

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Greetings,

While the pandemic's path differs from country to country, Maldives have also implemented social distancing, confinement, and social isolation measures to stem the virus's spread. COVID-19's impact on mental health, employment, and money loss were the top concerns among youth. Young people frequently work in low-wage, temporary jobs in areas that have been hit hardest by the crisis.

Because of its incredibly rich and diverse marine natural ecology, the Maldives has developed a thriving high-end tourism industry. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light some challenges in the Maldives. Businesses find it difficult to sell their goods or give services at reasonable prices due to their small size, geographical isolation, and geographically dispersed population. The same can be said about government services. The shutdown of resorts and hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in massive job and income losses, making it difficult for local youths to find work for at least a few years.

Social isolation and confinement have substantial psychological effects on young individuals, creating stress, anxiety, and loneliness. Since the beginning of the pandemic, young adults have experienced a higher level of suffering than other age groups. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, online enquiries to violence prevention hotlines have risen while emergency calls reporting domestic violence against women and children have increased along with the mental health issues.

The Maldives is already dealing with several climate-related issues, such as rising sea levels, tropical storms, and floods. The islands, communities, livelihoods, and infrastructure have all been impacted by climate change as a result of the rapid rise of tourism and large infrastructural projects.

To move the needle ahead, meaningful collaborations and policy effort are required. Similarly, Youth have also been active in recovery efforts, in collaboration with the government. For instance, a huge number of youths have volunteered for the Emergency Response and Health Protection Agency to improve the measures taken by the government during the pandemic. Several mental health awareness online sessions have been conducted by the ministry. Youth organizations have stepped in quickly to distribute information among their peers and aid in the virus's containment. New programs have focused on assisting the elderly and other populations that are at higher risk of infection, as well as combating stigma and discrimination.

Some changes that have brought to government strategies and policies regarding the pandemic include:

- National Emergency Operations Centre was to oversee the activities of stakeholder agencies and National Emergency Preparedness, Readiness and Response Plan for COVID19 was developed.
- The government of Maldives activated the emergency plan and decided to grade the COVID19 emergency in to 4 levels nationally.
- Designated spokesperson was identified by NEOC, and press conferences were held daily to ensure access to timely information from government authorities.
- Activated online platform with chatbots to ease burden on triage personnel in call centers (Hotline) and physical locations (e.g., Flu clinics, Hospital triage team).
- Support offered to migrant population with the help of the Maldivian Red Crescent (MRC) and Ministry of Economic Development.
- Developed a training plan for enhancing professional skillset of health workforce.

Some Initiatives by the Government to reduce Socio-Economic Impact include:

- Reduce government recurrent spending by MVR 1 billion (USD 65 million) as a precautionary measure to compensate for projected economic issues as a fallout of the spread of COVID-19.
- Developed an economic stimulus package to ensure the continuation of jobs and survival of businesses.
- Financial Aid for Maldivian students abroad for maximum of 2 months.

- Introducing National Apprenticeship Program (NAP) through National Recovery and Resilience Plan to develop skills among youths.

People stood up to the plate when confronted with the pandemic's extraordinary social conditions, accepting new working arrangements and personal hardships, and reminding us that the human ability for resilience is astonishing. It's evident that we will only be able to survive if we work together.

With great pleasure to represent Maldives, one of the highly developing countries, in this forum, I believe that investing and working together with youth of the country will lead to a brighter future. I hope this would be worthwhile to those countries still suffering from the consequences of covid 19 pandemic.

Thank you very much.

Wassalamu alaikum.