**49th session of the Human Rights Council**

**Annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming**

***Theme: The contribution of universal participation to the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system 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***

*Concept note (16 February 2022)*

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| **Date and venue:** | **Monday, 28 February 2022, 4 to 6 p.m.**  **Room XIX, Palais des Nations, Geneva and online platform (Zoom)**  *(will be broadcast live and archived at* [*http://webtv.un.org*](http://webtv.un.org/)*)* |
| **Objectives:** | The annual high-level panel discussion will gather high-level representatives of United Nations agencies and funds, high-level representatives of Member States and other stakeholders.  The panel discussion will focus on the importance of universal participation and of multilingualism in multilateralism and the need to actively promote them in order to ensure that all United Nations Member States can contribute meaningfully to shaping solutions to international problems, including in the field of human rights. At the international level, power imbalances and lack of representation of least developed countries and small island developing States (LDCs and SIDS) can contribute to outcomes that are not responsive to the needs and rights of the people of those countries, while conversely their participation can lead to positive outcomes. Speakers and panellists are encouraged to focus on challenges posed by the lack of universal representation and participation in their respective fields/organizations and measures taken to address this situation.  The panel discussion is organized 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* and will also showcase its achievements since its inception*.* |
| **Chair:** | **H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas**, President of the Human Rights Council |
| **Opening statements:** | **H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid**, President of the 76th session of the General Assembly  **Ms. Michelle Bachelet**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  **Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, Director-General of the World Health Organization *(video message)*  **H.E. Ms. Louise Mushikiwabo**, Secretary-General of the International Organization of la Francophonie |
| **Video screening:** | *Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund –  video prepared by the Trust Fund secretariat, OHCHR (duration: 5 mins)* |
| **Panellists:** | * **Ms. Rebeca Grynspan**,Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development * **Mr. Martin Chungong**,Secretary-General, Inter-Parliamentary Union *(video message)* * **Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox**, Acting High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States *(Zoom)* * **Ms. Emeline Siale Ilolahia**, Executive Director of the Pacific Islands Association of Non-governmental Organisations (PIANGO) *(video message)* |
| **Outcome:** | The panel discussion will contribute to the following outcomes:   * Recognition of the benefits of universal participation and multilingualism in multilateral affairs; * Presentation, through concrete examples, of the contributions made by LDCs and SIDS to the promotion and protection of human rights; * Better understanding of the unique challenges faced by LDCs and SIDS to access and engage with multilateral fora, including with the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms; * Achievements 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; * Identifying measures to encourage active engagement by more LDCs and SIDS in the work and membership of the Human Rights Council and to encourage LDCs and SIDS not represented in Geneva to consider establishing a permanent resident representation in Geneva; * Strengthening coordination within the United Nations system to ensure that LDCs and SIDS receive appropriate and dedicated technical assistance and capacity-building, including in the field of human rights, but also environmental, health and trade issues; * Reviewing and recommending measures, in particular those related to the use of modern technology, that could be envisaged by the Council and other intergovernmental bodies or international organizations to address challenges faced by LDCs and SIDS delegations.   A summary report on the panel discussion will be prepared by OHCHR. |
| **Mandate:** | In paragraph 42 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, the Human Rights Council decided to hold an annual panel discussion to interact with heads of governing bodies and secretariats of United Nations agencies and funds within their respective mandates on specific human rights themes with the objective of promoting the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system.  At its organizational session, held on 6 December 2021, the Human Rights Council decided that the theme of the 2022 panel discussion will be *“The contribution of universal participation to the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system 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”*. With this decision, the annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming is replacing 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, mandated previously by Human Rights Council decision 46/115. |
| **Format:** | The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two segments. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statements, panellists’ presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 12 States or observers, 1 national human rights institution and two non-governmental organizations.  The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). Passive interpretation from Portuguese into the six United Nations official languages will also be available for this panel. |
| **Accessibility:** | In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the interactive debate will be webcast and made accessible.[[1]](#footnote-1) International sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided. During the event itself, participants can access live English captioning on the StreamText web page (<https://www.streamtext.net/player?event=CFI-UNOG>). Hearing loops are available for collection from the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in *The accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities* (available on <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/Accessibility.aspx>). |
| **Background:** | Multilateralism is a hallmark and the *raison d'être* of the United Nations to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights. In order to make it relevant for all, it is necessary to ensure universal participation in the work of the United Nations, while ensuring that such participation is meaningful and that all United Nations Member States can effectively contribute to shaping those international problems, including in the promotion and protection of human rights. Also, more than ever, multilingualism is crucial to the discussion on human rights issues. Multilingualism is essential to ensuring universal participation.  The Human Rights Council, in order to enhance universal participation in its work has, through the adoption of resolution 19/26, established the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund to support activities designed to enhance the institutional and human capacity of LDCs and SIDS; to enable their delegations to participate more fully in the work of the Council, upon their request; and to encourage their effective and informed participation in consultative and decision-making processes, including negotiation sessions.  To date the Trust Fund has supported 172 government officials, including 104 women and 68 men, from 71 of the 72 LDCs and SIDS: 35 from Africa, 22 from Asia and the Pacific, and 14 from the Latin America and the Caribbean. It has supported at least once all the 19 LDCs and SIDS that do not have a permanent resident mission in Geneva. Other main achievements of the Trust Fund include: development of a e-learning tool, organization of induction courses (in person, online) and regional workshops, running of a HRC Help Desk for small states, and strengthened partnerships with intergovernmental organizations (the Caribbean Community, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the Commonwealth) and other Geneva-based organizations that support LDCs and SIDS. The membership of LDCs and SIDS in the HRC has increased since the inception of the Trust Fund. The Trust Fund has supported all the LDCs and SIDS members of the Council at least once. Since the establishment of the Trust Fund, there has been growing interest in its activities, achievements and impacts. This has contributed to an exceptional expansion of its donor base, which needs to be sustained and further expanded. Efforts must continue. Voluntary contributions from donor countries remain critical.  The universal periodic review (UPR), one of the crowning innovations of the Council, which exemplifies universality, is a unique process that involves a review of the human rights records of all the 193 United Nations Member States. The support provided by the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the UPR has greatly facilitated the participation of LDCs and SIDS: (1) in the sessions of the Working Group on the UPR when the human rights situation of the representative’s country was being reviewed; and (2) in plenary sessions of the Council during which the outcome of the review was adopted. Two positive trends have been noted. First, there is an increase in the participation of LDCs and SIDS in the universal periodic reviews as recommending States, and second, this participation has expanded from countries within their respective regions to all other regions.  During the last decade, representatives of LDCs and SIDS have also increasingly participated in informal consultations during the Council’s sessions, despite a variety of challenges, some of which include the large number of informal consultations to follow; the predominance of English drafts, including on discussions related to situations in French-speaking regions; lack of interpretation; and the time difference between Geneva and capitals, when discussions took place virtually. Another positive development is that LDCs and SIDS have successfully proposed and led initiatives on topics of particular interest to them. For instance, they played a critical role at the forty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council in the recognition of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right by the HRC (resolution 48/13) and in establishing the mandate of a special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change (resolution 48/14).  The COVID-19 pandemic, which is a human rights crisis, has exposed and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities manifesting themselves in multiple forms. All of these inequalities hinder the full enjoyment of human rights. The panel will therefore also explore ways to create a level playing-field and achieve universal participation so that the international community can fully address the global challenges brought about by COVID-19, ensuring that no one is left behind and that all voices are heard.  Unlocking the potential available within the United Nations system and the wider international community in order to assist LDCs and SIDS in participating in the work of the Council, hence advancing the promotion and protection of human rights, building on both South-South and North-South cooperation, can enhance the mainstreaming of human rights and related efforts in the relevant United Nations bodies. |
| **Background documents:** | * [Human Rights resolution 19/26](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/19/26) of 23 March 2012 entitled “Terms of reference for 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” * [Human Rights Council decision 31/115](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/DEC/31/115) of 23 March 2016 entitled “High-level panel discussion on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Human Rights Council” * [Human Rights Council resolution 34/40](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/34/40) of 24 March 2017 entitled “Promoting 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” * [Human Rights Council decision 46/115](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/DEC/46/115) of 24 March 2021 entitled “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” * Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Operations 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 ([A/HRC/49/92](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/49/92), 2022) * Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review ([A/HRC/47/18](https://www.undocs.org/A/HRC/47/18), 2021) * Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review ([A/HRC/47/19](https://www.undocs.org/A/HRC/47/19), 2021) * Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on progress and challenges encountered in the main activities aimed at enhancing technical cooperation and capacity-building undertaken since the establishment of the Human Rights Council ([A/HRC/35/20](https://www.undocs.org/A/HRC/35/20), 2017) * Report of the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights ([A/HRC/46/70](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/46/70), 2021) * Report of the Secretary-General on Multilingualism ([A/75/798](https://undocs.org/en/A/75/798), 2021) * Summary of the Human Rights Council panel discussion on the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review ([A/HRC/26/CRP.1](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session26/Documents/A-HRC-26-CRP-1_en.doc), 2014) * Summary report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the panel discussion on the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review ([A/HRC/35/16](https://www.undocs.org/A/HRC/35/16), 2017) * OHCHR web pages on the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Council (LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund) <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/SIDS-LDCs.aspx> * OHCHR web pages on the universal periodic review: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx> |

1. As per Human Rights Council decision 46/115 of 24 March 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)