



MALDIVES

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Statement by His Excellency Mohamed Nasheed, President of the Republic of Maldives to the General Debate of the General Assembly

24 September 2009, New York

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, and Distinguished Delegates:

May I begin by extending to you, Mr President, my delegation's warmest congratulations on your election to preside over the Sixty-fourth Session of the General Assembly. I assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation.

May I also take this opportunity, to offer our most profound appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr Miguel Brockmann, for the exemplary manner in which he guided the work of the Sixty-third Session.

Allow me also to offer my delegation's heartfelt gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, for his inspiring leadership and dedication in promoting the noble principles and ideals of this Organisation.

Mr. President,

This is the first statement to the General Assembly of a democratically-elected President of the Maldives. I am extremely pleased to be here. I have spent many of the past General Assembly sessions locked in a hot, humid, damp cell with my hands shackled and my feet bound; imprisoned for my conviction that the 300,000 people of the Maldives should be free from fear, free from want and free to live their lives in liberty and in dignity.

Mr President:

I would like to thank the international community for their invaluable support in helping secure our democratic transition. Reformers in the Maldives and our friends in the United Nations should feel justifiably proud that our island home was able to mark last year's first International Day of Democracy in the best possible way – by

throwing-off a thirty year-old autocracy and securing a smooth, peaceful and democratic transfer of power.

Just as the international community, played a key role in securing the Maldives' democratic transition, so, I hope, it will play a role in the even more difficult task of making sure our democracy becomes a permanent feature rather than a passing illusion. All of us who care about the Maldives and believe in democracy bear an enormous responsibility to ensure that the beliefs we fought for are set in stone rather than written in sand.

Mr President,

There are three areas in which the Maldives seeks the help of the international community. The first is continued collaboration in democracy-building. We must work together to strengthen the various pillars of a democratic society, namely human rights protection, good governance, independent oversight bodies, the free press, and civil society. The Maldives has made enormous progress across these pillars, but much remains to be done. My sense is that the necessary foundations are now in place.

Separation of powers has been established by constitutional reform. A range of independent agencies and commissions have now been set-up. We have a thriving independent media. Nevertheless, several crucial challenges still remain and we look forward to the support of the international community as we move to meet these challenges.

In particular, I would like to stress the importance of ensuring equality of women and men, not just in name but in practice as well.

Mr President,

The second way in which the international community can help consolidate democracy and rule of law in the Maldives is by promoting a conducive economic environment. As a small and open market economy heavily dependent on tourism and fishery exports, the Maldives has suffered badly from the current global recession.

Moreover, since assuming office, it has become clear to us that in the run-up to last year's election, the former Government engaged in highly irresponsible economic policies in the hope of buying their way to victory. Add to this picture our continued efforts to recovery from the 2004 Tsunami, our impending graduation from the Least Developed Country category, and the high oil and food prices of recent years, and the scale of the economic challenge facing the new Government becomes apparent.

The new Government is determined to confront this challenge with honesty and with vigour. In consultation with the IMF and the World Bank, we have embarked on a programme of major economic reform designed to reduce the bloated public sector, privatise public utilities and promote private enterprise and trade. Yet the scale of the problems we face mean we cannot succeed on our own.

We therefore look to you, our friends in the international community, to help us get back onto our feet. We are very grateful for the support extended to us by the IMF and the Indian Government to name but two. However, more is needed if democracy and human rights are to coexist with economic stability and prosperity.

Mr President,

The third way in which the international community can and must help the Maldives consolidate democracy and establish a secure, prosperous and equitable society, is by taking urgent and effective action to tackle global climate change.

The threats posed to the Maldives from climate change are well-known. Every beach lost to rising seas, every house lost to storm surges, every reef lost to the increasingly warm waters, every job lost as fish stocks dwindle, and every life lost to more frequent extreme weather events will make it harder and harder to govern the country until a point is reached when we must consider abandoning our homeland.

I therefore call on you, the leaders of the world, to protect the future of front-line countries like the Maldives by reaching an ambitious and effective agreement at December's UNFCCC conference in Copenhagen which seeks to limit average global temperature increases to less than 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels. To do otherwise would be to sign the death warrant for the 300,000 Maldivians.

But, the Maldives is determined to do what we can to survive. We are going to be the first country to go carbon-neutral in 10 years time. In order to do that, we are determined to formulate a survival-kit, a carbon-neutral manual that would enable others to replicate in order that all of us together might just about save ourselves from climate catastrophe.

As part of our efforts to achieve a unified voice, I will be inviting some of the most vulnerable states affected by climate change to the Maldives. We hope that this November summit will reinforce our determination to leave no stone unturned to ensure our survival.

Mr President,

I would like to now touch on a number of other important issues which are of enormous concern to us. The Maldives abhors terrorism in all its forms and is determined to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with all countries in facing down this menace. Events over the past year in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, our neighbours and partners in South Asia, show us that victory in this fight will not be easily achieved.

They also show us that to effectively tackle terrorism, we must reaffirm not dilute our commitment to human rights, democracy, rule of law and good governance.

Mr. President,

While we applaud recent efforts to reform and revitalise the United Nations, we believe that such reforms cannot be successful or complete without the much-anticipated and much-needed reform of the Security Council.

We firmly believe that the third round of intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform must produce tangible results. I call upon the Assembly to complete this task during the 64th session, and agree on the increase of both permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council. In terms of composition, we believe that the geopolitical realities of the contemporary world must be duly reflected in the membership of Council. As such, we support the inclusion of India and Japan as Permanent Members of the Security Council.

Mr. President,

The new Government of the Maldives is determined to pursue friendly and mutually respectful relations with every country represented in this room.

However, any friendship must include a willingness to be frank with one another and to object to behaviour not befitting of a sovereign State. We believe dialogue and constructive engagement serve the cause of peace better than ostracism and isolation. The new government in the Maldives will look to renew relations with Israel and to use the relationship to reiterate our support for an independent and sovereign Palestinian homeland, in conformity with the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council.

Mr President,

The Maldives is seeking election to the United Nations Human Rights Council during the current session of the General Assembly. We are doing so because we firmly believe in the universality of human rights and its critical importance to achieving the noble goals of the UN Charter.

Standing at this podium, I must admit how, as a prisoner, I was inspired by the courage and vision of Aung Sang Suu Kyi of Burma. Today, I would like to echo the call of the Secretary-General for her immediate and unconditional release along with all other political prisoners. I also reiterate my strident support for the work assigned to Mr Ibrahim Gambari, the UN Special Envoy to Burma, and say a prayer to political prisoners everywhere.

Mr President,

In conclusion, I must say that the most critical test so far of the resoluteness of the international community to save itself will come during your watch as President of this assembly: the Copenhagen meeting in December. We must prime ourselves to succeed at that conference. Between now and then, Mr. President, we must all use every opportunity, every debate, every encounter to achieve that goal. It is imperative that we succeed. If we want to save the world, saving the Maldives I suggest is a very good starting point.

I, thank you, Mr President.