**Statement delivered by Ms. Shae-Alicia Lewis**

**(Jamaica)**

**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**

**Side event in the margins of the Human rights Council 34th session**

**sponsored by**

**The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations in Geneva and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

At

Launch of 5th Anniversary Brochure of LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund

Thursday 16 March 2017, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m, Room XXIV, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon,

I bring you greetings on behalf of the other 10 beneficiaries under the Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council.  By now, it is perhaps well known that we represent three distinct areas of the world: Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Caribbean. My colleagues hail from Bhutan, Capo Verde, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of) ,Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, Timor Leste, Tonga and Trinidad and Tobago, while I come from Jamaica. We have different backgrounds, but all share a similar commitment to helping our respective countries to advance their human rights policies and programmes.

First, let me express our gratitude to the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco for organising this commemorative event and for its support in developing the brochure to celebrate the Fifth Anniversary of the establishment of the Trust Fund.

Today, as we celebrate the Fifth Anniversary, our presence here reflects the endurance of the Fund, and for this we say thanks for the kind contributions of donor countries, as well as the work of the Trust Fund Secretariat. The Fund has no doubt been successful over the last five years. So why has it been successful? The fact is, it has managed to address two key gaps in the diplomacy of small and economically vulnerable countries: capacity building and multilateral participation.

For SIDS and LDCs, resource constraints have generally meant that training is often one of the first line items to be sacrificed in budgetary processes. Furthermore, foreign travel and establishment of a diplomatic presence, particularly the former, are often seen as luxuries by the general public, and unfortunately finance ministries tend to agree. This affects our permanent diplomatic presence in key centres of diplomacy, the size of our presence or even participation in key conferences and meetings. Yet, SIDS/LDCS account for about 40 percent of the membership of the United Nations and our circumstances equip us with unique perspectives that can enrich multilateral discussions, and ensure a more representative decision-making process.

Excellencies and Friends,

So how exactly has the Trust Fund addressed the gaps in participation and capacity building for the 11 of us? In relation to participation, first of all, the Trust Fund has facilitated the attendance of four delegates from the Pacific region without Missions in Geneva. These delegates have been able to ensure the voices of their countries are heard, through delivering statements in panel discussions and interactive dialogues, and intervening in informal consultations to address issues critical to the national interests of their homeland. Furthermore, they have been able to keep their countries abreast of developments in the Council and behind the scenes, including meetings of treaty bodies, which would have been difficult without a presence on the ground. Other colleagues have been able to play a vital role in supporting the staff at their Missions, in negotiations, analysis of resolutions, reporting to capitals and drafting statements. For my country, in particular, which is currently the human rights coordinator for the Latin American and Caribbean Group, our ability to juggle the responsibilities of coordination with participation in the other substantive work of the Council has been greatly enhanced.

On the matter of capacity building, this has been a most instructive experience.  It started with the e-learning course on the Human Rights Council, which preceded our arrival in Geneva. This is an innovative model, which can address knowledge gaps within foreign ministries and among other government officials working in human rights. Yet while we recognise the usefulness of the e-learning course and UN Web TV, nothing quite compares to full immersion into the work of the Council. Our physical presence has allowed us to transcend the theory of the Human Rights Council, and experience the practical aspects, the dynamics and dynamism of the environment, the conduct of diplomacy often through more informal means, the techniques of negotiating resolutions, the role of NGOs, and the expansion of our knowledge of the issues falling within the Council’s purview. And so just as full immersion is crucial in learning a foreign language, no matter how many classes you have taken, so it is that only by full immersion have we the delegates been able to grasp the complexity of the work of the Council.

Distinguished Delegates,

The networks that we have established among ourselves [as beneficiaries] will no doubt be sustained. So too, we expect that the new knowledge we have acquired will be useful beyond this Session and will translate to enhanced capacity in negotiations and analysis of resolutions, declarations and other conference documents and that our exposure to the broader international context of human rights issues and the human rights architecture, including key issues and actors, will strengthen the quality of the policy advice that we will be required to give over the course of our careers. The knowledge we have acquired will also no doubt give us better clarity in our work in human rights reporting and follow-up.

It is also important to note that by facilitating this experience, the Trust Fund can extend its reach to even entire units or departments, as participants return home to share their skills with others.  At the same time, it is understandable that especially for those not previously acquainted with the work of the Council, one month is not enough to learn all one needs to know; for this reason, we look forward to collaborating with the Secretariat, where possible, on providing continued support, especially in respect of information sharing.

Excellencies, Friends,

I believe it is now axiomatic that for the effective functioning of the Human Rights Council, in keeping with the mandate of the UN General Assembly issued through Resolution 60/251, the voices of all countries must be taken into account in the decision-making processes. Without that universality of participation, the credibility of the Council would suffer, and with that its legitimacy.   That the Trust Fund has survived five years is a testament to its significance. We hope it can continue its support to countries like ours, as we all strive for a functional, representative and robust international human rights architecture.

I thank you.