**Remarks by Mr Fred Sarufa, Minister and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations in New York at the High-Level Meeting of the Group of Friends of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) on behalf of the Eleven Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Beneficiaries of the United Nations Human Rights Council Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund for participation in the Thirty-Fourth Human Rights Council Session, 28 February 2017, Geneva, Switzerland,**

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**Co-Chairs of the Group of Friends of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the United Nations in Geneva;**

**Her Excellency Senator Concetta Feravanti-Wells, Minister for International Development and the Pacific of Australia; and**

**His Excellency, Mr Mohammed Asim, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives;**

**His Excellency Mr. Alfonso Dastis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain;**

**His Excellency Mr Valentin Zellweger, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations in Geneva and Vice-President of the Human Rights Council;**

**Your Excellency’s;**

**Mr Eric Tistounet, Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch and Representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights;**

**Distinguished friends of SIDS and LDCs; and**

**Esteemed Colleagues and Ladies and Gentlemen;**

From the vastness of the Pacific ocean to the majestic mountains of the Himalayas and the deltas of the Southeast Asia and across the Caribbean Seas to the West African coast, may I extend on behalf of the 11 beneficiaries of the LDCs and SIDS HRC Trust Fund very warm and cordial greetings to you all this afternoon.

And in keeping with the United Nations practice, may I say, in UN-speak, Co-Chairs, I will try to limit my remarks to within the prescribed timeframe. Honourable Ministers, I would however, seek your indulgence to bear with me for a little while as I break with informality to try and capture the essence of our sizeable group’s message.

**Excellency’s and friends of LDCs and SIDS**, it is indeed a distinct honour and pleasure for me to speak on behalf of the delegations of Bhutan, Carbo Verde, Jamaica, The Marshall Islands, The Federated States of Micronesia, Myanmar, Senegal, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, and my own country, Papua New Guinea, who are indeed grateful eleven recipients of the Human Rights Council’s LDCs and SIDS Voluntary Trust Fund, particularly for the current Council session.

Let me at the outset, register our group’s profound appreciation firstly, to Australia and the Maldives, as Co-Chairs of the Group of Friends of SIDS, for hosting this afternoon’s important milestone event. I say milestone for a reason, which I will explain in a short while. We would also applaud and commend the other members of the Group of friends of SIDS, many of whom are with us at this venue, for their valued and constructive support and engagement.

In so doing, it would be remiss of me not to use this occasion to also on our behalf, thank the delegation of the Netherlands for the welcome reception last Friday evening, which helped us ease up after an intensive first two days of Human Rights Council induction programme conducted by the OHCHR Secretariat.

**Co-Chairs and Excellency’s**, your warm welcome and generous cooperation and support extended to us, as aptly demonstrated by the respective laudable remarks just made, has indeed heartened and inspired us. Particularly at a time of global uncertainty, instability and humanitarian crisis in many parts of the world, which brings to the fore the imperative to working together in furtherance of the safeguarding and advancement of humanity’s rights, freedoms and dignity, not only in our respective countries but, regionally and globally.

We are also gratified and highly thankful to the donor partners over the past five years and particularly those that continue to contribute so generously towards the LDCs-SIDS Trust Fund. This has not only made it possible for our participation in the work of Human Rights Council but it also ensures that we are not left behind in the context of the evolving human rights work in the Council.

Let me also convey our appreciation to the President of the Council for his warm welcome to us yesterday in the opening segment. Likewise, for the useful guidance and support provided to us by many other delegations, including those of you in this room who have offered workspaces to some of us such as our representatives from the Pacific Islands Forum and the Commonwealth Secretariat office. May I also particularly acknowledge with deep gratitude the Secretariat of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for their commendable and outstanding outreach to us thus far.

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We would like to single out in particular the tremendous and excellent work being done on our behalf by Ms Fatou Houel and her tireless team members who are becoming somewhat of a legend to beneficiaries of the Trust Fund. I should note that well before we departed our respective shores and work stations to be here, our Human Rights Council work began in earnest and continue apace courtesy of Secretariat team.

**Co-Chairs and Excellency’s**, I spoke earlier about setting milestones here. Well, firstly, with the exception of my delegation, the other ten delegates are all new kids on the block, not so much in the context of the carriage of human rights protection and promotion mandates in their personal capacities in their respective countries but with respect to being, for the first-time ever, participating in the Human Rights Council formal session in Geneva.

And second, it is most pleasing to note the ratio of female to male continue to get even better and for this group, the women outnumber the man – a clear testament to gender empowerment and equality. We appreciate and value the gender mainstreaming that the Council is now embarking on, which sets a solid benchmark to guide our respective national efforts in this important area.

Thirdly, this group, by far, is the largest assembled yet, under the Trust Fund. Indeed important milestones have been set, thanks, in large part, to the development partners generous and continuing constructive support.

It is also fair to say that the past week here in the Human Rights Council has been a steep learning curve for many of us. It has also enabled us to better appreciate and comprehend, not only the complexities of the human rights architecture and system, including navigating the myriad of mazes and hallways in the Council, but more importantly the fundamental importance of knowing better that human rights does indeed matter. And for all of humanity!

It has also enhanced our capacity to know that ensuring the third pillar of the UN Charter – safeguarding and promoting human rights - complements and mutually reinforces the peace and security and sustainable development pillars and thereby reinforces the Charter holistically.

**Co-Chairs and Excellency’s**, we look forward with interest and level-headedness to the days and weeks ahead of us here in the Council and remain committed to build and strengthen our respective capacities that will help make a real difference in our respective work at the national level.

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Hopefully, this first steps will become the cornerstone of the solid foundation for a transformative and sustained universal participation in the Human Rights Council, as envisioned by the Trust Fund.

As we commemorate the Fifth Anniversary of the Trust Fund, later this month, which is another key landmark, we would like to pay tribute for the foresight and vision it laid down and the value added it has been for the cause of human rights protection and promotion especially in LDCs and SIDS. We also look forward to supporting the draft resolution on the Trust Fund during this Council session to ensure the voices of LDCs and SIDS continue to be heard in this Council.

**Co-Chairs and Excellency’s**,

My time allotted has long lapsed, so in closing, we believe that this is not the end of the road but just the beginning of a partnership that will be a beacon that will shine the light on humanity in our respective homes, countries and globally.

We, once again, sincerely thank you all for been an integral part of championing the achievements we’ve had in this Council and also for the work in progress. Be reassured that you also have our support and commitment.

Finally, in the select languages of the Trust Fund beneficiary countries, let me say the equivalent of thank you to the Co-Chairs and all our great friends assembled here: merci beaucoup, kommol tata, kalangan, Kyay zuu tin par tal, kadrinchey (la), malo ‘aupito, jerejef, obrigada, and taniku bada herea momokani.

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