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MALDIVES

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Statement by

His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid

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of the Republic of Maldives

**At the General Debate for the High-Level
Segment of the Economic and Social Council
Substantive Session for 2008**

**United Nations Headquarters, New York
1 July 2008**

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite significant development challenges linked to the Maldives' unique geography, its small and widely dispersed population, and its acute economic and environmental vulnerability; the country has achieved an admirable level of socio-economic growth over the past twenty years. A strong private sector-led economic performance has enabled the country to achieve an average growth rate of 9 percent since 1978, with the result that the Maldives now has the highest per capita GDP in South Asia.

The proceeds from this strong economic performance have been invested into the social development of the country, and the Maldives is on course to meet all the Millennium Development Goals. The Maldives has already achieved the MDGs of halving extreme poverty and providing universal primary education, and is well on-track to achieve the MDG targets of reducing child mortality and improving maternal health. Ensuring environmental sustainability and achieving gender equality remain as key challenges. This positive socio-economic evolution has continued in recent years despite the destruction caused by the 2004 Tsunami.

As a result of our rapid development, on 20 December 2004, the United Nations took the decision to officially graduate the Maldives from Least Developed Country (LDC) status. Our transition from LDC status will be completed on 1 January 2011.

Mr. President,

This socio-economic success story has been built upon an integrated development strategy formulated and calibrated to address and overcome the particular challenges of the Maldives. The latest stage of that strategy is the Seventh National Development Plan which envisions a sustainable development path anchored on economic growth, social equity, poverty eradication, environmental protection and good governance. Although the concepts of "rural" and "urban" are not exactly applicable to the small islands of the Maldives archipelago, one of the core aims of our integrated development strategy is more balanced regional development based on the

principles of Population Development Consolidation or PDC and Safer Islands. Under PDC we aim to achieve greater economies of scale by consolidating populations on more economically and socially viable larger islands which have greater potential for physical expansion, social service provision, infrastructure investment and diversified economic growth. Such islands also have the advantage of being environmentally safe and better adapted to climate change. Better coastal protection, elevated public buildings, and more reliable communication and supply systems will better protect populations on these “Safer Islands” from natural disasters and sea-level rise.

Mr. President,

As is apparent from this brief overview, the Maldives has a clear vision of the future, a clear understanding of domestic challenges and opportunities, and a well-defined strategy for realizing its vision and improving the lives of its people.

And yet, Mr. President, our hard work and hard-won achievements are fundamentally threatened by one challenge over which we have no control, which originates in countries far from the white sandy beaches of my country, and which poses an existential threat to the future of the Maldives as a viable functioning State. I talk, of course, about the challenge of climate change.

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing the Maldives today. It threatens each and every development achievement accrued by the country over the past three and a half decades.

The Maldives is currently swimming strongly towards the attainment of the Millennium Goals. Yet, if left unchecked, global warming will leave us treading water or, worse, will see us pushed backwards by the man-made current of rising global emissions.

Mr. President,

The inverse relationship between responsibility for climate change and vulnerability to its consequences is often overlooked. The Maldives and other Small Island States have a tiny carbon footprint and yet their development and indeed their very existence are fundamentally threatened by global warming and its consequences.

The injustice of this situation was one of the themes discussed at the recent Global Humanitarian Forum meeting convened by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in Geneva. During a high-level panel debate on “Climate Justice in a Shared Global Ecosystem”, the President of the Maldives, H.E. Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, declared the fundamental and universal right of all peoples, especially in small vulnerable countries, to live in a safe, secure and sustainable environment. Taking up this call and reflecting on the injustices of global warming, especially for the world’s poor, the Chair and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson called for a new paradigm of “sustainable *and just* development”.

In order to contribute to the understanding and promotion of such sustainable *and just* development, the Maldives tabled, in March, a Human Rights Council Resolution on Human Rights and Climate Change. The Resolution, which was cosponsored by 80 States and adopted by consensus, calls on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to explore the relationship between climate change and fundamental human rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development.

The Maldives also welcomes the Pacific Island Developing States’ initiative focusing on the security implications of climate change, which we hope will build on the results of last April’s UK-initiated Security Council debate.

Mr. President,

We hope that the OHCHR Study and the subsequent debate in the Human Rights Council will together contribute to the evolution of the concept of

sustainable *and just* development. We hope also that increased dialogue on and support for this concept will result in international action to mitigate against the worst effects of climate change and ensure the future viability of human settlement and human development in the Maldives.

In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Council that the Maldives will convene tomorrow, 2nd July at 1.15pm, an ECOSOC Side-Event to explore the implications of climate change for sustainable development.

Mr. President,

If we in the Maldives are to continue to take strides towards poverty eradication and sustainable development, we need the support of the entire international community. That support should not be restricted to the provision of aid and assistance by developed countries, but should also involve a commitment by every country represented in this room to avoid adopting measures or taking actions that knowingly undermine the ability of *other* States to pursue sustainable long-term development. To begin with, and as demanded by Lord Stern during his presentation to the Council yesterday, that commitment should include a redoubling of efforts to reach agreement in Copenhagen next year on an effective and equitable successor to the Kyoto Protocol. Only through such commitment and multilateral solidarity can we guarantee sustainable *and just* development for the Maldives and for other developing countries around the world.

Thank you Mr. President.
