COTONOU DECLARATION

Adopted in Cotonou, Republic of Benin, on 22 May 2025

PREAMBLE

We, the former beneficiary delegates of the Trust Fund for Technical Assistance to Support the Participation of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Work of the Human Rights Council (hereinafter the 'LDC/SIDS Trust Fund') coming from 25[1] countries in the Africa region, having gathered in Cotonou, Republic of Benin, from 20 to 22 May 2025, on the occasion of the Regional Workshop of the LDC/SIDS Trust Fund for the Africa region under the theme: "Assessing the impact of the activities of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund in implementing its training and capacity building mandate: identifying achievements and areas for improvement",

Recalling the importance of the principle of multilingualism as a fundamental pillar of inclusive multilateralism and an essential tool for ensuring equal access to information,

Emphasizing in that regard that, for the Africa region, the availability of documents, training tools and capacity-building opportunities in French and English remains an indispensable condition for the equitable and effective participation of all beneficiaries,

Acknowledging with appreciation the ongoing efforts of the Trust Fund secretariat to promote gender equality and the inclusion of people with disabilities,

Underscoring the need to return to hybrid participation modalities in the sessions and meetings of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms in order to ensure equal and meaningful participation of all States, and particularly LDCs and SIDS,

Stressing the importance of timely sharing of information on the Human Rights Council's initiatives and activities, through reports and summaries before, during and after its sessions,

Reaffirming our commitment to support all measures aimed at enhancing accessibility, linguistic diversity, inclusion and representativeness of LDCs and SIDS in the Human Rights Council,

Recognizing the vital importance of peace, security, and climate change for LDCs and SIDS, and stressing the need for these interrelated challenges to be given greater

[1] Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Togo, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia

consideration by the Human Rights Council due to their significant impact on the enjoyment of human rights,

Building on the commitments made in the Ouagadougou - Port Louis Declaration of 2021,

Express our sincere thanks to the Government of the Republic of Benin for generously hosting the workshop in Cotonou and for the warm hospitality extended to all participants;

Also express our thanks to His Excellency Mr Jürg Lauber (Switzerland), President of the Human Rights Council for the 19th cycle (2025), for his presence and participation in this workshop;

Welcome the valuable contribution of Ms. Fathimath Razana (former beneficiary of the Trust Fund from Maldives), Ms. Sasha Dixon (representative of the Bahamas, on behalf of CARICOM), Ms. Zhiping Lin (representative of Singapore, on behalf of the Forum of Small States), Mr. Yashasvi Nain (representative of the Commonwealth Secretariat) and Mr. Passassim Atade Nanguit (representative of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie), who provided cross-regional perspectives and shared good practices from their respective contexts that greatly enriched the inter-regional dialogue between LDCs and SIDS;

Express our deep gratitude to the Secretariat of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund, administered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), for its leadership and continued commitment to the inclusive, meaningful and effective participation of LDCs and SIDS in the Human Rights Council;

Also Express our gratitude to all the donors of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund for their continued support. We strongly encourage them and potential new partners, including those from beneficiary countries, to strengthen their support and contribute to the Fund's ongoing efforts to build national capacities in the field of human rights;

Adopt this declaration, henceforth referred to as the “Cotonou Declaration”, with the hereunder recommendations, based on the discussions and experiences shared during the workshop, and which aim at strengthening the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund in order to promote more meaningful participation of LDCs and SIDS in the work of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Trust Fund secretariat:

1. Funding and support for the trust fund

a) Explore a wider range of funding options to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Trust Fund.

b) Explore partnerships with other UN agencies and international organizations to increase contributions and support.

c) To Establish a task force with Member State representatives to mobilize donor funding.

d) Send an annual Note verbale to Member States to remind them of the importance of and encourage contributions to the Trust Fund.

2. Modernizing the e-learning tool, strengthening digital participation and improving training for LDCs and SIDS

a) Organize an orientation programme for new diplomats from LDCs and SIDS arriving in Geneva, focusing on how to effectively engage with the Human Rights Council, in partnership with the Commonwealth, the OIF and FOSS.

b) Explore the development of interactive platforms that contemplate the inclusion of mentoring components, to support ongoing engagement and post-training follow-up for LDCs and SIDS beneficiaries of the Trust Fund.

(c) Modernize the existing e-Learning tool updating its content, adding interactive and multimedia features, and incorporating recent procedural changes of the Human Rights Council to enhance accessibility, relevance, and engagement for LDCs and SIDS delegates.

(d) Maintain and improve the use of digital tools guaranteeing equitable and ensuring broad participation, in particular by setting up a multilingual system for trainings and events, using an innovative approach that overcomes logistical and geographical constraints.

e) Update the online e-learning tool and expand the training modules to include issues identified as priorities by former LDCs and SIDS beneficiaries from Africa participating in this workshop, such as environmental rights, migration, digital inclusion and rights linked to artificial intelligence, and a human rights-based approach in post-crisis, transitional justice and peace-building contexts.

f) Consider an extension of the pre-session induction course for delegates from three days to one week, incorporating in-depth rules of procedure briefings and simulation and resolution drafting exercises, including by combining virtual and in-person meetings subject to availability of funding.

g) Encourage the participation of the Trust Fund’s beneficiaries in human rights briefings and related events, outside the deliberations of the Human Rights Council and during their stay in Geneva, in order to enrich their experience and consolidate their commitment.

3. Selection of delegates and fellows

a) Continue to give priority to LDCs and SIDS members of the Human Rights Council and representatives without a permanent mission in Geneva in the selection of delegates and fellows to benefit from the support of the Trust Fund.

b) Consider giving priority also to LDCs and SIDS that are on the agenda of the HRC session when selecting delegates and fellows.

CONCLUSION

We, the participants of the 2025 Cotonou Regional Workshop, reaffirm our commitment to supporting the work of the Human Rights Council and to ensuring meaningful and equitable participation of LDCs and SIDS,

And look forward to continuing our collaboration with OHCHR, Member States, donors and civil society to strengthen sustainable and resilient human rights capacities in our countries.

Cotonou (Benin), 22 May 2025