



MALDIVES

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STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. MOHAMED LATHEEF, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AT THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON HIV/AIDS

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed an honour for me to address this august Assembly on an issue of utmost importance to mankind today. Given the lateness of the hour, I shall be brief and finish before the time allotted to me.

Mr. President.

Since the United Nations sat in Special Session in 2001 to commit to combating HIV/AIDS epidemic, much has been achieved. The report of the Secretary-General has clearly registered major efforts by individual countries and the international community as a whole. Financial resources made available for HIV/AIDS programmes have augmented, access by the victims to medication and anti-retroviral therapy has significantly increased in many developing countries, and awareness amongst the most vulnerable and high risk sectors have improved as well. Once an endless dark tunnel is now finally starting to flicker light. Proper planning, sustained resources and effective implementation of prevention programmes have proven positive results. The achievements of some countries in sub-Saharan Africa as well as some states in south India stands out to demonstrate this hope. However, we still have a long way to go on this path. Much needs to be done if we were to halt and reverse the spread of the epidemic and achieve the targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. President.

In the Maldives, a comprehensive National AIDS Control Program was established in 1987, four years before the first case of HIV was diagnosed. Since

then this multi-sectoral programme with strong political commitment and leadership at highest levels of the government, and active participation of NGOs and the private sector has played the central role in the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in the country. Strong religious and cultural convictions as well as the remoteness of the country may have contributed to the prevention of an onslaught thus far.

The first case of HIV/AIDS was detected in the country in 1991. Since then, to date a total of 11 cases were confirmed, out of which six have sadly passed away of AIDS related diseases. Although the number of cases may be relatively small, the potential threat that looms over my country cannot be over emphasized. Of late, our population has become increasingly mobile while at the same time our dependence on a floating migrant worker population has inflated. This, combined with a wide circulation of a large tourist population, has exposed us to an unprecedented level of vulnerability. The high rate of divorce and remarriages, the high rate of unemployment among youth, the rise in drug and substance abuse amongst young people, as well as the numerous constraints on conducting an effective awareness and surveillance programmes due to the lack of human and financial resources as well as logistical difficulties due to structural handicaps of the country, are but some factors that contribute to the prospect of a feared epidemic in the country. Furthermore, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami has posed new challenges for the country. If left unaddressed on an urgent basis, these challenges could provide a fertile environment which would further enhance our vulnerability.

Mr. President,

My country is confident that this High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly will reaffirm the commitments made in the 2001 Declaration and chart a clear course of action for the future. It should be a course to which all peoples of the world, regardless of their social, cultural, religious or political differences, can fully subscribe. Ensuring the full protection and enjoyment of fundamental human rights of affected peoples, eliminating stigma and discrimination, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women should remain fundamental and should form the core of our work. It is absolutely essential for us all to demonstrate our full political will, and commit adequate resources that are required to achieve our targets. We believe that the active and dedicated involvement of the civil society and the private sector stakeholders such as the pharmaceutical industry and the large multinational corporations is a prerequisite if we are to fight this epidemic in a meaningful manner.

I assure you, Mr. President, of the full support and cooperation of my country and pledge to do all that it could to rid the world of this deadly epidemic.

Thank you Mr. President.