**Side event to the 56th session of the Human Rights Council on 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 (LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund)
*“Our success stories”***

***Friday 21 June 2024, 13:30-14:30, Room XXIV, Palais des Nations***

**DHC draft opening statement**

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to open this event celebrating the achievements of the least developed countries and small island developing States (LDCs/SIDS) Trust Fund - notably its contribution to promoting universal and meaningful participation of all Member States in the work of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms.

Our Office has, working with Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams, stepped up its efforts to provide more effective support to LDCs and SIDS towards achieving the 2030 agenda, including through the management of the Trust Fund.

Since its inception in 2012, 266 government officials – 156 women, and 110 men – from 71 LDCs and SIDS have benefitted from the Fund. 13 countries did not have a Permanent Mission in Geneva when they sent their representatives to participate in Human Rights Council sessions. In fact, the Trust Fund brought the diversity of voices to the Council.

Beneficiaries of the Fund have repeatedly highlighted how global challenges are disproportionately affecting their countries and emphasized the importance therefore of their participation in international discussions.

One such example is climate change - a major source of natural disasters, alteration of precipitation patterns, and loss of biodiversity. Climate change disproportionately affects the lives and livelihoods of SIDS/LDCs, and is resulting in increased poverty, deeper inequality, loss of territory, displacement, and even conflict.

In 2021, a core group composed of the Maldives, supported by beneficiaries of the Fund with another four Member States, led the historic Human Rights Council resolution on the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment – bringing about new substantive and procedural rights to protect those affected by climate and other environmental issues.

The Trust Fund’s beneficiaries bring home new skills and experience. Most have continued to work for their respective governments, with some having returned as part of delegations from their capitals to the Human Rights Council or to participate in the Universal Periodic Review.

Many beneficiaries have focused their work on their countries’ engagement with the UN Human Rights Mechanisms, effectively contributing to implementation of human rights mechanisms’ recommendations at the national level. Several beneficiaries have been assigned to posts in Geneva and New York.

I am pleased that we have with us four of the former beneficiaries of the Trust Fund, now based in Geneva here today to share their experiences with you from the podium.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Trust Fund has also provided capacity-building beyond the participation in the Council sessions in Geneva. It has trained government officials through an e-learning course on the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms for government officials working in the field of human rights. This training was such a success that our Office organized a national-level training in Vanuatu, a good practice that can hopefully be replicated elsewhere.

Despite these successes, the Trust Fund has yet to enjoy a predictable pattern of funding. After an initial period of growth, contributions to the Trust Fund have sharply decreased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, making the voluntary contributions received in 2023 the lowest since 2013, when the Fund was newly established. Should this trend continue, the Trust Fund will face significant challenges in sustaining similar levels of supports for beneficiaries as in previous years.

I call on all current and potential donors to engage with the Trust Fund, and to consider pledging predictable multi-year funding in order to achieve and maintain universality at every session of the Council, and inclusiveness, ensuring that no voice is left behind. We shall certainly do our part towards ensuring this support.

Thank you.