



**WORKSHOP FOR LDCs/SIDS IN THE CARIBBEAN REGION:
“Engaging with the UN Human Rights Council through the LDCs/SIDS Trust
Fund: Achievements, Challenges and Lessons Learned”**

Georgetown, 19 November 2018

**Keynote Address
by
H.E. Mr Vojislav Šuc
President of the Human Rights Council**

(Welcome)

Good morning everyone. It is my great pleasure to be able to address and welcome you all at the first in the series of workshops for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) mandated by the Human Rights Council in 2017.

This year has been a very challenging and intense one and a short escape to the warm Caribbean seems like just the right medicine. But this visit to the Caribbean region is first and foremost an important piece in my vision to strengthen the Human Rights Council as a cooperative global body for the protection and promotion of human rights.

(Cooperation with regional organizations)

Today, in this interconnected globalized world, the challenges we face are not challenges of just one State or one region but of the entire world. Dialogue and cooperation on all levels, and especially between the Human Rights Council and regional mechanisms are essential in order to effectively confront these challenges and ensure the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all.

When I took up my office in January this year I laid out priority areas I wanted to focus on during my Presidency in order to strengthen the Human Rights Council. Among them was also a question of how to strengthen relationship and enhance cooperation with regional organizations. Already the General Assembly recognized the importance of this cooperation when it created the Council and gave it a mandate to work in close cooperation in the field of human rights with regional organizations. Your engagement with the Human Rights Council in the following days is therefore an important contribution to this aim. And I believe that the Human Rights Council can greatly benefit in its deliberations from the knowledge and experience that regional organizations bring with its specific understanding of the regional particularities and dynamics.

(Universality and Trust Fund)

Among the key principles guiding the work of the Human Rights Council is the principle of universality. Ensuring universal participation in the Human Rights Council is essential in our efforts to address human rights issues globally. To explain why the principle of universality is so important let me borrow the words of the late Kofi Annan who reminded us that an ostensibly global human rights body could not credibly or effectively speak out against or influence human rights situations in much of the world if it was accountable to and represented by only a handful of countries. In this respect I am happy to report that as of January 2019 114 out of 193 UN member states will have served as members of the Human Rights Council. Therefore, I wish to warmly welcome the Bahamas as the first CARICOM state to the Human Rights Council membership in the period of 2019-2021. I firmly believe that your membership will enrich our debates in the Council.

In 2019 Fiji, a fellow member from the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) will also begin its three-year membership of the Human Rights Council. This will make the next year composition of the Council particularly important for the Small Island Developing States. I sincerely hope this will also serve as further encouragement for other members of CARICOM and SIDS to consider putting forward their candidacy for membership in the Council.

With the continuous and increasing support of States, the Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the work of the Council enabled the participation of

25 delegates in its regular sessions this year. Among these government officials, ten were from Africa, five were from the Caribbean and Latin America, and ten were from Asia and the Pacific.

Furthermore, 14 of them were women and six represented Small Island Developing States (SIDS) that do not have permanent representation in Geneva, namely: Antigua and Barbuda, Marshall Islands, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu.

(Human Rights Council)

In the short history it has been able to write so far, the Human Rights Council has carved notable achievements. In the twelve years, the Council has established itself as a leading forum where concerns and views on human rights issues and situations can be voiced in a constructive manner. It is a body where delegations can come together in an effort to find common ground. It is a unique body in that it enables various stakeholders, including civil society representatives, to participate in promoting universal human rights protection. It therefore provides a setting to hear a wide range of views on difficult human rights issues, including those which other organisations are unable or even unwilling to discuss.

The Council also possess a robust set of mechanisms which enables it to respond to human rights issues and situations worldwide. The Council's 56 Special Procedures mandates and investigative commissions provide us with first-hand,

reliable information from every corner of the globe and contribute valuable recommendations towards ensuring the protection of human rights.

The UPR, which is now well into its 3rd cycle and continues to celebrate a 100% participation rate, is often cited as one of the Council's greatest achievements. It not only provides the Council and the world with an account of the human rights record of every UN Member State, it also elevates human rights on the agenda of government ministries across the board.

These Council's unique mechanisms ensure that no human rights concern goes unaddressed and this can play an important role in the overall UN prevention agenda. All UN bodies as well as other organizations can use the expertise, information and recommendations provided by the Human Rights Council when addressing and preventing serious crises around the world.

(Looking towards 2021)

Turning now to the way ahead of us, I would like to say a few words about the tasks and challenges that lie before the Human Rights Council in the coming years. Among these challenges, without a doubt, are the preparations for the upcoming review after 2021. This is based on the General Assembly's 2011 decision to maintain the status of the Council as a subsidiary body of the GA and to review this status again between ten and fifteen years later.

Unlike the mandate for the 2011 review, this time around the GA did not specify that the Council should review its work and functioning at the same time as it is considering its status. Consequently, whether the upcoming review should include

also the functioning of the Council or should it focus only on the question of status is the regular topic of ongoing debates.

With 2021 quickly approaching, now is the right time to discuss what the 2021 review process should look like and how the Council can best participate in and contribute to it.

But for me one thing remains certain – as 2021 draws nearer, the Council would benefit greatly by showing itself as a strong and vibrant body and an essential part of the United Nations system. Improving the Council's efficiency in Geneva, and in turn its effectiveness on the ground, must remain a priority in our work between now and 2021.

(Efficiency process)

Let me be clear, the Council has many good stories to tell, but as is the case with everything in this imperfect world, there is always room for improvement. The efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's work is the area where delegations have agreed that improvements are most needed. Efforts to address efficiency have been at the forefront of our agenda for some time now.

On this basis I have initiated, together with the Bureau of the Council, a process guided by the co-facilitators which through informal open-ended consultations seeks to identify long-term measures to improve efficiency, strengthen the Council and rationalize its work.

This process aims to provide space for more quality debate and more time for delegations, particularly small ones, to be able to follow the work of the Council and thus meaningfully participate in it. It focuses on three aspects: (1) reducing the

workload and meeting hours of the Council during its regular sessions, (2) the rationalization of resolutions and initiatives, and (3) the use of modern technology. Through open-ended inclusive consultations we are currently working on securing an consensual agreement among the delegations to adopt measures at our organizational session on 3 December. Small Islands Developing States have so far made an important contribution in this process.

(Geneva - New York relationship)

This year cooperation and collaboration has been the theme of our efforts in the Human Rights Council. While we are striving to create an atmosphere for a constructive dialogue and cooperation in the Human Rights Council, we have also spent considerable time discussing the need for better cooperation within the United Nations system particularly looking for tangible solutions to bridge the disconnect between the three pillars and the so-called Geneva – New York gap.

When I visited UN Headquarters this year, it was apparent that the work of the Human Rights Council, and the issue of human rights overall, is rarely present in the day-to-day work of the United Nations in New York.

I find this extremely unfortunate because in the face of a fracturing world where human rights and multilateralism are under threat, we need now more than ever a strong United Nations. Fragmented approaches and working in silos seriously hinders the work of the organization.

Understandably, the various bodies and organs of the UN have their own priorities built around their own mandates and budgets. But it is the imperative that we start

connecting the dots in order to ensure that each part of this great organization is working for one common goal – a more just and peaceful world.

(Conclusion)

During my term, I have had the rare opportunity of gaining an insider’s view of the strengths and weaknesses not only of the Human Rights Council, but of the United Nations system as a whole. And I have realized how imperfect the UN system is. But at the same time, I have become even more convinced of its crucial role as our guarantor, a guarantor that we do not return to dark periods of our history, which we experienced in the last century.

I strongly believe that the Human Rights Council, with its guiding principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity, constructive international dialogue and cooperation, provides the international community with the perfect platform to come together. We must commit ourselves to work together in order to achieve the full respect for all human rights of every person in all corners of the globe.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights tells us that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. I believe that while we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of this fundamental document we should seize this opportunity to reflect on the strength that the international community had at the time of its adoption. Through this retrospect let us reaffirm our promise of “never again” by efficiently mending the fracturing world we are witnessing today.
