

**Statement by Honourable Dr Aminath Jameel,  
Minister of Health and Family, Republic of Maldives  
UN Economic and Social Council, Geneva, 6-9 July 2009**

**Madam President,  
Honorable Ministers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Maldives is a country of 300,000 people scattered across 200 inhabited islands along 800 kilometers. Like other small island nations, we are faced with several unique challenges that often go un-noticed. A small island nation such as the Maldives is often viewed as an exotic destination for holiday-makers. However, a closer look will reveal that smallness, indeed, poses several developmental challenges especially in a country where over 1000 small islands are widely dispersed across the ocean. The cost of delivering goods and services on an equitable manner to its people is the biggest challenge. Unlike countries where roads connect people living on remote settlements, in small island countries like the Maldives, sea transport is the only viable option and the cost of transportation absorbs a huge component of not only the national income but also of the incomes of its people.

**Madam President  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Today, in terms of per capita GDP, Maldives is one of the richest countries in the region of South Asia. However as we emerge from three decades of gross

mismanagement of our limited financial resources under a heavily repressive regime, the first democratically elected government that took office in November 2008 is faced with huge challenges with the daunting task of having to deal with huge fiscal and budgetary challenges.

**Madam President**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Maldives was set to graduate from the list of Least Developed Countries by 2011, but a three-year delayed date was set after the Asian tsunami of 2004 that devastated the Maldives. In a matter of moments, around 80% of GDP was lost. Once again, as the world economic crisis threatens to engulf all nations of the world. Maldives stand extremely vulnerable and helpless. Our helplessness is further aggravated by the negative effects of the rapidly changing climatic conditions, global warming and sea level rise.

Although we have fully not accepted the norms set in graduating from LDC we are ensuring a smooth transition on graduation and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 59/209, we have already formed a consultative forum with our development partners to formulate a long term smooth transition strategy. The initial Maldives Partnership Forum was held in 2006. The 2007 Forum was devoted to national adaptation to climate change and investment opportunities in the Maldives. This year's Forum focused specifically on the issue of graduation and formulating economic policies and strategies geared to tackle the challenges of middle income country status.

While the Maldives is working towards the transition into MIC status, following the ratification of the new Constitution last year, a number of independent institutions have been reconstituted, under specific laws, reforming and strengthening its democratic governance system. A number of legislations are being considered to increase tax revenue for development and meeting internationally agreed development goals.

**Madam President,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Despite several challenges we have achieved 5 of the 8 MDGs.

Maldives have already achieved MDG 1, but there is growing income disparity between urban and the rural population. Poverty dynamics analysis also showed that many in the non-poor fell back into poverty and that there is rise in unemployment among youth.

Although we can achieve the Goal 2: in time in halving the proportion of people with hunger we are faced with the challenge to promote locally grown food and change dietary habits of our people.

While we have achieved Goal 3 in achieving universal access to primary education, we are proud to note that our literacy rate of 98 is one of the highest in the world.

Goals 4 to eliminate gender disparity still needs concerted effort, today more and more women are engaging themselves in decision making levels and in politics.

Goal 5 of reducing by two-third, in the under-five mortality rate have already been achieved in 2005. However while reducing MMR is on track, accessibility to essential obstetric care, early detection of high risk cases in the outer islands are issues need to be addressed urgently.

We have been able to contain the low prevalence of HIV/AIDS and remained free of Malaria since its eradication in 1984. Prevalence of TB is low but the few cases of MDR need greater attention.

We have maintained our stand in ensuring environmentally sustainable economic development. We realize that we are among the most vulnerable to the climate change and to strengthen our convictions recently our new President of the Maldives has unveiled a plan to make our country carbon-neutral within a decade.

The impacts of climate change are already evident in the Maldives with a marked increase in weather conditions and coastal erosion. Over the medium-term, the main threat comes from temperature rise and acidification of the surrounding ocean. Both impacts could lead to the extinction of our prized coral reefs, the very livelihood of our economy, our two principal industries – tourism and fisheries.

Although climate change has been understood as a narrow scientific issue for the past few years Maldives has led an international initiative to realign this conceptual framework by shifting the world's focus onto the human and social dimensions of climate change. It is equally important for the wider international economic and political environment to be sensitive and responsive to the situation of vulnerable countries if they are to be set on a path towards resilience.

If the international community is to see countries like the Maldives graduate from LDC status then it is important that a new development category of Small and

Vulnerable Economies to sit *alongside* but *separate from* Middle-Income Country status. This we believe would allow preferences and support to be tailored to the needs and vulnerabilities of relevant States. However, we believe that final responsibility for setting the Maldives on a pathway to climate resilience rests with the people of the Maldives themselves, led by their democratically-elected Government.

**Madam President**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The new Government's ambitious plans for political and administrative decentralization are being taken-forward hand-in-hand with the continued development of the innovative "safe-island" concept, designed to enhance our safety from climate change impacts and natural disasters by resettling communities from smaller islands that are more vulnerable onto larger and better protected ones so as to enable the Maldives to concentrate its limited resources on protecting the more viable islands, as well as allow for a strengthening of public services, the more efficient development of economic opportunities, and the construction of vital transport and communications infrastructure.

In our developmental efforts the government is aspiring to engage private public partnerships and mobilize Foreign Direct Investment in the development of critical infrastructure and services, such as transportation, education, health, and commercial infrastructure in the country. The government firmly believes that exploring alternative sources of development financing, in partnership with the international community, is key to achieving sustainable development. No doubt there are also important risks to manage private-public-partnership, and planning an effective private-public-partnership involves careful review of the allocation of

financial risks and rewards, decision-making and keeping in mind the economy of scale in the Maldives context.

We strongly believe that the social needs of people cannot be left to the markets but we believe that public sector alone cannot provide all the essential services to its population. As in many governments Maldivian government is confronted by fiscal constraints that force us to carefully prioritize and restrict public expenditures.

Maldives is currently in a period of transition with respect to health care financing. The mode of financing is still fee for service with out of pocket payments. Currently the major sources of financing include the government budget; Social Health Insurance, out-of-pocket expenditures; safety net programs for senior citizens, the registered poor, the disabled and those on the pension scheme; and donors. The new government has also committed to provide universal health insurance by 2010 through the Social Health Insurance and social security ensured through National Pension Scheme ratified by the *Citizen's Majlis* in April 2009.

**Madam President,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In a globalized world, health issues present new challenges that go far beyond national borders and have an impact on the collective security of people around the world. The experience with SARS, with avian influenza and, currently H1N1 Influenza made us aware of the need for effective surveillance and strategies such as collaboration among countries, proper infection control measures and coordinated efforts of several actors and networks of relevant

scientific institutions to maximize our knowledge and capacity to handle such new challenges.

My country is happy to report that with the present concern over H1N1 influenza have seen this opportunity to fulfill many of the requirements stipulated in the International Health regulations. A high level committee was formed at the President's Office under the chairmanship of the Vice President. A multi-sectoral technical committee was formed at the Ministry of Health and Family.

**Madam President**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our lifestyles are changing rapidly with development and urbanization there are new emerging challenges to the health system. The emergence of NCDs is putting a heavy burden to the already burden economy. In the recent years the medical model preceded the public health model in our health care system.

We reiterate that PHC is the right approach to strengthen the health systems taking into account the social determinants of health for achieving the MDGs. Furthermore my government fully realizes the potential benefits of partnering with the private sector cannot be over looked.

In conclusion I would like to reiterate that we need to further strengthen international coordination and partnerships and continue to share our experiences.

**Thank you for your kind attention**