Keynote Address - LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Workshop for the Caribbean Region

The Most Honourable Kerryann F. Ifill, FB
Human Rights Commissioner, Barbados

Distinguished representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Excellencies,
Representatives of Governments,
Members of National Human Rights Institutions,
Representatives of Civil Society,
Colleagues and Friends,

Good morning.

It is both an honour and a privilege to welcome you to Barbados for this regional workshop of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund. I extend warm greetings on behalf of the people of Barbados and the Human Rights Commission.

We gather at an important moment in history. The world today is experiencing profound change. We are witnessing armed conflicts that continue to exact a devastating human cost. We are seeing increasing geopolitical tensions, growing economic uncertainty, rising inequality, the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence, and the accelerating impacts of climate change. These developments are reshaping societies and challenging the international community's commitment to human rights.

In times such as these, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the scale of global challenges. Yet history reminds us that moments of uncertainty are also moments of opportunity. They compel us to reaffirm our values, strengthen our institutions, and deepen our commitment to human dignity.

They remind us that human rights are not simply legal principles or international commitments. They are grounded in dignity, rights and responsibility for all. At a time when many societies are grappling with division and uncertainty, these values remain essential to building peaceful, inclusive and resilient communities.

For Small Island Developing States, these global developments are not distant concerns. They are realities that affect our people every day. The Caribbean remains particularly vulnerable to external shocks, whether economic, environmental, or social. Hurricanes, sea level rise, coastal erosion, food insecurity, and debt burdens continue to test our resilience

and our capacity to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of our populations.

For our region, climate change is not simply an environmental issue. It is a human rights issue. It affects the rights to life, health, housing, education, work, culture, and development. Our countries have contributed little to the causes of climate change, yet we bear many of its consequences. The Caribbean therefore has both a moral and practical responsibility to ensure that climate justice remains central to international human rights discussions.

Indeed, with rights come responsibilities. While larger nations bear particular responsibilities in addressing the causes of climate change, all of us share a responsibility to protect future generations and to ensure that sustainable development remains people-centred and rights-based.

At the same time, we must confront emerging challenges. Artificial intelligence and digital technologies are transforming the way we live, work, communicate, and access services. These innovations hold tremendous promise. They can improve access to education, healthcare, public services, and employment opportunities. Yet they also raise important questions regarding privacy, discrimination, accountability, and inclusion.

As we embrace technological progress, we must ensure that no one is left behind. Technology should expand opportunities, not deepen existing inequalities. Human rights must remain at the centre of innovation.

Technology should strengthen dignity rather than diminish it, and promote inclusion rather than exclusion.

The international human rights system itself is also evolving. The Human Rights Council, treaty bodies, special procedures, and the Universal Periodic Review continue to play critical roles in advancing accountability and promoting good governance. Yet these mechanisms can only be effective when all regions have meaningful opportunities to participate.

This is where the importance of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund becomes particularly evident.

For many small states, participation in international human rights processes can be challenging. Limited financial resources, competing national priorities, and capacity constraints often restrict engagement. The Trust Fund has helped to bridge that gap by providing opportunities for training, capacity building, knowledge exchange, and direct participation in the work of the Human Rights Council.

Its value extends far beyond facilitating attendance at meetings. It helps build expertise. It strengthens networks. It develops future leaders. Most importantly, it enables small states to contribute their perspectives to global discussions and to bring valuable lessons back

home.

The true measure of success, however, is not simply participation. It is impact.

The knowledge gained through these opportunities must translate into stronger institutions, improved reporting, better implementation of recommendations, more effective public policies, and greater protection of rights at the national level.

As we assess the achievements of the Trust Fund over the coming days, we should also look toward the future. How can we strengthen support for small states? How can we ensure that capacity-building efforts produce sustainable results? How can we improve regional collaboration and share successful practices across our countries? And how can we better equip future generations to engage with the international human rights system?

The Caribbean has much to contribute to these discussions. Our region has long understood that equality, dignity and respect for all are not merely aspirations. They are essential foundations for stable societies, democratic governance and sustainable development.

Our region has demonstrated resilience, innovation, and leadership in addressing complex social challenges. We have advanced important conversations on climate justice, sustainable development, gender equality, children's rights, and democratic governance. We have shown that small states can exercise influence beyond their size when they work together and speak with clarity and conviction.

Yet there is still more to be done.

In a world where polarization often dominates public discourse, we must continue demonstrating that rights and respect can coexist. The advancement of human rights depends not only on protecting individual freedoms but also on fostering mutual understanding, dialogue and social cohesion.

We must continue strengthening national mechanisms for implementation, reporting, and follow-up. We must improve our engagement with treaty bodies and special procedures. We must ensure that human rights considerations are integrated into national development planning. We must create meaningful opportunities for young people and civil society to participate in shaping public policy.

Above all, we must remember that human rights are not abstract concepts discussed only in conference rooms and international forums. They are lived realities. They are reflected in whether a child can access quality education, whether a family can secure adequate housing, whether a person with a disability can participate fully in society, whether citizens can engage freely in democratic processes, and whether communities can live with dignity and security.

Human rights begin with people.

As we commence this workshop, I encourage all participants to approach our discussions with openness, creativity, and a spirit of partnership. Let us learn from one another's experiences. Let us celebrate our achievements while honestly confronting our challenges. And let us use this opportunity to identify practical ways to strengthen Caribbean engagement within the international human rights system.

The future of human rights will not be shaped solely in the world's largest capitals. It will also be shaped in communities across our islands, through the actions of dedicated public servants, civil society advocates, human rights defenders, and citizens who believe in the inherent dignity and worth of every human being.

Let this workshop reaffirm our collective commitment to ensuring that the Caribbean remains an active, influential and respected voice within the global human rights community. Let it also reaffirm our commitment to building societies where rights and respect coexist, where equality, dignity and opportunity are available to all, and where future generations inherit institutions that are strong, inclusive and accountable.

Our countries may be small in size, but our voices matter. Our experiences matter. Our perspectives matter. If we remain guided by dignity, rights and responsibility for all, the Caribbean will continue not merely to participate in the global human rights system, but to help shape its future.

I wish you productive discussions over the next three days and every success in your deliberations.

Thank you, and I wish the workshop every success.