

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



MALDIVES

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Statement by

His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Khaleel,

**Permanent Representative of the Republic of Maldives
to the United Nations at the General Debate of the Sixty
Third Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

29 September 2007, New York

Mr President, Mr Secretary-General, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I begin by extending to you my delegation's warmest congratulations on your election to preside over this sixty-third session of the General Assembly. I assure you Mr. President, of the full support and cooperation of my delegation in your work.

May I also take this opportunity, to extend our profound appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr Srgjan Kerim, for the exemplary manner in which he guided the work of the sixty-second session of the Assembly.

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 organization.

Mr. President,

Four years ago, the people of the Maldives embarked on a comprehensive reform programme, aimed at strengthening and modernizing the democratic governance in the country. Within this short span of time, unprecedented reforms have been adopted and the political landscape of the country has been completely transformed.

A new Constitution that fully guarantees the civil liberties and fundamental freedoms of our people was adopted on 7 August 2008. To safeguard the foundations of democracy on our islands, several oversight bodies such as a National Human Rights Commission that complies with the Paris Principles, a Judicial Services Commission and an independent Elections Commission, have been established and are now fully operational.

Significant progress is also being made in reforming and restructuring the legal and judicial system of the country to align it with internationally accepted norms and standards.

In accordance with the new Constitution, the Maldives will hold its first multi-party Presidential election early next week. Parliamentary elections will be held before the end of February and local municipal elections will be completed by July next year.

These gains were made Mr. President, with the help of the international community, particularly, the Commonwealth, the European Union and the United Nations. I thank them for their invaluable support, encouragement and assistance in implementing the reform programme. My Government is also extremely grateful for these organizations for accepting our request for elections monitoring and assistance in the electoral process. We are firm in our resolve that the elections are held in a free and fair manner in full conformity with the internationally recognized standards and best practice.

Mr. President,

When the Maldives joined the United Nations in 1965, we were one of the smallest and poorest Member States of the organization. We lacked even the most basic political, legal and economic infrastructure and institutions necessary for self-governance. Our ability to provide for the welfare of our people was extremely limited. The economy was largely based on subsistence fishery and the health and education sectors were severely underdeveloped.

However, since then, the Maldives has achieved remarkable levels of socio-economic progress. Thirty years of strong and unwavering political leadership, complimented by the hard work of our people and the generous assistance of our development partners, has enabled the country to successfully pursue a people centric path of sustainable development, based on social equity and justice, poverty eradication, economic growth, environmental protection and good governance.

The Millennium Development Goals are now fully incorporated in our national development priorities and I am happy to note that we are amongst those countries which are on track to achieving most of the MDGs by 2015.

We believe that the ongoing political, legal and human rights Reform Agenda will further strengthen our progress and propel us to new heights of socio-economic development with the support of our partners.

As a result of our rapid development progress this Assembly decided, four years ago, to graduate the Maldives from the list of Least Developed Countries. The Maldives is also being hailed by the international community as a major success story of the multilateral development assistance framework.

And yet, Mr. President, these hard-won achievements will be rendered meaningless if MDG Goal 7, environmental sustainability, cannot be guaranteed.

It is now accepted beyond any doubt that climate change poses the most immediate and far-reaching threat to human security directly compromising the most fundamental rights, including the right to self-determination and the, right to life itself, for millions of people around the world.

From the highest Himalayan peaks to the low-lying coastal areas and small islands with a meter or so above sea-level, global warming and changing weather patterns are undermining the lives and livelihoods of millions of people around the planet, with the poor especially vulnerable. The recent hurricanes that left such a trail of destruction across the Caribbean once again brought into sharp relief the acute vulnerabilities of small island states like the Maldives to global warming and climate change.

For the Maldives, climate change is not a distant possibility; it is happening now and it is a reality that we are experiencing on a daily basis. The continuing degradation of the global environment is not only undermining our development process, but it is also seriously threatening the very survival of our people and the existence of our tiny country.

Mr. President,

We are all aware of the grim predictions in the IPCC's fourth assessment report. If these predictions were to come true, the Maldives and many other Small Island Developing States and low-lying coastal areas would cease to exist within a relatively short period of time.

Hence, the Maldives and many other Small Island Developing States, do not have the luxury of hesitation and inaction. Nor can we afford to pick and choose where and when this important issue needs to be addressed. For us, it is not solely a development issue, but also a moral issue, an ethical issue, a political issue, a legal issue, a human rights issue as well as a grave security issue.

This is the reason why the President of the Maldives took the initiative in 1987 to raise this issue at this august Assembly. This is also the reason why the Maldives participated at the Security Council debate on this issue last year and this is the reason why the Maldives decided to raise this issue at the Human Rights Council in 2008.

Mr. President,

While climate change knows no borders and will effect us all, it is now clear that the worst impacts will fall on the most vulnerable, namely the Small Island Developing States and the Least Developed Countries. The inverse relationship between responsibility for climate change and vulnerability to its consequences is often overlooked. The Maldives and other Small Island Developing States, contributes the least to global warming and yet their development and indeed their very existence are fundamentally threatened by global warming and its consequences.

Addressing the injustices of climate change is therefore the moral and ethical responsibility of the entire international community. It is time that we put people back on the heart of the climate change debate. We believe a comprehensive rights based approach to sustainable and just development, anchored in the concept of common but differentiated responsibility, is now an imperative.

In this regard, we are happy that, on the initiative of the Maldives and 80 other like-minded countries, the UN Human Rights Council had for the first time, earlier this year, recognized the link between human rights and climate change. The Council will formally debate this issue at its tenth session in March 2009 and we hope that due consideration will be given to the outcome of this debate by our colleagues in the UNFCCC, as they work to ensure an effective and equitable successor to the Kyoto Protocol.

Mr. President,

The Maldives is encouraged by the renewed international impetus towards a more sustained and robust approach to achieving the MDGs. Indeed, the high level event on the MDGs held last week, clearly signifies the collective commitment and interest of the international community to work towards achieving these goals.

The inter-relationship between climate change, food security and the attainment of the MDGs cannot be overemphasized. It is now believed that the global food and energy crisis will further drive more than 100 million people into poverty.

While short term measures may ease the immediate pressures, we believe that a sustainable solution to the problem lies in a fair and equitable trading regime and a shared vision of partnership and cooperation. The early and successful completion of the Doha Development Round and the successful outcome of the post Bali negotiations as well as the Financing for Development meeting in Qatar at the end of this year will prove to be critical in this regard.

As a country that depends on the import of most of its food and all of its energy resources, the Maldives is extremely concerned about the rise in global food and energy prices. Although the situation at present in the Maldives is relatively stable, the potential of a severe blow to our economy is alarmingly high. The Government is fully aware of the risks involved and is taking all necessary precautionary measures to ensure that the crisis does not adversely affect the daily lives and wellbeing of our people.

Mr. President,

Organized crime and terrorism are continuing to menace the maintenance of international peace and security. The recent bombings in India and Pakistan are yet another tragic reminder of the evil and insidious nature of terrorism. It is therefore important for the international community to ensure that the war against terrorism remains a main priority on the international agenda.

The continued scourge of terrorism is particularly alarming when seen in the context of the spread of nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction. The threat of a terrorist organization gaining access to such weapons is extremely alarming.

I am happy to note that the Maldives is now party to almost all international conventions on counter terrorism. Despite its limited resource and expertise, the Maldives has been actively working towards implementing its various regional and multilateral obligations under the international counter terrorism regime. As such, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to combat global terrorism, specifically to Security Council resolution 1373 and 1540.

Mr. President,

The question of Palestine continues to elude a permanent and lasting resolution. The Maldives reiterates its support to the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to an independent and sovereign homeland. We believe that the two-states solution remains the only viable option which needs to be pursued with greater vigor and vitality.

Mr President,

The United Nations in the 21st century must have the ability to take on emerging challenges in an expeditious and efficient manner. While we applaud the present efforts to reform and revitalize the organization, we believe that such reforms cannot be successfully achieved without the much anticipated reform of the Security Council. In this regard we are happy that the Assembly had decided to proceed to inter-governmental negotiations in early 2009. We look forward to participating in these negotiations.

Mr. President,

Despite the criticisms leveled against the United Nations, my country remains convinced that this organization is the most potent and dependable universal institution today. For the past six decades the United Nations has been a beacon of hope for peoples around the world. Its universal character and the multilateralism that it embodies, hold true to the ideals and virtues upon which it was founded and, without doubt, provide the only viable framework for solving the world's greatest challenges including climate change, sustainable development, human rights and global terrorism.

Hence, I reaffirm the Maldives' commitment to the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. I offer our full support to the United Nations, in its resolute efforts to maintain international peace and security, and to work towards the betterment of all humanity,

I, thank you, Mr President.