

Excellencies,
Distinguished panellists,
Colleagues, Friends,

I am honoured to welcome you to this *talanoa*, and please allow me this opportunity to share a few reflections with you.

Let me begin with the word *talanoa*, a word I was first introduced to some months after my arrival in Fiji two years ago. A word that brings to mind blue oceans, beaches, rugby and, yes, a formal kava ceremony, too, Fiji, its culture and its traditions. Fiji gifted this word to the world at COP 23. And it is only fitting that this gift is a word immersed and grounded in human rights. It is about participation, inclusion, listening to each other, trying to understand a different perspective and finding a common ground to move ahead together. A single word standing for an idea symbolising the core principles of human rights.

So welcome to this *talanoa* on the integration of human rights into the realisation of the SDGs in the Pacific.

What is the dream of each one of us, who lives in a village, a town or a metropolis? All women and men desire above all to achieve secure livelihoods and jobs through environmentally sustainable economic growth shared by all. And that dream is now supported by a common world commitment, the Sustainable Development Goals, signed at the United Nations in New York by numerous presidents and leaders of countries.

“This is the people’s agenda, a plan of action for ending poverty in all its dimensions, irreversibly, everywhere, and leaving no one behind.” This is how the then UN Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon described the Sustainable Development Goals. They are the result of a negotiation process that involved the 193 UN Member States as well as the unprecedented participation of civil society and other stakeholders.

For the first time governments of developing countries and wealthy countries have agreed on a set of goals for everyone. These goals will help all nations and all people create jobs with new skills and better incomes, share prosperity, reduce poverty, and protect the planet from environment damage and climate change. They will address the interconnected elements of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

The goals also commit governments everywhere to creating open and accountable institutions free of corruption, where the rule of law is of paramount importance. One hundred countries he representative decision-making at all levels so that the voice of citizens is clearly heard.

Let me quote the current HC on Human Rights: “[...] *a country’s economic development is not in itself a synonym for the fulfilment of human rights.*”

Development can bring with it access to the fundamental services and goods that improve many people’s well-being and the ability to make choices about their lives. But if they cannot also voice their concerns and participate in decisions, the resulting “development” may not increase their welfare. What increases people’s welfare is respect for all their rights [...] Conversely, discrimination and other human rights violations are a threat to development, just as they are a threat to peace and security.” _

These words underscore our duty to uphold the **Universal Declaration on Human Rights**, which stresses the interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights for all. And the SDGs make a unique and essential contribution in this regard.

This is a year of milestones for the human rights struggle and the systems designed to elevate and protect it. 70 years have passed since Member States--having learned the tough lessons of a devastating world war--declared with authority that all people are born equal in dignity and rights. 25 years have passed since in the **Vienna Declaration**. Member States have made it clear that a lack of development may not be invoked to justify the non-respect of internationally recognised human rights. 20 years have passed since the **Human Rights Defenders Declaration** affirmed the rights of people to stand up against the tyranny of those who would seek to deny these truths, resorting to civil and political oppression to deprive people of their right to material dignity, to full civil and political participation, by depriving them of their rights to education, to health and to shelter.

“Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.”

This promise of Article 28 of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** is echoed in the **Declaration on the Right to Development** according to whose third article, States have the duty to co-operate with each other in ensuring development and eliminating obstacles to it. To this end, States should work together to build an international economic order based on sovereign equality, interdependence, and the realisation of all human rights for everyone.

This bedrock of the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights for everyone, underpins the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is the foundation for its just implementation. And, **inequality** and **discrimination** will be defining challenges during in the process of implementation.

Every system is perfectly designed to deliver the results it delivers. That **inequality** has deepened in this century, within and between countries, suggests that from a human rights standpoint something is gravely dysfunctional in our social, international and economic order. Inequality between people owing to age, ethnicity, race, disability and other identities as well as discrepancies with respect to wealth and income levels is a root cause for instability, a driver of the brutal loss of trust in our institutions.

That **discrimination** shadows so closely these patterns of inequality only reinforces what some powerful actors find to be an inconvenient truth: that it is our decisions that create these artificial arrangements, manufacture and reproduce them, by both omission and commission, accompanied by inordinate tolerance for that which must never be considered tolerable.

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** is a powerful framework for addressing inequalities and for dismantling their close and constant companion, discrimination. But like the MDGs before it, equality will not be improved by 2013 nor will discrimination be on the decline if implementation of the Agenda fails to take into account the values, principles and norms enshrined in international human rights instruments, including the Declaration on the Right to Development.

In this, the **means of implementation** are fundamental, as Member States have emphasised in Article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The

maximum available resources for the realisation of these Covenant rights is a core component of a sovereign State's duties to its people.

Since every system is perfectly designed to produce the results it delivers different results will come only from a different systemic approach, an approach in which development and the benefits of globalization are shared fairly, so as to leave no one behind either by design or neglect.

Let me also mention an issue that is far too often of a topic that is swept under the carpet in today's societies. And that is the right to the highest attainable standard of health, which is fundamental to human dignity. And there is no health without mental health, of course. Clearly, the provision of adequate mental health services and support are essential: they cannot be viewed as a luxury, any more than clinics that fix broken limbs or treat malaria are a luxury. And it is clear that mental health services cannot legitimately be given lower priority than services that focus on people's physical health.

A very high proportion of us may be affected by a mental health condition during the course of our lifetime. Indeed, as many as one in four people, according to some estimates. Quality mental health services should be accessible to all, regardless of social class or status; and no stigma or shame should be associated with using such services.

But in reality, during their lifetime very few people with mental health conditions or psychosocial disabilities will benefit from the sort of accessible, quality services and support which are their right.

Instead, many will face discrimination. Profoundly harmful stereotypes about people living with – or perceived to have – mental health conditions will condition the health services they receive, with a long-term impact on their participation and inclusion in society.

Psychiatric institutions, like all closed settings, generate exclusion and segregation, and being forced into one amounts to arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Such institutions are also the locus of abusive and coercive practices, as well as violence that is often tantamount to torture.

Institutionalisation and segregation have been an inadequate response at all levels – for adults with disabilities as well as children. The threat of becoming institutionalised also impedes users from accessing services in the early stages of anxiety or stress. An emphasis on institutionalisation has meant that rather than resolving gaps and weaknesses within family and community networks, bonds have been broken and children and adults have been denied their right to enjoy family life and participation and inclusion in the community.

For a person to be banished from society – to be considered unworthy of belonging to humanity and confined in seclusion – is deeply damaging to the human soul. States should ensure that people with mental health conditions and those with psychosocial disabilities may access treatment and support services, including peer support, in their communities. Segregation is harmful – not only for the individual, but also for the community as a whole.

Clearly the human rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities and those with mental health conditions are not being protected around the world. This needs to change. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities offers a legal framework for a more comprehensive approach that upholds the rights of people with psychosocial disabilities,

including the right to exercise legal capacity and give free and informed consent; the right to live and be included in the community; a move toward de-institutionalisation; and the right to liberty and security without discrimination. We must all move in the direction of strengthening and supporting this framework. And as we will see in this meeting, *change is possible* and is happening *now*.

Deciding for oneself; living in the community; working and socialising without discrimination – these are four essential areas where progress can be made that will have an enormous impact on the well-being of millions of people.

This *talanoa* and the work together of PIDF and OHCHR will explore ways to reaffirm the dignity and equality of users of mental health services, people with psychosocial disabilities and those with mental health conditions. Amongst us are many notable practitioners struggling to ensure human rights-based systems of care and support, as well as several people who have themselves experienced the shortcomings of current practises. We also commit to working with other organisations such as the SPC and UN agencies to cast light on the inadequacies of the systems currently in place and appreciate your efforts to restore dignity to those whose dignity has been undermined.

I share the hope with you that that we might contribute to reforming policies that worsen discrimination, abuse and the arbitrary institutionalisation that people frequently face, as well as other practices that fail to respect people's autonomy, choices and rights.

My team and I look forward to working closely together with the team at PIDF and with the States in the Pacific to making the SDGs a reality for all.