



Statement (Virtual)

by

**Mr. Fred Sarufa
Deputy Permanent Representative
of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations, New York
and 2019 Rapporteur-General of the Pacific Region Workshop**

at the

**Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and
Small Island Developing States (SIDS)
Trust Fund Virtual Workshop for the Asian Region:**

**“Engaging with the UN Human Rights Council during and after
COVID-19 through the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund:
Achievements, Challenges and Lessons Learnt”**

**Male, Maldives
24 November 2021**

"Check against delivery"

His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Shahid, President of the General Assembly;
His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Khaleel, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Maldives;
Her Excellency Ms. Nazshat Shameen Khan, President of the Human Rights Council and Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Fiji to the United Nations in Geneva;
Excellencies, Fellow delegates and Beneficiaries of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund, Distinguished participants and Ladies and Gentlemen;

As the Rapporteur-General of the Pacific Region Workshop and also a former LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund beneficiary, may I, on behalf of the Pacific region, and also on my own delegation's behalf, firstly; convey, in my own country's Kuanua¹ language, which is one of over 800 distinct languages and say "bona malana", which means good morning and warmest greetings to you all.

And secondly, note how honoured and pleased I am to, once again, for the third time, in this series of Human Rights Council related LDCs and SIDS Trust Fund Regional Workshops, and for the second time, join virtually from New York, the Asian region Workshop.

Having personally visited the Maldives, not so long ago, I would have preferred, and I am sure, like many others in this meeting, to have been in-person in beautiful Maldives for this Workshop had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Be that as it may, let me convey the Pacific region's deep gratitude to our hospitable fellow sister Small Island Developing State of the Maldives for the commendable efforts in enabling us to come together, though virtually, for this Asian Region Workshop and offer our best wishes for a successful Male Declaration outcome.

I would like to also acknowledge with appreciation the continuing excellent leadership support from the President of the Human Rights Council for this Workshop and similarly pay special tribute to the tremendous partnership that is going from strength-to-strength from the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund partners, the Friends of LDCs/SIDS in Geneva, other development partners as well as the ever reliable team from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, particularly Mr. Eric Tistounet, Chief, HRC Branch and Ms. Fatou Camara Houel, Coordinator, LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund, for their invaluable support.

Such support, without a doubt, is helping us – LDCs/SIDS - help ourselves better address our human rights commitments and obligations and ensuring that we are not left behind, particularly those LDCs and SIDS not physically present in Geneva.

¹ A language spoken by the Tolai people in Papua New Guinea's East New Britain Province.

Madam Moderator,

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic gripping the global community, including impacting our collective work; this year, the Small Island Developing States, in particular, have had two remarkable achievements. The simultaneous incumbency of the President of the General Assembly's 76th Session – now held by the Maldives - and that of the Human Rights Council – with Fiji at the helm. Of course, attaining this with the support of LDCs and others.

It is in this spirit that I want to thank the opening keynote speakers for this Workshop for their thought-provoking and insightful respective addresses, including His Excellency the President of the General Assembly for his Presidency of Hope advocacy in our collective work. This have set the stage for the Workshop and I am sure will inspire the Workshop deliberations.

Madam Moderator,

Now let me briefly, in a truncated way, share with you all some reflections on what I have learned from my involvement, over the recent years, through the auspices of the Trust Fund in terms of training, capacity building and workshops and also offer some suggestions to further enhance the evolving commendable work under this arrangement, as we work towards marking the Tenth Anniversary of our human rights journey under the auspices of the Trust Fund. The longer version will be shared with the Secretariat.

Before I do so, I would, however, note that much of what I would like to share with you today are not new issues but rather reiterating key points that have been articulated in previous Workshops, particularly drawing from the Workshop for the Africa region eight months ago., which remain pertinent. I hope this will be beneficial for particularly our colleagues from the Asian region.

I will restrict myself to five thematic areas though there are many noteworthy developments under the flagship of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund, which deserves in-depth discussions.

Firstly, the national leadership and ownership of human rights agenda by LDCS and SIDS; secondly, on political visibility and voices of LDCs and SIDS in the Human Rights Council and related bodies; thirdly, on partnerships; fourthly, on the Workshops processes and outcomes; and fifthly, on the way forward to 2022 and beyond.

This is the second occasion we are meeting virtually for the Workshop series, courtesy of the COVID-19 pandemic, whose devastating impact on all aspects of life, including on human rights, continues to be felt worldwide, including for us in the Pacific region.

It is such a time as this, the most challenging and difficult times, that we all must rise to the occasion, individually and collectively, as a government and a global community of humanity, to take leadership and ownership to ensure that our hard-won human rights gains are not lost and arginalized but protected and advanced.

As an example, my own country, Papua New Guinea, presented on 4 November 2021 to the HRC our Third Cycle Universal Periodic Review. It was not an easy task because of the COVID-19 challenges involved. But more importantly the onus was on us to show leadership and ownership of our human rights commitments and obligations.

The LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund capacity building, training and the workshops we all benefited from and will continue to do so, is but one of the solid stepping-stones we can count on in this regard. We must leverage it to be better human rights torchbearers at the national, regional and global level and I believe this is a work in progress for many of us.

Madam Moderator and dear friends,

Secondly, through the supportive work of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund, it is most pleasing to note that now, not only has the political visibility and the voices of LDCS/SIDS on issues of importance to them are amplified and resonating in the Human Rights Council and related bodies, like never before but also those without physical diplomatic representation in Geneva are not left behind through the inclusivity of this process.

For the Pacific region, of noteworthy is the welcome exponential growth of the proportion of female participants taking part in the HRC sessions; the increasing establishment of Pacific SIDS Missions in Geneva; and the welcomed growth in the membership of the Human Rights Council the number of successful Pacific SIDS, from none to two over the past 15 years.

We had for the first time-ever four female Ambassadors who joined our Pacific region Workshop. The Workshop's level of intensity, the heightened commitment and creativity and the spirit of collegiality shown through and is a great reflection of the training and capacity building under the Trust Fund. The same can be said of the other SIDS regions.

A great example of the political visibility and amplifying voice in the HRC, for us, particularly from the Pacific region and SIDS, in general, is that of the incumbent Human Rights Council President Ambassador Khan from Fiji, who has broken new ground and set a milestone for being the first-ever Pacific region and SIDS representative and a female, to hold this important post. Fiji and Ambassador Khan and also the Pacific SIDS have lit the pathway for our distinguished women from LDCs and SIDS and elsewhere to say yes, we can, too!

Also praiseworthy is the continuing practice of the HRC Presidents availing themselves to be an integral part of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Regional Workshops. The Pacific region was well pleased to play host to the landmark first-ever visit to our Blue Pacific Continent by the former HRC President His Excellency Ambassador Coly Seck of Senegal.

At the highest political level of the Council, bringing the human rights agenda and work to the regions and peoples of the world especially LDCs and SIDS, is an important step in the right direction. This is too important an issue to be just confined to the seat of the UN human rights architecture.

Such an important visit could be further improved by expanding the engagement of the President in an informal setting for separate direct dialogue with multistakeholders in the host country.

These are important constituents of “we the peoples of the United Nations”, who may never again have any such opportunity to directly say to the HRC President that human rights matter to them too. This requires advance and thoughtful planning and improved dialogue between all relevant stakeholders before future Workshops are hosted.

Value added positive developments such as these need to be further encouraged and sustained for political visibility and voices of LDCs and SIDS to be not only heard in the narrow corridors of the HRC but also to shape the agenda of the Council, in a way that takes to heart and acts in a manner that adequately serves the wider and specific interests of LDCs and SIDS on the human rights agenda. The importance of this cannot be overstated.

Madam Moderator and colleagues;

Another important milestone we all can be proud of is the pivotal role the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund is playing to nurture constructive partnership and friendship. Not only between the participants themselves. But also more importantly, with the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund partners, the Friends of LDCs/SIDS in Geneva, the wide UN membership and indeed also with the outstanding team of champions for LDCs and SIDS in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who are always with us, including today. This has been a cornerstone of the continuing and sustained support and success for the Trust Fund activities. The sustainability of this arrangement is dependent on all of us doing our part well.

The importance of this evolving partnership is attested by the landmark HRC Decision L23 on the “High-Level Panel discussion on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council”, adopted on 24 March 2021.

This was where 160 UN Member States (nearly 83 percent) were co-sponsors and now that Decision holds the HRC record for the second highest sponsored text.

I am heartened to note and with pride that all Pacific SIDS joined the co-sponsorship of that landmark HRC Decision. Also, the support rendered by many of your delegations from other LDCs and SIDS regions is worthy of praise. That is great partnership at work for LDCs and SIDS and for the noble cause of fostering human rights for all.

Madam Moderator and dear friends;

Now turning to the fourth crucial lesson I have learned from the Trust Fund Workshop, having been to the inaugural one in Guyana for the Caribbean region in 2018 and the second one my own Pacific region in Fiji in 2019 and the Third Workshop for Africa region earlier this year, the significance of the outcome documents or Declarations cannot be overstated.

For us from the Pacific region, the Nadi Declaration drew inspiration from the Georgetown Declaration of our fellow SIDS from the Caribbean region. We can learn much from each other.

The Workshop Declarations serves as an important guidepost on the key priority human rights and related issues that matter most to the respective regions and also collectively there are many shared interests between the regions, where partnerships are born, harnessed and leveraged to benefit our national, regional and global human rights issues such as in the preparation and presentation of the Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR), treaty body reporting, Special Procedures work, capacity building and training, and the reforms of the HRC and the UN as a whole.

It is also important to note that there are some challenges, including new and emerging ones that are specific to certain regions and therefore one-size-fit-all modus operandi in addressing such situations needs to be avoided.

An example of this is in our Pacific region's Nadi Declaration is the primacy and urgency of addressing the human rights concerns arising from the single gravest existential threat the climate crisis continues to pose for our peoples and countries, who are on the frontlines of climate change, natural disasters and rising sea-levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded further our challenges and holding back and in other instances regressing progress in our sustainable development goals pursuit where many human rights issues are covered.

In other words, and the important point to make here is that the quality of the Declaration is what matters most. This depends entirely on the practical and strategic leadership from the Rapporteur-General and ably supported by every participant and the setting of a workable and solid modalities of work. It must also be an inclusive process where no one is left behind.

I would add that the draft Work Programme content – the topics or sub-topics and the guiding questions, which are not set in stone, needs to be thoroughly reviewed and examined in advance to ensure it is what your region wants.

The welcome helpful guidance from the Secretariat is a complementary support. As member States of a region, be the author and finisher of your Work Programme and Agenda. It is a key building block to a satisfactory Declaration.

Also, dear colleagues, time is also indeed of essence and working to schedule is important.

Another important element is that the Declaration must be realistic about the opportunities provided under the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund to address support for human rights issues at the national and other levels but also recognizes the Trust Funds limitations and challenges including new and emerging ones, which we have to also address.

Also, importantly, how these Declarations are taken forward in the Council matters and deserves greater attention. One of the Nadi Declaration recommendations from the Pacific region Workshop is to hold the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Workshop earlier in the year rather than at towards the year's end.

The point being that the Declarations are best addressed during the tenure of the incumbent HRC President, who is directly involved in the process instead of this being passed over to the next President.

In considering the timing of such Workshops, we need account for work schedules for our small delegations both in Geneva and New York. The practical challenges for those of us in New York where the General Assembly main Committees work runs from October to December each year and the Workshop held in November is not conducive for LDCs and SIDS participants from New York Missions.

It is critically important that we remain continuously engaged on our issues to ensure sustainability and practical support from the wider UN membership and other relevant stakeholders.

So, if I may humbly leave a thought with our LDCs and SIDS brothers and sisters from the Asian region, the “Male Declaration Towards 2022”, is entirely in your hands and may you learn from both the African, Caribbean and Pacific region Workshops in enabling you arrive at the Declaration you want.

Madam Moderator, Excellencies and colleagues;

Going forward to 2022 and beyond, it is important to recognize that our governments must continue to take leadership and ownership role in strengthening human rights nationally but also work in close partnership with all stakeholders, including HRC and build on the foundations that has been laid under the HRC resolution 34/40.

We are now four months away from marking the Tenth Anniversary of the LDC/SIDS Trust Fund, as highlighted by HRC Decision L23. It is therefore incumbent on all of us to work together as a united and solid team.

This is to ensure that we clearly demonstrate to our partners who have long supported and continue to support the Trust Fund that the added value of the Fund not just to us as beneficiary countries but also to the overall work of the HRC and which deserves to be continued in the foreseeable future.

Madam Moderator, Madam President and dear friends,

In conclusion, we as a Pacific region recognize that collectively as LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund beneficiaries we have remarkably come a long way in a few short years, thanks to the foresight and wisdom of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund. How successful it is, going forward, is in our hands, individually and collectively.

I thank you all for your attention.