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MALDIVES

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Statement by His Excellency Mohamed Nasheed, President of the Republic of Maldives to the Summit on Climate Change convened by the United Nations Secretary General

22 September 2009, New York

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am sorry to say that the Maldives has developed something of a habit.

Once or twice a year we are invited to attend an important climate change event such as this one – often as a keynote speaker. The subject matter we are asked to cover is usually something along the lines of: “what are the challenges and threats that climate change poses to the Maldives and other Small Island States”?

On cue, we stand here and tell you just how bad things are. We warn you that unless you act quickly and decisively, our homeland and others like it will disappear beneath the rising sea before the end of this century. We ask you what will become of us?

In response, the assembled leaders of the world stand up, one-by-one, and rail against the injustice of it all. “We are with you!” they say. “We must act now before it is too late!”

But then, once the rhetoric has settled and the delegates have drifted away, the sympathy fades, the indignation cools, and the world carries on as before.

A few months later, we come back and repeat the charade.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Like all habits, this particular one is hard to break.

We in the Maldives desperately want to believe that one day our words will have an effect, and so we continue to shout them even though, deep down, we know that you are not really listening.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I do not wish to sound down-hearted, but it is important to be frank and honest.

As we all know, the first step in breaking a habit is to accept that there is a problem. And I think it is clear that there *is* a problem. For the past twenty years we have stood here warning you of the *threat* of climate change. But we have not told you what the *solution* is, we have not clearly explained that it is in *your* interest – not just ours – to pursue that solution, and we have not been willing to prove that such a solution is achievable and mutually-beneficial by pursuing it *ourselves* - by leading by example.

Today therefore, the Maldives will break its old habit. We will continue to play our allotted role as the world's conscience on global warming: the "canary in the coal mine" as some have called us. But we will ally that role with an equally determined effort to point the way out of the mine, to explain why it is in all of our interests to reach the surface, and to walk with you towards the light.

First then, what is the solution to the current political deadlock on climate change?

As all of us know, but are perhaps unwilling to say, it is really very simple:

1. Developed nations must acknowledge their historic responsibility for global warming and they must accept ambitious and binding emission reduction targets consistent with an average temperature increase of below 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels.
2. If developed countries do act decisively, we in the developing world must be ready to jump, by accepting binding emission reduction targets under the principle of common but differentiated responsibility -- *providing* that the rich world gives us the tools to do so, namely the technology and finance to help us reform our economic base and pursue carbon-neutral development.
3. While priority must be given to mitigation, the developed world must also provide new, additional and predictable adaptation financing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If it is so simple, then why are we not doing it? In my opinion, there are three principal reasons.

First, governments still believe that tackling climate change must necessarily incur an economic cost or a relative disadvantage.

In fact, the opposite is true. Oil is running out and will become increasingly expensive, while clean technologies and renewable energy are becoming ever more efficient and affordable. States which accept this reality and embrace the Green New Deal will be the winners of the 21st Century.

The second reason why the world is failing to pursue the political solution I outlined a few moments ago is, of course, because of a lack of trust between countries, especially between developed and developing States. Typical points of disagreement are: Who should jump first? How far does the other side have to jump before we make our move? If we express a willingness to jump, will it weaken our negotiating position?

These concerns are of course quite normal and are part-and-parcel of international diplomacy. However, I would argue that the threat posed by climate change is now so acute, the science so clear, the solution so apparent, and the cost-benefit analysis of action and inaction so alarming, that such horse-trading and brinkmanship must be left in the past.

Thirdly, the Kyoto Protocol is primarily about what countries cannot do, rather than what they can do. I believe a positive agenda focusing on what we can do might provide a better alternative. Yesterday at the AOSIS Summit we agreed to recognize the need to supplement the UNFCCC process by calling on the major emitters to agree to produce enough clean energy to attain the targets of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degree Celsius and 350 ppm of carbon concentrations.

It is now in *all* of our national interests to jump first and jump far.

That is why the Maldives, without waiting for the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit, recently announced its intention to become carbon neutral by 2020, and why we are actively formulating a national strategy to put that political commitment into practice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I hope I have made clear, the Maldives is determined to break old habits. From now on, we will no longer be content to shout about the perils of climate change. Instead, we believe our acute vulnerability provides us with the clarity of vision to understand how the problem can be solved; the objectivity to say that it is in all of our interests to aggressively pursue that solution; and the courage and determination to lead by example by walking the path ourselves.

In return, we ask assembled world leaders to discard those habits that have led to twenty years of complacency and broken promises on climate change, and instead to seize the historic opportunity that sits at the end of the road to Copenhagen.

Thank you.