



Republic of Maldives

Check Against Delivery

Statement by His Excellency Dr Mohamed Waheed, Vice-President of the Republic of Maldives to the General Debate of the Sixty-fifth Session of the General Assembly

27 September 2010, New York

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

First, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly. Please be assured of my delegation's full support and cooperation. I would also like to take this opportunity to offer our appreciation to both your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Ali Abdussalaam Treki, for the exemplary manner in which he guided the work of the sixty-fourth session, and to Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, for his leadership of the United Nations over the past four years.

Mr. President,

Last week, I had the opportunity to report on the Maldives' progress on our attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. My report demonstrated that while we have achieved five of the eight MDGs, namely, MDGs 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6, several goals remain challenges, and some achievements are increasingly becoming threatened.

For example, the Maldives has made great strides in eliminating poverty, in education, and in improving mortality rates among both mothers and infants. However, we have yet to make significant gains in areas for the empowerment of women. We are also still struggling to provide for our environmental and developmental needs. Moreover, religious extremism confronts notions of equality and social justice, and endangers our achievements in gender parity. All the while, environmental and economic vulnerabilities threaten to diminish our gains.

Mr. President,

These gains, among others, have improved the lives of the Maldivian people, and contributed to a situation that has led to our impending graduation from the UN's list of LDCs this year. Whilst we look forward to our graduation, we also remain concerned about the sudden withdrawal of some of the benefits afforded to LDC countries that have helped sustain our developmental efforts for the past four decades. These include preferential market access and concessionary finance. While we were very encouraged by the pledges made by our partners at the Donors' Conference held in the Maldives in March of this year to invest in urgent development projects, we anxiously await the speedy disbursement of the promised aid.

Furthermore, we look forward to working with our development partners to achieve consensus on a transitional model that provides for a gradual reduction of benefits to avoid disruption of our developmental efforts, as stipulated in UNGA resolution 59/209.

Mr. President,

As a country on the verge of LDC graduation, we look forward to adopting a development strategy that places emphasis on greater independence and economic stability through private investment and public-private partnerships. Our government's policies for privatisation, and our employment of commercial diplomacy are designed to achieve this transition. However, like many other small island states, our geopolitical and socioeconomic circumstances will continue to render the Maldives vulnerable.

The impact of the recent global recession clearly demonstrates these vulnerabilities. As a country primarily dependent on tourism and fishing, the Maldives was severely affected by decreases in consumption in our traditional markets. As a result, the government was compelled to implement severe austerity measures that cut public spending and undertook massive economic reforms. Nevertheless, our people continue to face formidable developmental challenges, and thus the Maldives will continue to push for greater recognition within the UN for the plight of Small Island Developing States.

Mr. President,

The economic transition in the Maldives complements an ambitious political transition from autocracy to democracy. Although a daunting task, we have been successful in achieving important milestones over the course of these past two years. In fact, the 2-year period of transition stipulated in our new Constitution concluded in August 2010. This process resulted in the establishment of our Supreme Court, as well as the creation of other relevant institutions. While our transition process was accompanied by some political discord, it was largely peaceful.

Our friends in the international community helped us find peaceful solutions during this somewhat tumultuous period in politics. I would like to thank all members of the international community for their continued engagement and assistance, specifically President Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka for his constructive contributions.

Mr. President,

The Maldives' transition to a democracy is accompanied by our evolution from an abuser of human rights to a staunch advocate for them. We are proud of what we have achieved, but are the first to recognize that there is no shortage of challenges that require our immediate attention. These include the need to abrogate the use of torture, the need to safeguard the rights of women, children and the disabled, and the need to improve our capacity to deal with human trafficking in our region.

The Maldives is proud to have been elected to Human Rights Council in May of this year, and we are cognizant of the trust and responsibility conferred upon us by the overwhelming support demonstrated by UN members across all regions. We will continue to uphold our pledge to use our membership to promote human rights through positive engagement, and to

address the sensitivities in our collective quest to protect the most vulnerable. Moreover, the Maldives is undergoing its own Universal Periodic Review this year, and we consider this exercise an opportunity to further strengthen human rights protections at home.

While our interest in human rights is rooted in our ambition to improve the lives of our own citizens, it also stems from our rising concerns about life in our now interconnected global village, where the need to compel tolerance, understanding, and respect for human dignity is greater than ever before. We support the initiatives for a culture of peace, for dialogue amongst civilisations, and tolerance amongst different faiths.

As a Muslim country, we lament over the rising tide of Islamophobia in non-Muslim States. The people of the Maldives certainly qualify the differences between government-sanctioned incidents, and those anti-Muslim activities that can be attributed to marginal segments of non-Muslim societies. However, we believe that religious intolerance, negative stereotyping, racial-profiling, and discrimination thwarts this institution's mission for peace and prosperity among all societies. Therefore, we must intensify our efforts to promote a culture of tolerance and understanding, and continue an effective dialogue to expand the scope of rational discourse between the Islamic world and other civilizations.

Mr. President,

Some of the gravest threats facing humanity today do not occupy their rightful places in the headlines, nor do they gain the significant attention they require. We believe that climate change is such a threat. For the Maldives, the effects of global warming pose an overwhelming threat to our infrastructure, economy, and our very existence.

In an attempt to implement adaptation measures, the Maldives has invested in water and sanitation projects, coastal defences, and is attempting to develop voluntary resettlement programmes to more viable islands within the country. We are also investing in a low carbon future that emphasizes renewable energy and other green projects to achieve our goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2020.

It is unquestionable that our actions alone cannot save us. The global community must act. Regional initiatives that complement UNFCCC processes must be pursued. Weeks before Copenhagen, the Maldives convened a group of countries and formed the Climate Vulnerable Forum to declare our concerns with a united voice. I am pleased to report today that Kiribati will take over the leadership of this group ahead of the COP 16 in Cancun this year, and Bangladesh will steer it to the COP 17 in South Africa next year.

The Asian region is one of the most vulnerable to climate change. We recognize that failure to extend emissions targets beyond 2012 leaves 60% of the world's population without durable solutions for the global warming effects already being felt. Threats to food and water security for the world's most susceptible populations, will undoubtedly perpetuate disease, exacerbate conflicts, and threaten to erode decades of hard-won successes achieved by countries throughout the region.

While we have high hopes for the ensuing COP-16, 17 and 18 talks, we believe alternative solutions that harmonize the development needs of industrial states, with the human and economic rights of vulnerable peoples should exist. Therefore,

the people of the Maldives and Timor-Leste call for an Asian Initiative that forges a consortium of Asian countries and regional partnerships. This will aim to enable our region to aid the world's most vulnerable states.

Mr. President,

The Maldives believes that it is time to let go of the mistrust and blame that has plagued the UNFCCC process. We welcome the recent voluntary initiative by India to curb its emissions and its commitment to the promotion of green energy without waiting for others to follow suit. We call upon all nations – large and small – to come together in a cooperative spirit in Cancun, so that we may effectively establish and promote mitigation activities that restore our native carbon sinks, increase energy efficiency, reduce emissions, and preserve our ecosystems.

Mr. President,

The Maldives would also like to state its support of the G4 position for reform of the Security Council. We believe that an expansion of permanent membership to reflect the realities of our contemporary international system will improve representation in the Council, and better serve in addressing a panoply of concerns facing nations in all five regions today.

Mr. President,

The Maldives also continues to grapple with traditional security threats. The scourge of terrorism and the growing menace of piracy threaten national, economic, and maritime security throughout our region, and around the world. Yet, deficits in the capacity to attribute criminal accountability to the perpetrators of terrorism persist. Our failure is marked by the advancements in the modus operandi of terrorists, the proliferation of illegal technology transfer, and the surge in the trade of illicit weapons. The Maldives cannot stress enough, the importance of this Assembly to finalise the draft convention on terrorism.

Our geographical location in the Indian Ocean makes the Maldives particularly vulnerable to threats to its maritime security, as our vast open waters continue to prove difficult to police. We are deeply concerned with the surge in piracy that has moved beyond the Gulf of Aden into the Indian Ocean. If the international community does not increase its efforts, Mr. President, we fear that piracy may end up turning into an uncontrolled threat to security in the region.

Thus, we are particularly encouraged by UN Security Council resolution 1897, and pleased with the work of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia. We feel, however, that it is important for the Group to urgently establish an easily accessible legal toolkit for States that enables them to overcome the vacuums in their national legal systems, and address piracy in a comprehensive manner.

Mr. President,

The continued suffering of the Palestinian people deeply saddens the Maldives. They have been denied their right to self-determination, and their right to live in peace and freedom in their own independent State for far too long. While recognising the rights of the Palestinians, we also appreciate and support the right of the people of Israel to live in peace and security alongside an independent and sovereign state of Palestine. We continue our call for all sides to use the ongoing peace talks as an opportunity to resolve their differences, and are therefore heartened by the new initiatives being pursued

by the United States in its pursuit of a Mid-East peace treaty. Furthermore, we call for continued support for the governments of Jordan and Egypt in their work on the Arab Initiative, which we believe may provide an enduring solution to the conflict for the people of the region.

Additionally, our pursuit for a more secure and just world, and our respect for international law, was the basis for the Maldives' recognition of the independence of Kosovo declared on 17 February 2008. The Maldives believes that the declaration of independence by the people of Kosovo reflects a last-resort remedy that embodies the best prospects for peace and stability in the region. The Maldives also welcomes the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on 22 July 2010, that "the declaration of independence of Kosovo did not violate international law". While we are disappointed by recent efforts to reverse this judgement, the Maldives welcomes the alternative solution contained in the unanimously adopted EU sponsored resolution, as a positive step towards Kosovo's assumption of full UN membership.

Mr. President,

Closer to home, the Maldives has borne witness to advancements in democracy, sustainable development, and peace building throughout the SAARC region. Notably, we praise the progress made by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, including the development of democratic institutions, as well as improvements in the areas of health, education, and the status of women. We wish them continued success in their efforts to rebuild their long-suffering nation, and implore the international community to maintain their support of the Afghan people.

Furthermore, the Maldives welcomes Sri Lanka's success in their ongoing consolidation of peace and democracy, and we call upon the international community to support them in their reconciliation efforts, as well as in their efforts to rebuild a nation torn from 25 years of sustained conflict.

Mr. President,

We are a small nation with big dreams. Our dreams are rooted in the vision of the Charter that binds the membership of this Assembly together here today. Our hopes are inextricably tied to fears of the past that inspired this body, and to the hopes of those that dream of a future grounded in justice, equity, opportunity and peace for peoples of the North and South, in nations large and small. Our humanity defines our obstacles, Mr. President, but we believe that our dreams for a better future defy our limitations.

Thank you.