suva to meet with the President of Fiji and other authorities, as well as participate in a conference with students from the University of South Pacific. I strongly believe that education is essential to our efforts in promoting and protecting human rights, and this conference is a great opportunity to spread information, not only about human rights issues but also about the good work being done by the Human Rights Council. It is also particularly timely as the theme for this year’s International Human Rights Day (which is the 10th of December) is “Youth Rises for Human Rights”.

Excellencies,

In 2020, two countries from this region -- Fiji and the Marshall Islands – will be Members of the Human Rights Council. This will be the first time since its establishment that two Pacific countries will serve as Members of the Council at the same time. I would like to congratulate both States on their election. I have no doubt that the Council will greatly benefit from their active and constructive participation.

Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your discussions over the next three days will be reflected in the “Nadi Declaration towards 2022”. I encourage you take advantage of this unique opportunity to ensure that voices of your beautiful and unique region are heard in Geneva. Your active participation and thoughtful contributions will ensure that this seminar is a success.

Thank you. Bula Vinaka