LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund workshop for the Caribbean region
Bridgetown, Barbados 3 June 2026

Opening Statement

Ms. Mariana Olivera West, Chief, Human Rights Council Branch, OHCHR

The Most Honourable Kerryann F. Ifill, Barbados' National Human Rights Commissioner, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates and former beneficiaries, Representatives of CARICOM, the Commonwealth Secretariat, CTI and FOSS,

Dear colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and a privilege for me to address you at the opening of this regional workshop of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund for Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.

On behalf of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, allow me to join the President of the Human Rights Council in expressing our sincere gratitude to the Government of Barbados — not only for the warm welcome extended to all participants, but also for the excellent arrangements that have made this gathering possible. Barbados' hospitality, combined with its longstanding and principled engagement with the international human rights system, provides an ideal setting for the open dialogue and collective reflection this workshop calls for.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the President already highlighted earlier, this workshop is the **fourth and final** in a series mandated by Human Rights Council resolution 49/32 (2022) — a resolution adopted with the highest number of co-sponsors in the Council's history. The series aims to assess the Trust Fund's achievements, identify areas for improvement, and reflect on ways to strengthen its impact as we approach the Fund's **15th anniversary in 2027**. Following the workshops in Malé (Maldives, 2024), Cotonou (Benin, 2025), and Palikir (Federated States of Micronesia, 2025), we are now gathered in Bridgetown to hear the Caribbean's contribution.

The Caribbean holds a particular place in this journey. It was here in the region — in **Georgetown, Guyana, in 2018** — that the Trust Fund convened its very first regional workshop, resulting the **Georgetown Declaration**. Our discussions over these three days will build directly on that foundation, and you will return to it in detail in the breakout sessions on our final day to carry its vision forward.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For many Caribbean SIDS and LDCs, meaningful participation in Geneva remains a significant challenge — owing to limited diplomatic presence, capacity constraints, geographic distance, competing reporting demands and obligations, and financial

limitations. The Trust Fund was established precisely to help bridge these barriers, and to ensure that all States, regardless of size or resources, can contribute effectively to global human rights discussions.

Since becoming operational in 2014, the Trust Fund has supported the participation of **312 delegates and fellows — 182 women and 130 men — from 72 of the 73 eligible LDCs and SIDS**. For 90 per cent of them, it was their first direct engagement with a session of the Human Rights Council, and all SIDS and LDCs without a permanent mission in Geneva have now been represented. Since 2022, beneficiaries have delivered more than 500 statements during Council sessions – this is a clear evidence of the the Fund's role in making participation at the Council both universal and meaningful.

Beyond facilitating participation in Geneva, the Fund provides an opportunity for substantial capacity-building through a combination of tools and programmes designed to ensure meaningful and lasting engagement. Its impact has been tangible: former beneficiaries have returned home to lead their countries' engagement with the Universal Periodic Review, the special procedures and the treaty bodies. Many have advanced to senior advisory roles and heads of delegation, while also strengthening the capacity of their colleagues at home.

I am happy to underscore that our programme for these three days also includes practical, OHCHR-led sessions, dedicated to **reporting to the treaty bodies** and to **national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up (NMIRF)**, drawing on the experience of Caribbean States in these areas.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As underscored by the President, the gains achieved through the Trust Fund - especially that of universal participation — with every region, and every State represented at the table must be safeguarded in the current context where the multilateral system is under significant financial pressure, including broader UN liquidity challenges, while travel and accommodation costs for beneficiaries continues to rise. The Fund relies on voluntary contributions, and its sustainability cannot be taken for granted. Renewed political commitment and continued financial support to the Fund, alongside innovative approaches, are needed now more than ever to sustain its mission and maintain its lasting impact.

This brings me to your crucial role as participants to this workshop. I warmly encourage each of you to engage openly and constructively throughout these three days — to reflect on how the Trust Fund has amplified your country's voice at the Council, share the practical experiences and lessons learned from your national contexts, and identify concrete, forward-looking recommendations to further strengthen the Fund's impact and sustainability. Your perspectives are invaluable. The outcomes of this workshop will form the **Caribbean region's contribution to the OHCHR report** mandated by resolution

49/32, to be presented to the Council at its **sixty-fourth session in March 2027** — building on the recommendations of the 2018 Georgetown Declaration.

Your engagement does not end here. As former beneficiaries, you are ambassadors of this Trust Fund — helping to enhance its visibility, relevance and impact, and encouraging the continued political and financial support of the international community that allows this work to continue.

Let us make this gathering in Bridgetown a space for sincere exchange, dynamic collaboration, and renewed commitment — in the service of human rights, and of a Human Rights Council that is increasingly representative, equitable, and effective.

I thank you for your attention, and I wish you discussions over the coming days that are as rich as they are inspiring.