



MALDIVES

Statement by

His Excellency Dr Mohamed Waheed Hassan,
Former President and Special Envoy of the President of the Republic of Maldives,
at the General Debate of the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York, 30 September 2014

Mr President, Mr Secretary General, and Distinguished Delegates:

Allow me to extend warm greetings and felicitations to you, Mr President, on your assumption as President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly. We also recognise the exemplary stewardship of His Excellency Mr John Ashe, the outgoing President, and record our appreciation to the Secretary General for his stewardship of this organisation during this turbulent times.

Mr President:

What defines the great communities of our times is their ability to overcome the unexpected; the ability to persevere; and the ability to adapt to the changing realities of our times: from the daunting effects of climate change, the ever-pressing challenges of poverty and want, to the uncontrollable spread of disease. Communities everywhere are striving to overcome obstacles.

When communities are subject to challenges that are impossible to bear, that is when they think beyond the realm of possibilities: start searching for different answers to the same questions. That is when they nurture their ability to bounce back from adversity; from shock and from threats. The ultimate goal of fostering resilience is to overcome the unexpected. Sustainability is about managing, but resilience is about thriving!

Mr President:

For the last eight decades, the Maldives has been on a journey to consolidate democracy. Last year, our democracy faced unprecedented challenges. Yet we were able to overcome these hurdles entirely by peaceful means. Even though it sometimes felt as if we were quite alone in this fight, we are proud of what we have achieved.

We take pride that our democracy is home grown. Our systems are organic. Our young institutions too, as in the older democracies of the world, are gradually settling into

patterns and traditions that are unique, just to our string of islands. That is in harmony with our Islamic heritage and our traditions.

Our experience clearly shows that holding elections, or introducing a multi-party political system does not instil democratic values in a society. Democracy cannot be traced in the pages of laws. The only way for a new home-grown democracy to achieve resilience is to shift the way its people think; a transformation in their normative framework is necessary. Democratic values need to find a place in the hearts and minds of the people. The Government of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, and the people of the Maldives, are determined to achieve a modern, and an authentic Maldivian democratic State.

Promoting and protecting human rights is central to Maldivian democracy. Our Constitution is very clear on what those rights entail. Yet, with every right, comes responsibilities. It has been a daunting challenge to make human rights a way of life. This is why the Maldives advocates cultivating a culture of respect for human rights. Policies need to be rights-based. People need to be rights-minded.

Mr President:

People must lie at the heart of every decision and every policy we make. The ultimate goal of every action must be to improve the lives of our people. The Government of President Yameen has embarked on an ambitious programme aimed at realising the full potential of our youth. The goal of the Government is to create opportunities that would help to unleash the creativity of the youth. Young people are the future of any country and without the full realisation of their productive capacities, countries cannot prosper.

Few days ago, the UN marked an important milestone: the 20th anniversary of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Today, we celebrate the achievement of many of the goals of that Programme; most notably, the low maternal and infant mortality rates, gender parity in school enrolment, and equal pay for equal work.

Next year, we will celebrate 20th anniversary of another important document: the Beijing Platform for Action. It is a fact, not mere speculation, that for building resilience and building sustainable societies, contribution by women is a necessity. Women have achieved remarkable progress since the Beijing Platform. Maldivian women are among the most emancipated in South Asia with no structural barriers to education, employment, and mobility. Still, much remains to be done both nationally and globally. Just as an example, think back over the past week at the General Debate: How many women spoke at this podium? How many countries can claim to have achieved parity between men and women at decision-making levels? In the Maldives we are committed to empowering women, and have adopted a zero-tolerance policy towards violence against women.

The resilience of our people to overcome adversity in their lives is rooted in their ability to rise up from the fear of want, the fear of need. The Millennium Development Goals were framed to do just that. The MDGs committed to a new partnership to reduce extreme poverty, halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, and provide primary education for all. The MDGs set benchmarks, and set targets to Governments. These targets enabled to plan effectively. The MDGs, though remarkable for their time, were limited and now are reaching their expiry date. We ardently believe that the post-2015 development agenda must be inclusive, transparent, and people centred. The new development agenda should succeed where MDGs failed.

Mr President:

At times, violence and bloodshed, conflict and upheaval that we witness daily, seem unbearable. In July this year, we watched with grief, the horrendous attack on Gaza, another, in a countless cycle of aggression and brutality. Our hearts bleed for the countless children who lost their lives, mothers who lost their children, the nation, the State of Palestine, that lost countless citizens. After the global outcry, and the outpouring of condemnation, when the guns stopped firing, and the bombs stopped dropping, the world seems to have moved on to the next crisis. The news cycles have found their next headline.

Yet, we remind you here again: the siege is not over. The blockade has not ended. Gaza has been destroyed. Development set back several years. Palestinians are still being denied their right to a sovereign nation of their own: to their own lands: to the fruits of their labour. Those children are being denied a right to determine their own destiny. Are you willing to let this continue? We must do more, to help realise the dream of peace in the Middle East, and a two-state solution. We must resume peace-talks, with a clear goal and an endpoint in mind.

Mr President:

The biggest challenge to our development, to our way of life, is ignorance. Violence, subjugation, and eternal poverty, breed ignorance. Misinformed, yet talented, young people can easily be lured into fanaticism, radicalism, and extremism. Islam's identity as a religion that supports innovation, knowledge and scholarship, is slowly eroding away: the Golden Era of our religion is almost forgotten.

Today, the world has a choice to make. Should we allow extremists to shape our future? Or should we take decisive actions to defeat these extremist ideologies? Our answer to these questions will define the way in which we deal with the so-called Islamic State and other terrorist groups. These groups are not only un-Islamic. In fact, they are anti-Islamic. These are terrorist organisations, not religious groups. Islam, our great religion of peace, compassion, and tolerance, is being hijacked by radical and extremist elements to perpetuate hatred and violence. We, the Government and the people of Maldives,

condemn in the strongest terms, these groups, their ideologies, and their activities. We join our fellow Muslims around the world in saying “not in my name”.

Mr President:

The unique challenges faced by Small Island Developing States are well known. Climate Change exacerbates these challenges. We remain hopeful that a legally binding treaty will be agreed to, next year in Paris. The Maldives stands ready to do all it can to make this hope a reality, for the sake of our children and the fate of our nation.

Earlier this month, we agreed to a new highway for development: the SAMOA Pathway. We commend Samoa for its leadership in setting the vision for a new gateway for Small States. To make the partnership enduring, we need to make the voices of SIDS louder. SIDS need to be united in the quest. That inspired the Maldives to take the lead in forming the Alliance of Small Island States. We are committed to taking AOSIS to face the challenges of post-2015 and beyond. We call on others to join us in this journey.

Mr President,

Nine days ago, on 21 September, we celebrated 49 years of our membership at the United Nations. The Maldives joined the UN, merely 58 days after its independence, as the smallest state in its membership till that date. As we look forward to celebrating 50 years of membership at the UN in 2015, the Maldives is happy to note that the UN has served us well.

We joined the UN in 1965, amidst questions over the viability of small states. In the past 49 years, the Maldives has taken the lead in showing to the world that small states are not only viable, but they are in fact, valuable in finding common solutions to common problems. Today, we continue to prove at the United Nations that small states can lead. That it is not size, but smart ideas, that make a nation's destiny.

Thank you.