



بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

MALDIVES

Ref #UNGA/71/32

[Check Against Delivery]

Statement by His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Sareer, Permanent Representative of Maldives to the UN

Fiftieth Session of the Commission on Population Development
Priority theme: "Changing population age structures and sustainable development"
United Nations, New York, 4 April 2017

Madam Chairperson,

Let me begin by offering my congratulations to you on your assumption as the Chair of this Session. I would also like to thank the keynote speakers for their useful remarks.

Madam Chair,

We are all aware that population and development is about people of all ages. It is about creating policies that supports them, to improve their well-being, achieve their full potential and realize their fundamental human rights. This is the very essence of the ICPD Programme for action that was adopted in 1994 – development that places individual dignity and human rights at the very center.

The Government of Maldives has kept this principle at the heart of its development policy. We are cognizant of the fact that greater socio-economic development is dependent on our success in advancing the rights and maximizing the potential of *all*. We also believe that it depends to a large extent on the success in addressing population and development issues.

The Maldives is a young country; nearly forty-eight percent of our population is under the age of twenty-five. This poses a challenge, but it also presents an opportunity. We are presented with a potential *demographic dividend*, for which we must cultivate our youth assiduously if we are to reap such gains, both in terms of economic development and a broader conception of sustainable development. Given the country's population dynamic, it is only natural that sustainable development would go hand-in-hand with the youth agenda in the Maldives, if not as part of our way of life.

As such, the Government has spared no efforts in mainstreaming the youth agenda into the broader development agenda, and especially the sustainable development agenda, through concrete initiatives and consistent policy measures.

In this task, education plays the decisive role. Only with an educated, skilled workforce can the demographic dividend be realized in full. To this end, the Government of Maldives has ensured that public education is provided free for both the entirety of the secondary level as well as pre-school, thus building upon our previous success in realizing universal primary education.

Madam Chair,

It is not, however, sufficient to merely equip young people with such skills if they do not have the means to translate those skills into productive activity. Without jobs, a demographic dividend may instead materialize as a demographic curse. In acknowledgement of this fact, the Maldives adopts a whole of the government approach in enhancing youth skills from youth leadership development programs and entrepreneurship development. One of our foremost priorities has been to ensure that all our people, especially our youth, have the opportunity to find good jobs. Last year, the government initiated special lending schemes for small and medium enterprises, under which 40% of loans were specifically reserved for youth and women. Young people are at the core of a dynamic economy—and such dynamism is in turn the product of their innovative and entrepreneurial spirit. Through major investments and improved economic activity, several thousand jobs have been created in the Maldives during the past three years – more than 70% of the election pledge of the incumbent Government.

Madam Chair,

Young people, especially young women can never reach their full potential if they do not have access to adequate health care. Successive Governments have therefore placed particular emphasis on strengthening the health sector and in investing in reproductive health care services in the Maldives. And we are now reaping the dividends of these policies and investments. Over the last 25 years, the country has experienced a stunning 90 per cent plunge in its maternal death rate, the largest decline in the world during this time period. In 1990, out of every 100,000 live births, 677 women died of pregnancy-related causes. In 2015, the figure stood at 68. For the first time in the country's history, the Maldives is now implementing a Universal Health Care Coverage System for all Maldivians ensuring that each person, whether child, youth, woman or the elderly have access to free and quality health services.

Madam Chair,

In the Maldives, youth empowerment programmes are closely related to women's empowerment agenda. Investment in women and girls remains a priority in our development efforts. Through enacted legislations, the Government has ensured that both men and women earn equal pay for equal work. With the establishment of the Council for Economic Empowerment, the Government has promoted women's ability to secure decent jobs and runs programmes towards the empowerment of women at the national level.

Madam Chair,

With advanced technology and life-style changes, the world is going through a major transformation in each of our country's demographics and age structures. We need to keep in mind the present opportunity of demographic dividend is a temporary phenomenon and with the bulge of youth population resulting in elderly population in few years' time. Today the Maldivian life expectancy is 74 years, that is 10 years longer than in 1990. Successfully responding to these changes can only be met through appropriate policies and programmes to meet the needs of all groups in society. We, as member states must collectively work together to meet the needs of the entire population – children, youth, women, the working population and the elderly. Only through a comprehensive, a whole society approach would enable us ensure that sustainable development is truly realized universally.

I thank you.