



بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

MALDIVES

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Statement by His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Asim, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives

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Bismillah-Ah-Rahman-Ah-Raheem

Mr President
Mr Secretary General
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalam-alaikum va-rahmathullahi va-barakaathu and a very Good afternoon to you all

We stand today at the cross roads – between old wars and new conflicts, between what we know, and what we fear - between the needs of a changing planet, and the demands of a growing population. We remain caught between human ambition and human limitations. And in these times of change, we must turn once again to the principles that defined this Organisation. Those that make us who we are, and who we would like to become.

Rising from the darkness of war, the United Nations shone like a beacon of light. Dedicated to seeking peace, this organisation became the purpose for many. For many of those fighting for freedom, fighting fear, and fighting for the right to be. The United Nations was, and is, the best hope we have for humanity.

The United Nations was built on the promise of peace, and salvation – a place where every issue can be debated for a solution, where every nation has a voice regardless of size, regardless of might.

This is why we believe that the theme for this session of the General Assembly is most appropriate. “Focusing on people, striving for peace and a decent life for all, on a sustainable planet” – this is what makes up the core of this organisation. This is what defines our work.

Please allow me to congratulate you Mr President, on your assumption as the 72nd President of the General Assembly. I also welcome the Secretary General Mr António Guterres to his first General Debate, and commend him for the dedication he has demonstrated throughout his first year in office.

Mr President,

The United Nations is what we all make of it. It is made up of us, the Member States. Its successes and its weaknesses are determined by how much we put into it.

My country, the Maldives, envisions a United Nations that is fair, that is representative of its diverse membership, that takes into account the views and opinions of all, and forms consensus, based on compromise and dialogue. A United Nations that commits and delivers.

Our vision for a stronger United Nations is founded on President Abdullah Yameen Abdul Gayoom's policy of strengthening national resilience – economic resilience, social resilience, political resilience, and indeed environmental resilience. Crafting meaningful global solutions built on national policies and experiences, for the common problems of our times, for our common, and shared destiny.

Mr President,

The world must become a safer planet for all. No man, no woman, and certainly no child, must suffer due to conflict. Yet we know this is not the case. Far too many people are dying in conflicts across the world. Far too many mothers are living in fear, unsure of the fate of their children. Far too many children are seeing their futures crumbling in front of them.

In Palestine, another year ends, with no permanent peace, no permanent hope. An independent, sovereign State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, established along the 1967 borders, is the only solution, the only way. Yet, many resolutions have been passed without action; many peace processes have been abandoned without progress. The shameful occupation by Israel continues, without consequence. Violence, economic deprivation, fear, hunger and hopelessness – this is what a child in Palestine is born into. Generations have now matured, knowing nothing else. This must end.

In Syria, over a quarter of a million people have lost their lives, with many millions displaced and many more millions made refugees. War crimes have been committed. Chemical weapons used. Inhumane treatment normalised. This suffering must end.

Mr. President,

As hundreds of innocent people continue to flee the violence, conflict, and endless suffering – the greatest numbers since the World Wars – it has become imperative that we seek sustainable long-term solutions that address the wellbeing and welfare of migrants and refugees. Incidences of hatred, islamaphobia, and xenophobia – what has

become so frequent today – can only breed more violence, intolerance and hatred. Our policies of fences, force, and fear, must end.

In Myanmar, the situation of Rohingya Muslims, who are some of the most persecuted people in the world - presents another tragic case. Systemic violence, including massacres, torching of homes, forced displacement and forced migration – these acts of ethnic cleansing are alarming, to say the least. Those responsible for these barbaric actions must be brought to justice swiftly. These acts of prejudice, violence, and discrimination against Rohingya Muslims must end.

Instilling fear of “the other” is easy. Determining “them” as worth less – due to their religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, Islamophobia, or whatever the reason – is a short step away. When this happens, it is easy to ignore grave violations, easier to even encourage them. It is then, and only then, we see – and we have seen – the worst of humanity. We cannot allow another wave of genocide to repeat. Not on our watch.

Mr. President,

Chaos, vacuum, and uncertainty, have given the opportunity for Dae’sh to start their own brand of terror, their own version of religion, and their own brutal methods of fear. Combatting terrorism, fighting violent extremism, and radicalisation, are national priorities. We have enacted a national legislation and formulated a comprehensive national policy in our fight against violence extremism. We have also established last year the National Centre for Counter Terrorism. It is a top priority for the Maldives. The Maldives is working with its bilateral and international partners, studying best practices, and forging common consensus. We commend the Secretary-General’s efforts in achieving greater global coordination in the fight against terrorism. The establishment of a new Office of Counter Terrorism, we hope, will inject more energy in the implementation of the Plan of Action in Preventing Violent Extremism. The Secretary-General will have our full support.

We must all do more. Today, we are in the midst of a war, like no other. This enemy has no single face, no single identity, no single country, and no single strategy. The only thing common is their brutal methods and their misplaced ideology. The fact that they kill more Muslims – the very people they allegedly fight to protect – proves their twisted reasoning. This terrorism, this extremism, must end.

In North Korea, the most recent tests of ballistic missiles, with them, the real threat of nuclear weapons and war, has alarmed us all. This is a clear violation of international law, an unnecessary act of provocation. There is every possibility now, that this could lead us down a path of destruction. We condemn these actions. We urge North Korea to return to dialogue, to let multilateralism take its course, to choose peace over war. These blatant attempts at aggression must end.

Mr President,

The world must become a more hopeful place for all – a place where people enjoy decent and meaningful lives.

Adopting a proactive and constructive stand is our approach. Sustained and targeted investment is our policy. Looking to cultivate a culture of respect for human rights, at home and abroad, is our goal. We believe we have been successful.

The Gender Equality Act has guaranteed in law, what Maldivians have been practising for decades - equality for women at home, at work, in decision-making, and in our society. Policies aiming at greater representation of women in leadership positions are showing results. Laws, policies, and regulations have created a framework where every man, every woman, every Maldivian can be a champion for gender equality. We need to do more – as all countries do, but we are proud of our considerable progress.

People with disabilities are supported through financial and material support. Our elderly population is getting the compassion and the financial support we owe them, through well-targeted policies.

Universal healthcare has been realised across the country, in all 188 islands. Easy access to a medical doctor, sea ambulances, and a pharmacy on every island are ensured. The Maldives spends more than nine percent of its GDP on health-related expenses – the highest in South East Asia region – an investment that has propelled us on our development path. Lymphatic filaria, measles, malaria, and polio – all of these diseases have been eradicated in the Maldives.

Access to safe, habitable, and affordable housing is recognised as a human right in the Constitution. Considerable progress has been made, with several housing units built and awarded under public housing schemes, despite the scarcity of land, and remoteness of islands.

Achieving near universal literacy, and universal enrolment in schools, has not stopped us. We are investing continually in improving the quality of our schools, our teachers, our curriculums and our approaches – to ensure that no-child is left behind.

We are also investing in our young people – the future of our nation. Caring for the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of our young people – the largest portion of our population – is a cornerstone of the Government’s policy. We are focused on creating an enabling environment where they will thrive, where they will shine. Including through the promotion of unity, cultural values and national identity and national spirit, through programmes such as “Tharika” launched earlier this year.

Mr. President,

The Maldives is a middle-income country. But like every country, we want to achieve higher growth, and even greater development. For this to happen, large-scale investment

is necessary. Investments are not only a means to support our economic development, but a means to support our social development as well. Large-scale projects will help to provide economies of scale, facilitate expansion of key sectors of the economy, and also generate jobs, and create opportunities for our youth, for their creativity to be unleashed. Yet, it has become increasingly difficult for middle income countries like the Maldives to access concessional financing for development projects, leaving no choice but to go with commercial interest rates, further increasing debt burdens. This will undoubtedly make the transition, out of the middle income box to higher levels of development, all the more challenging.

Our successes at home provide the basis for our solutions to the global problems that face our world. Our focus globally, has been to make sure we pay attention to those that are more vulnerable. This is why we believe that focusing on those that do not have a voice, and those that are not usually represented, making sure that their voices are heard, should be the international community's collective focus – as was ours during the six years we served on the United Nations Human Rights Council.

This is why we established at the Council, the Trust Fund to support the participation of LDCs and SIDS in the work of the Human Rights Council – two groups of countries vastly under-represented in Geneva. This is why our priority has been women, children, and the disabled. And introduced the link between climate change and its consequences on human rights. We worked hard to establish the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment – a major global milestone.

Mr. President,

The world must be made a happier place to live in. And this can only be done through our collective will to approach the common problems we face, with concrete solutions.

And there is no bigger global threat than that of climate change. In 1987 when the Maldives first spoke about sea level rise, the science was still new, the threat relatively unknown. We persisted in our advocacy – because we believed that the threat of climate change deserved, and indeed, needed global attention. The Maldives hosted, in 1989, the first international conference on small states and sea level rise. We helped form the Alliance of Small Island States, one of the most influential groups on climate change and sustainable development – a group that we have chaired since 2015. The Maldives negotiated, in 2008, the first UN resolution on human rights and climate change – the first time a UN document acknowledged this link.

Today, the threat of climate change is very real. Unpredictable weather, more frequent and intense natural disasters, unprecedented temperatures, are the norm rather than the exception. The unprecedented frequency and the intensity of the recent hurricanes to hit the Caribbean and the United States, and the Pacific islands last year – are all powerful signs that our planet has changed significantly.

Island nations – including the Maldives – are the first to be devastated by these impacts. But, we are not the only ones. Today, climate change is becoming a reality for the rest of

the world – whether we choose to believe it or not. Here, I would like to take a moment to express our sincere sympathies to those affected by recent Hurricanes Jose, Irma and Maria. I assure you, we will not stop our advocacy on climate change.

We have proposed many solutions. The full implementation of the Paris Agreement is our priority. The reduction of harmful emissions, transitioning to renewable sources of energy, and investing in mitigation and adaptation are also crucial. We need to join together, in meaningful and durable partnerships, to find sustainable solutions. We need constructive engagement, leadership and a certain degree of openness to change, from all countries – developing and developed. Leadership like we are seeing from China, Brazil, India, Canada, France, Germany, and countless others.

At home, we are investing in renewable energy, through the transition to a low carbon economy. The Maldives, as the Chair of AOSIS, and in collaboration with IRENA, we have launched the Initiative for Renewable Island Energy (IRIE), which will facilitate support for Small Island States in their transition to renewable energy, and in achieving energy efficiency. We are looking at innovative approaches to fulfil the developmental needs of our people that do not compromise the needs of our planet. We have lent our voice and shared our experience. We have requested support to make our economy, and our country more resilient to the shocks and impacts caused by climate change.

Taking care of our ocean is intimately linked to meaningful action on climate change. The Maldives, and other island nations are custodians of large expanses of ocean. Yet, every person in this room, every community you represent, every country you come from – derives benefits from our ocean, is dependent, on the health and wealth of our ocean and seas. Every other breath we take comes from the ocean.

In the Maldives, the ocean is the backbone and the artery of our two main economic sectors – fisheries and tourism. The ocean defines who the Maldivians are – traditional seafarers, fishing communities, reliant on the produce that the ocean offers to us. This is why we welcomed, and actively engaged in the first UN Oceans Conference held earlier this year. This is why we have preserved – despite the hardships – our traditional method of pole-and-line fishing – the most well recognised, the cleanest, greenest and most sustainable method of fisheries. Catching fish one-by-one with almost no by-catch. This is why since 2010, our entire Exclusive Economic Zone – nearly one million square kilometres, has been declared a shark sanctuary – a measure we call on other countries to follow, as the current Chair of the “Save Our Sharks” Coalition. This is why an entire atoll is a UNESCO recognised biosphere reserve, with many other marine areas protected and preserved. In fact, there are many more uninhabited islands with marine protected areas than populated islands in the Maldives. This is why the total ban on exploitation of ecologically significant marine creatures such as turtles, whales, dolphins, rays, and whale sharks is strictly enforced. At the same time, Maldivians are some of the largest consumers of fish and fisheries products, demonstrating to the world that sustainable utilization of the marine resources is indeed possible.

We must not forget those that suffer the consequences of natural disasters. We are witnessing the total destruction and loss of life the Earthquake in Mexico is causing. We

must endeavour, as an international community, to do our very best for them, and for many others that suffer around the world in disasters. And focus on cultivating resilience by building back better.

Climate change, sustainable development, and the protection of our ocean – these are not trends or passing fascinations – inaction would cost us our progress, prosperity, and the lives of our people – the future of all our nations.

This is not the time to question what we already know. This is not the time to turn inwards or look the other way. There is no time to waste. It is time to act.

Mr President,

Two days ago, we celebrated fifty-two proud years as a member of the United Nations.

Throughout our membership in the past five decades, we have worked with a vision of a United Nations that protects people – providing them with a safe haven, and access to their rights – A United Nations that preserves our planet – prioritising the needs of our present generation without compromising those of the future – A United Nations that promotes peace – free of fear, full of bright tomorrows, and an abundance of hope.

We have focused on providing meaningful, pragmatic, real solutions, based on sound national experience, for our common shared destiny.

It is because we have a meaningful vision to promote that we continue to make every effort to the common cause of humanity.

Mr. President,

It is because of our firm belief in the power of multilateralism, the same faith that propelled us – fifty-two years ago – to seek membership of the United Nations – the very first foreign policy decision of the independent Maldives – that pushes us to be effective members of the international community.

It is because we have never served before – It is the promise of equality of representation, our conviction that every nation – large or small – should have a voice, and can make a difference – our firm conviction that size does not determine destiny or value, that in our fifty-two years of membership of the United Nations, for the first time, we are seeking a seat on the United Nations Security Council for the term 2019-2020.

We stand tall, and proud because we believe that we have much to offer – fresh perspectives, fresh ideas, and new concepts, to bring renewed dynamism, and new approaches to the United Nations.

The Maldives deserves an equal chance to serve this international body. We are dedicated to the cause of peace in a sustainable world. And we are determined to leave a mark, and make a difference.

The triumph of multilateralism, the pinnacle of our common vision, lies in our collective approach to solving the global challenges of our time. The Maldives stands ready to take that leap of faith, providing shared solutions, for our shared, common destiny.

I thank you Mr President.