



SPEECH OF AMBASSADOR NAZHAT SHAMEEM KHAN
At the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Regional Workshop: The Pacific Region
“Engaging with the UN Human Rights Council through the LDCs/SIDS Trust
Fund: Achievements, Challenges and Lessons Learned.”
19 – 21 November 2019

Bula vinaka and welcome to you all,

- It is with great pleasure that Fiji hosts this workshop. A special welcome to the President of the Human Rights Council His Excellency Mr Coly Seck, who has travelled to Fiji from Geneva to honour us at this workshop. It is the first time that any President of the Human Rights Council has visited Fiji and we are overwhelmed and honoured by his visit. His quiet and principled leadership at the Human Rights Council has inspired us all to greater efficiency and to a uniform adherence to the procedures of the Council. He is accompanied by Ms Fatou Gaye the Special Advisor of the President, and a person well known to representatives of States in Geneva for her attention to detail, her support for the Presidency and for her efficiency.
- We are also pleased to welcome to Fiji and to this workshop Mr Eric Tistounet the Chief of the Human Rights Council Secretariat of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. It is true to say, from my experiences with the HRC Bureau this year, that the Secretariat under Mr Tistounet’s leadership is the engine room of the Council. From experience I have to say, an extremely well oiled and and efficiently functioning engine room. It is also an engine room which is so subtle and self deprecating that we

often forget how much effort and energy has gone into the preparations for each session of the Council.

- It is with particular pleasure that Fiji hosts the SIDS/LDCS Pacific Workshop. Fiji has been a strong advocate for the Trust Fund, because it is based on the premise that a Human Rights Council which does not represent all regions and all concerns, does not fulfil the expectation that human rights are universal and relevant for everyone. Over the years the Trust Fund has brought many diplomats to the Council, especially those from countries which do not have Missions in Geneva. Fiji has been a beneficiary of the Trust Fund and we have seen for ourselves how the exposure and training of our own diplomats at the Council, has helped Fiji to be better represented in Geneva.
- It is therefore a matter of pride that this workshop is held in the Pacific and in Fiji. I am very pleased to welcome all beneficiaries to Fiji and to the Pacific for this important workshop, and we from the Pacific especially welcome delegates from the Caribbean and African regions.
- We represent a collection of Pacific Island States, bursting with diversity and united in our love for our region. We are also aware that whilst human rights are universal, that issues which have impacted our islands disproportionately such as rising sea levels and more frequent and intense disasters, and such as internal climate displacement, require solutions where Pacific voices have become especially relevant. Also important is the discussion around development and human rights, and balancing the important relationship between cultural autonomy and human rights. Increasingly we are hearing more of these discussions in Geneva.
- Since 2014, when Fiji first opened its Mission in Geneva, we have seen how the voices of SIDS and LDCs have helped to shape the debate in the Human Rights Council. There are cynics in the world who might question what the Council does, and how effective it is. I am not one of them. I have sat in the Council day after day, in all its sessions, including the sessions of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review. I have seen how the debates have changed for the better. I see a greater appetite for discussions around the

relationship between development and human rights, around the role that culture plays in both restricting human rights and developing it, around LGBT rights, and around the important role of businesses in human rights. The Council has greatly influenced the domestic implementation of rights. Those countries which are present in Geneva and are able to participate in these debates, are those which have a greater chance of watching the rights discourse unfold nationally. It is for this reason, that the purpose behind the SIDS/LDCs Trust Fund, is so central to ensuring the universal relevance of human rights.

- Human rights must not be the intellectual chattering of a privileged few. They must have relevance to the lives of all people, in the rural and urban areas of a country, for all men and women and children, and for every human being with the right to a healthy and sustainable environment. It is for this reason also that the Universal Periodic Review process – a process of constructive peer review of a country’s human rights progress, is so effective as a catalyst for change.
- Through my years as Fiji’s Ambassador in Geneva, I have seen more Pacific Island Permanent Missions established and I have seen more representatives of Pacific Small Island States engaging in the Human Rights Council. Fiji, Nauru, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands now all have Missions in Geneva. Last year Fiji became a member of the Council. This year we were joined by the Marshall Islands. These developments indicate not only the willingness of Pacific Island countries to engage in human rights discussions in Geneva, they show that the global community wants to hear from them. This is significant. We want to be heard, and the world wants to hear from us. However, we have not forgotten that the first steps were taken by the SIDS members in the Council, by the Maldives and Mauritius. They performed so well on the Council, that they inspired us all. They showed us that smallness in size and limited resources did not prevent effective membership and engagement on the Council.
- I consider that this workshop will serve to enlighten us on how we can improve our engagement with the Human Rights Council through the

LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund. It will enlighten us on the achievements, challenges and lessons learned in ascertaining how Small Island States and LDC's may access the Trust Fund to facilitate closer and more effective engagement with the Human Rights Council.

- That is the significance of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund. It opens the window of opportunity for us to advocate for the protection of our human rights in the context of our development journeys, and to set out challenges to the implementation of those rights. This journey is not identical in any two countries. However, our experiences with climate change, migration, cultural autonomy, faith based practices, and poverty reduction, often show similar patterns.
- I thank the Secretariat of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund and the OHCHR for making this workshop a reality. I would also like to thank those from other regions present with us notably from the Caribbean and African regions. Welcome to Fiji.
- Finally, a special word of thanks to the donors to the Trust Fund. Without the donors the purpose and scope of the Trust Fund would be frustrated. On behalf of every country which has benefited, and every diplomat who has built his or her capacity to engage at the Council, we thank you.
- It is our hope that more Pacific Island States will reach out and access the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund to facilitate an effective engagement with the Human Rights Council. It is also our hope that this workshop provides the Trust Fund alumni, an opportunity to meet each other again and to together help to shape and strengthen the future of the Trust Fund.
- We have a remarkable array of experts here with us from OHCHR in Fiji, led by the Regional Head Chitra Massey, and the Secretariat of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund. I anticipate that by the end of this workshop, the participants will also become experts on the matter. I wish to acknowledge especially the

passion and dedication of Fatou Camara Houel the Coordinator of the the Trust Fund. It would be fair to say that Fatou has become synonymous with the SIDS/LDCs Trust Fund. Indeed the happiest I have ever seen Fatou is when we have achieved universal representation at a session of the Council as a result of her efforts and the efforts of her team at OHCHR Geneva and of the SIDS/LDCs Trust Fund.

- I wish you all the very best.

Thank you. Vinaka Vakalevu.