



*Remarks Dr. Chitrlekha Massey,*

*Representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Pacific, at the launch of the Institute of Human Rights Research*

Distinguished Speaker of Fiji Parliament and UN AIDS Regional Goodwill Ambassador, The Honourable Sir Epeli Nailatikau, all protocols observed.

A very good afternoon to you all.

It gives me immense pleasure to speak today, at an event that marks the culmination of afternoons of brainstorming together with the teams of University of Fiji and PIDF led by Shaista and Mark. It also marks the beginning of fruitful cooperation between the University of Fiji, the Pacific Islands Development Forum and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the team that worked for the organisation of the event today my colleagues Releshni and Thomas, Afsirin, Nitish, Mark, Evelyn and the teams of the three partners.

As we ponder further on the intersectionality of human rights, the interdependence and indivisibility of rights, let us step back and look at a bigger picture - I want to draw attention to two figures that the HC Bachelet has referred to in this last week, they are from a recent report by the Task Force on Justice, as they speak to the scale and the complexity of the issues that globally we are dealing with.

First, an estimated quarter of a billion people are living in extreme conditions of injustice, deprived of any meaningful protection of the law. This includes the stateless, people living in conflict zones, modern day slaves.

Second, the report estimates that 4.5 billion people – 60 percent of the people on this planet – are excluded from social, economic, and political protections and opportunities which the law should provide. They may lack land tenure, residency papers, housing documentation or may be employed without contracts in the informal sector.

As a result, they are deprived of adequate access to healthcare, education, bank loans and specific types of jobs, and the most vulnerable are the most likely to fall into the trap of disempowerment.

The Pacific as a region speaks with a strong moral voice in the international arena on injustice and the need for climate justice. The Pacific states are engaging with both the Universal Periodic Review and the SDGs. As OHCHR we are committed to working to support governments to ensure meaningful implementation to ensure tangible results i.e. improvement in the daily lives of people everywhere to enjoy effective all rights. Both the UPR and the SDGs – mirroring each other are grounded in the same principles – upholding a life or dignity and ensuring no one is left behind.

Therefore the construction of peaceful and just societies, with effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, ensures human rights. In a world where the need for betterment and development are catalysts for change -

Excellencies,

Development is a comprehensive and complex economic, social and political process. And this process is all about human rights: about the right to development; about economic, social and cultural rights; and also about the civil

and political rights which uphold people's capacity and right to raise their voices, and participate in decisions.

The multiple and overlapping structural impediments that prevent justice from being done, express the relevance of indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights. As the 2030 Agenda recognizes, freedom from fear and freedom from want cannot be achieved in isolation from each other.

As we are gathered to launch an institution that aspires to be a catalyst for enhancing positive change in this unique and beautiful region, I am reminded of why the concept of SDG16 *plus* is so persuasive. Because as the HC said recently, the multifaceted disempowerment of those who are left behind will not be adequately addressed if we adopt fragmented approaches, designed in silos and applied as band-aids.

We need integrated approaches, grounded in broad participation, which build on the mutually reinforcing work of many communities. And it is this integrated, indivisible approach to promoting and protecting all rights which drives the work done by OHCHR around the world – in close partnership with States, stakeholders and civil society groups of all kinds. As approach that the IHRR will take and ensure support to the development of national policies and law.

As OHCHR we want to emphasize the need for partnership. Progress towards the SDGs is lagging; many of the recommendations accepted under the UPR are also pending meaningful implementation. The Secretary-General has called for a turbocharge in efforts towards the 2030 Agenda. At the regional level in the Pacific, the UN family, PIDF, PIFS, USP and University of Fiji, NGOs are some key partners in supporting the work being done by States and all other partners to achieve each of the SDGs needs to be stronger, smarter and more far-reaching. The IHRR must in its support too all stakeholders include practical advice on progress

towards achieving justice, equality, inclusion, and empowerment – or, in other words, human rights.

As the Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed has said, “Human rights are an intrinsic part of sustainable development – and sustainable development is a powerful vehicle for the realization of all human rights.”

We will not reduce inequalities unless we can all raise our voices to call for policies that effectively address our rights to decent work, food, health, housing, education and justice. We will not ensure sustainable development unless we eradicate the discrimination, which strips millions of women and men of opportunities, resources and access to skills and to justice. We will not achieve effective climate action until we all participate in the definition and implementation of appropriate climate policies.

Human rights span economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights, as well as the right to development. They are not only universal, and inalienable; they are interdependent, and indivisible. And together, they are integral to every one of the 17 goals for sustainable development.

While we continue to ponder on the SDGs let us also address SDG 17, on partnerships, and I want to linger on this point for a moment. Because human rights are not just the job of the UN or OHCHR . It is everyone’s job, too.

We can only ensure sustainable development if we can work together to ensure greater equality and human dignity – and when we empower the greatest possible participation by people in decisions that affect them. This approach is, to me, the meaning of SDG17.

A few days ago at a High Level meeting at UNHQ - it was emphasised that implementing the SDGs requires a human rights-based approach – locally, nationally, regionally and globally.

Data collection, disaggregation and analysis are very important for the implementation of the SDG's and Human Rights, particularly for ensuring that the challenges faced by the most vulnerable and marginalized groups are clearly identified or addressed. If we are not counted we do not count.

We need to establish more inclusive and collaborative roles for civil society, as well as the business community, in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda – even, and perhaps especially, where civil society voices do not agree with existing policy. The IHRR will assist in bridging the policy gap with its research based evidence.

The entire Pacific region has made considerable efforts in the past few years to meet human rights commitments and obligations as well as to ratify treaties on core human rights issues dealing with issues such as climate change and related migration, civil and political rights as well as a large area of cultural, social and economic rights. While we acknowledge that considerable progress has been made, much more work could be done in the Pacific region to promote and protect human rights of citizens in order to improve the life of people.

While we were considering when and how to launch this institute we all felt strongly that in today's changing world - the message of equality, justice, compassion and forgiveness is so critical and the life of Nelson Mandela embodies all of these, stands tall as an inspiration for us all.

The Institute will have freedom of academic research, including freedom of methodology and the right to share the sound results of the research done in cooperation with the general public. The quality requirement means that fact-finding and analysis must be methodically well-founded, and that research must aim to create innovative and significant contributions in the Pacific and internationally. The Institute will also encourage research that has a more practical relevance to the Pacific than what is normally required at universities, and research

should thus address current and emerging human rights issues in the Pacific. All research conducted will aim to have policy and practical impact, helping to promote and develop our understanding of human rights and support human rights work.

I thank our partners, PIDF and University of Fiji for joining hands and making the establishment of such an Institute possible in the Pacific.

I invite you all to join the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, PIDF and University of Fiji and the human rights community at large to celebrate this day in the belief that through the establishment of this institution , welded together in the bond of human rights and equal partnership will inspire us all to work together, so that we can build on each other's' expertise to fulfil our promise to the people of the Pacific, of a life in dignity for all.