Abdulla Shahid, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Biographical note

Abdulla Shahid is widely recognized as an exceptional politician and a seasoned diplomat, with a long and distinguished career serving in both the Government and legislature of Maldives.

Since his appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs in 2018, for the second time, Mr. Shahid has worked incessantly to reposition Maldives as a responsible and respected member of the international community, by renewing previously strained relationships and building new ones, both in the bilateral and the multilateral domains. He has reinvigorated the country’s efforts in the multilateral arena and led national efforts to rejoin the Commonwealth after a four-year hiatus.

Maldives also won the bid to host the 2023 Indian Ocean Island Games, after tireless lobbying efforts conducted under the leadership of Mr. Shahid. The Games will be the first-ever international multisport competition held in Maldives.

As a strong advocate for gender equality, he is credited with achieving gender parity among the country’s diplomatic Heads of Missions for the first time, as well as in the country’s foreign service.

Amid the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Mr. Shahid has been one of the leading voices in the international arena highlighting the devastation caused by the global health crisis on the economies and societies of small island developing States.

He has continuously drawn attention to the inherent economic vulnerabilities of small island developing States to external shocks and their limited ability to bounce back from disasters.

Mr. Shahid began his professional career as a foreign service officer in 1983 and rose through the ranks rapidly.

In 1993, he was promoted to the post of Director, International Affairs, with the responsibility of leading the Multilateral Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He attended all General Assembly sessions from 1987 to 1994, working tirelessly to bring the issue of small State security to the forefront of the United Nations. He was a negotiator at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and he actively participated in the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993.
As the Head of the International Organizations Department of the Ministry, Mr. Shahid also represented Maldives at several meetings of the Commonwealth, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, among others. He also led the Maldives delegation at the twentieth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Uganda and the sixth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference in Senegal.

In 1995, he was appointed Executive Secretary (Chief of Staff) to the President in the President’s Office.

He held that post for over 10 years, serving with a high degree of distinction and diligence and displaying strong administrative and organizational capabilities.

In 2005, Mr. Shahid was appointed Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and, in 2007, Minister for Foreign Affairs for the first time.

During his first stint as Minister, Mr. Shahid advocated for a rights-based approach to climate change by making a submission to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, under Human Rights Council resolution 7/23, on human rights and climate change. He drew attention to the direct and indirect effects of climate change on the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, which reinvigorated the discourse on climate change and brought to light the multidimensional impacts of climate change. He also successfully steered the Ministry through a period of sweeping political change in Maldives, skillfully displaying a willingness to engage more widely with the international community and international human rights mechanisms.

Mr. Shahid’s illustrious parliamentary career spanned 25 years, during which time he participated in, and oversaw, major legislative progress and reform. He was a Member of Parliament for five consecutive terms, from 1994 to 2018.

Following the adoption of the newly promulgated democratic Constitution in 2008 and the first multiparty parliamentary elections in 2009, Mr. Shahid became the first democratically elected Speaker of the People’s Majlis in history, in his fourth term as Member of Parliament. As Speaker, he energetically steered the work of the People’s Majlis and managed to build consensus at a time when Maldives was undergoing a tumultuous period of democratic transition, in an exceedingly polarized political environment.

During his tenure as Speaker, Mr. Shahid served as the President of the conference of the Association of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Speakers and Parliamentarians, from 2013 to 2014, and on the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, from 2012 to 2015. He also actively engaged with the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

As a leading voice of the Maldivian Democratic Party, Mr. Shahid adamantly advocated for political and judicial reform and was incarcerated for a short period for his relentless activism. As the Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Party, as
well as of the Joint Opposition coalition, he played a pivotal role in mobilizing international action against injustice, corruption and human rights violations in Maldives.

Mr. Shahid holds a master’s degree in International Relations from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and completed his undergraduate degree in Political Science and Government at the University of Canberra.

Mr. Shahid is an accomplished poet and has a keen interest in astronomy. A sportsman from a young age, he enjoys badminton, cricket and football.

Born in Malé in May 1962, Mr. Shahid is married to Aishath Suiza. They have a daughter and two sons.