



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-sixth Session of the General Assembly

26 September 2011, New York

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

Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, to join my previous speakers in congratulating you warmly on your assumption of office to preside over the sixty-sixth session of our august Assembly.

Your election is testimony to the growing confidence of the international community in the ability and commitment of the smaller members of our organization to play an increasingly active and responsible role in the United Nations.

I would also like to take this opportunity to place on record our deep and abiding appreciation to your predecessor, H. E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, for the exemplary manner in which he had guided the work of the sixty-fifth session.

Allow me also, Mr. President, to convey my sincere felicitations to the Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki Moon, on his re-election for a second term.

We remain confident that his experience, leadership and steady hand will ensure that this organization, in which so many of our hopes and dreams are invested, will live up to the many complex challenges facing us during these tumultuous times.

Mr. President,

We are at a defining moment in modern history. Across the Maghreb, the Levant and the Gulf, popular pro-democracy uprisings are sweeping away longstanding dictatorships.

We are witnessing the greatest liberation movement since the fall of the Berlin Wall. But what is most striking, is that this is happening in predominantly Muslim countries. The democratic uprisings across the Middle East prove that Muslims yearn for democratic rights just as much as non-Muslims.

For me, this is unsurprising. After all, we are all human. We all feel resentment, if those in power steal our country's wealth. We all feel frustrated, if we are prevented from speaking our minds.

Mr. President,

In the fog and confusion of the turmoil we are witnessing in the Middle East, one thing stands abundantly clear: That the demand for human rights and democratic values are universal; The march of democracy is inevitable; And the argument that says Islam and democracy cannot be united has shown to be a foolish and patronizing fallacy. My country, the Maldives, in some ways was a harbinger of the Arab Awakening.

Our revolution started eight years ago. Then, in 2008, presidential elections brought peaceful closure to a 30-year authoritarian regime. Since then we have had our difficulties consolidating democracy. There are many hurdles to overcome.

But three years since the elections, I am pleased to report that in general the Maldives is safe, stable and successful. I don't want to sound complacent. Democracy is a process, not an end goal and freedoms are always threatened in one way or the other. A successful democracy requires more than just the separation of powers. We also need a free media, strong institutions and a vibrant civil society. Above all, we need patience to realize the fruits that democracy brings.

Nevertheless, I can report without exaggeration that Maldivians enjoy more freedoms today than at any other point in their history. And I am sure, with support from this United Nations, the people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other countries will enjoy democratic freedoms too.

Mr. President,

We must counter the false perception that people must make the choice between devotion to Islam on the one hand, and the full enjoyment of human rights on the other. We strongly believe in the compatibility of Islam and human rights and seek to do our part to promote understanding and tolerance.

This is why we intend to organize, during 2012, a major international conference on progressive Islamic jurisprudence and human rights. With this conference, we hope to renew the concepts of peace and tolerance, co-existence and inter-faith harmony that exist in Islam.

Mr. President,

As we watch the changes in the Middle East and North Africa, it has become even more imperative that the question of Palestine must be addressed. The Maldives stands shoulder to shoulder with the Palestinian people.

We believe that the time for Palestine to join the international family of nations is long overdue and welcome its application for statehood. The Maldives calls on all Member States to support the recognition of a Palestinian state, living side-by-side and at peace with the state of Israel. While recognizing the rights of the Palestinians, we also value and support the right of the people of Israel to live in peace and security.

Mr. President,

We are proud to announce that last week, the Maldives has acceded to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The Maldives believes that human rights must be protected at both the national and international level.

We are pleased to join a growing alliance of states who stand firmly against those who believe they can violate human rights with impunity. In our globalized world, those who trample human rights or deny basic freedoms will be held accountable. And I am proud that the Maldives has now taken its rightful place as a defender of international law and human rights.

Mr. President,

We understand, as a small island state, our means are modest. Nevertheless, we are proud to contribute to the UN's efforts to promote peace and security. In this regard, we are pleased to note that following the approval of our Parliament, the Maldives is looking forward to becoming engaged, for the first time in our history, in UN peacekeeping efforts around the world.

Mr. President,

As a newly graduated LDC we welcome the international support we have received in our transition. Our graduation from LDC to Middle Income status has not been easy. From our experience, I would like to say that the international community must continue to help states make a smooth graduation from LDC status.

We must not allow graduation from LDC status, and the removal of support that comes with it, to undermine a country's progress and development.

Mr. President,

The Maldives has spared no effort in highlighting the growing threat from climate change. Our nation is just 1.5 metres above the sea. For us, climate change is no vague or abstract menace, but a clear and present danger to our very existence as a nation state.

In the past year, the world has experienced an increase in natural and man-made disasters that compel us to address the effects of climate change with more resolute urgency. It is increasingly becoming evident that the international community needs to be better prepared and equipped to address the challenges of disaster preparedness and response.

Cutting global carbon dioxide emissions, to a safer level below 350 parts per million, is not just an environmental issue. It is also an issue of national security. We do not view cutting carbon emissions as a burden but rather as an opportunity. An opportunity, not just to protect the climate, but also to create new jobs and grow our economies.

For these reasons, the Maldives is proud to announce that we will dedicate a minimum of 2% of our government revenues to renewable energy investments. We look forward to the day when the international community will adopt a legally binding climate treaty. We welcome the incorporation of the political pledges contained in the Copenhagen Accord into the UNFCCC process in Cancun.

In Durban, we look forward to helping to move the process forward, so we can reach the elusive prize of an agreement that protects the climate and the interests of vulnerable nation states.

Mr. President,

The sustainable development of Small Island Developing States has, from the very beginning, been inextricably linked with the Rio process. Unfortunately, like the goals expressed in the Rio Declaration, the objectives defined in the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy have gone largely unmet.

Now, as we look to set the goals of Rio+20, we must include in the agenda a serious review of progress made by the international community to address the sustainable development challenges facing Small Island Developing States. The Maldives hopes that Rio 2012 will provide a platform and create the necessary impetus to conduct a radical reform of international support for SIDS.

This should pave the road to establishing a SIDS category based on objective, transparent and consistent criteria. We must also analyze and identify the particular challenges and needs of SIDS, which are different to those of other developing countries.

We must further ensure that UN programs are redesigned to assist with these particular challenges. The Maldives believes that three issues should form some of the key pillars to be discussed and acted upon in Rio next year. These issues are firstly, reform of UN support for the sustainable development of SIDS; a political declaration and strategy to give impetus to the roll-out and mobilization of renewable energy and green technologies; and finally, improvements in the integration of sustainable development principles into international and domestic policy at both strategic and project levels.

Mr. President,

We are deeply concerned by the dire food crisis in the Horn of Africa. As a United Nations, we must come together to find global solutions for these challenges and must ensure that we work to protect the rights of those that are most vulnerable, especially women and children. As a country that derives its livelihood from the ocean, we are also concerned with the growing threat of piracy in the Indian Ocean.

We will continue to work with the international community in addressing this growing menace to make our maritime areas safe for international shipping and trade.

Mr. President,

The Maldives looks forward to a time when every country will be democratic, every nation will be free and the values that underpin this great institution can finally be realized. Through the institutions of the United Nations, we look forward to continuing to promote equity, fairness and the protection of the most vulnerable; regardless of where they live or what religion they practice.

And it is only through the United Nations can we hope to forge an agreement that protects our climate – a prerequisite of all our future progress and development.

In this volatile and ever-changing world, there is one institution that provides the stability of continuity. And that is the United Nations.

The United Nations is more important today than ever before.

Thank you.