



MALDIVES

**Statement by His Excellency Dr Mohamed Waheed, President of the Republic of Maldives
at the General Debate of the Sixty-Seventh Session of the United Nations General
Assembly**

New York, 27 September 2012

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

Let me begin, Mr President, by expressing my delegation's warmest congratulations on your assumption of office to preside over the Sixty-Seventh Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I would like to record my delegation's deepest appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, for his untiring efforts in steering the deliberations of the sixty-sixth session to a successful conclusion.

Allow me also, Mr President, to congratulate the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr Ban Ki-moon, for his extraordinary report submitted to this Assembly on Tuesday. Despite the many unprecedented challenges the United Nations face today, we remain confident that the Secretary-General's leadership and the resolve of this organisation and that of humanity will not waver.

Mr President,

I represent a small, yet proud, island nation. A nation that has long advocated for an effective international framework for the security of small states. A nation that has vigorously campaigned for international actions to combat climate change. A nation that has contributed to break the international silence on the human rights of climate change. I come from a nation that has successfully moved from authoritarian system to a multi-party democratic system of governance, an historical transition achieved purely by peaceful means.

That is why Maldivians show their solidarity with people anywhere in the world who struggle to replace despotism with democracy. That is why we support the on-going democratisation process in the Middle East and North Africa. And that is why we applaud Tunisia and Egypt, for holding their first post-transition elections in a free and fair manner. While the democratisation processes in other countries in the region are on an upward trajectory, we see violence and human rights

violations in Syria. We welcome the latest findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry on the human rights situation in Syria. We urge the Syrian security forces and anti-government armed groups to immediately cease all hostilities and violence.

Mr President,

We strongly believe that tolerance and mutual respect should prevail among different religions and cultures to ensure that the world we live in remains peaceful and harmonious for the future of our children. The Maldives strongly condemns the recent anti-Islamic video demeaning our Prophet Muhammad. Freedom of expression should not be used as an excuse to insult religions, incite hatred and provoke communal violence. While the video has provoked demonstrations around the world, the Maldives does not believe that violence is the way to respond to such low-level blasphemous acts.

The Maldives has also condemned the attack on the United States Consulate in Benghazi, which took the life of the United States Ambassador to Libya. On behalf of the Maldivian people I express my deepest condolences to the United States Government and the families of the bereaved.

Mr President,

My delegation and I express the wishes of the Maldivian people to see the day that the Palestinian people will join the United Nations as a full member. The Maldives strongly calls on all Member States to support the true aspirations of the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination in recognition of a Palestinian State, living side-by-side and at peace with the State of Israel.

Mr President,

In June this year, we, the leaders of the world, agreed to signal a solid political commitment towards establishing the Sustainable Development Goals. We believe that these goals would further strengthen social, economic, and the environmental well-being of nations. The 2015 development agenda should be one that recognises the particular characteristics and needs of small states. It should support the creation of a stronger international architecture to achieve a sustainable future for all.

Climate change remains the most important and complex developmental challenge that small states face. We face the threat of sea-level rise. We experience ocean acidification, changes in average temperature, and variability of precipitation events. Coastal erosion is a serious problem in the Maldives that is affecting more than 113 islands. Additional 120 islands need emergency water during the dry season. The Government now spends more than 27 per cent of our national budget on building our resilience to combat the effects of climate change.

The Maldives reiterates its call for a binding agreement to reduce global carbon emissions. The world cannot afford to wait any longer for such an agreement. The absence of a global accord is no excuse for doing nothing. The Maldives is one of the smallest island economies in the world. Our contribution to global emission is at 0.003 per cent. Yet, we are the most

vulnerable to the effects of climate change. And for that reason, we are also taking difficult and bold measures to combat climate change. We have been one of the first countries in the world to eradicate CFC's well ahead of time. We intend to become the first to eradicate HCFC's by 2020. And we intend to become the first to put a ban on import of HCFC based equipment. A large number of our islands are also scaling up renewable energy, not only to avoid spending 20 per cent of GDP on importing fossil fuel, but also to reduce harmful emissions.

Hence, we are converting to solar or hybrid sources. A total of 20 islands in the Maldives would switch to renewable energy sources for power by next year. These measures are part of a national initiative to transform the country's economy into a low-carbon one. If we can take these measures, why can't the larger States, endowed with more resources, take stronger measures? It requires political commitment and making difficult choices. I therefore call upon the carbon emitting countries to develop and utilise clean and renewable energy to reduce their carbon footprint.

Mr President,

Climate change is just one of many challenges faced by the Maldives. The country's transition to democracy, which has reached a critical point, is another pressing challenge, that we are determined to overcome. Four years ago, the Maldives had its first competitive multi-party Presidential Elections. It was a watershed moment in the country's long march to democratic governance. Four years after that historic elections in October 2008, people in the Maldives ask: are our lives any better? The answer, regrettably, would be 'not yet'. The multi-party democracy in the Maldives, so far, has been a deeply divisive one. It is also a polarizing one, that is tearing apart families and the fabric of a small homogenous society. Political leaders elected to office by popular vote chose to act with impunity. Centuries old values of respect and tolerance have been replaced with intolerance and hatred in the islands where almost everyone literally knows each other. This is not because there is any inherent deficiency in democratic form of governance. Rather it is because the road to liberal democracy is always rocky and long. It has to be navigated by a political leadership with an unshakable commitment to the principles and values of democracy.

Mr President,

Past eight months have been particularly challenging in consolidating democracy in the Maldives. The elected President of the country resigned in February, and later claimed that he was forced to do so. The Government opened a commission of inquiry to investigate the allegations. Some of our friends rushed into conclusions and that did not make it any easier for us. Some big States, and some not so big States took sides in a domestic political crisis and contributed to making a bad situation worse. While the Government was striving to strengthen the country's institutional capacity to manage the new democracy, some international actors continued to publicly criticise the country's young institutors.

We look for new ideas and we are receptive to good ideas irrespective of where they come from. That is why we engage in international cooperation. We expect the result of international cooperation to help, not hinder, a country's march towards a better, more democratic society. It is suppose to build a country's institutions and to gain public confidence. International cooperation should not be used to undermine national capacities. It should not be used as an excuse for larger countries to interfere in the domestic politics of small States.

Mr President,

Small states are vulnerable in many ways. We alone are not able to stop larger and stronger countries from dictating terms. Our vulnerability is particularly acute when there are discord and system breakdowns in our countries. This is the time when the larger states should help the smaller states in the international system. The history of a nation is never a single event or a single person. The life of our nation comprises of the lives of all of us who live in there. We are the building blocks in the evolution of our countries. The knowledge, education, experience and the commitment we bring to our nation is what shapes our history. That is what makes our history unique. Respect for us and our small nation requires that our external partners do not under estimate our capacity to contribute to the shaping of our own destiny. Nations must be allowed to resolve their problems on their own. International community should not take punitive actions against any sovereign State, unless there is verified and blatant abuse of human rights.

Mr President,

Yet, I believe that international cooperation can and should promote positive change in emerging democracies. I believe that international organisations, such as the United Nations, can play a pivotal role in strengthening democratic institutions in these nations. I believe that some of the advanced democracies can help the small states with technical expertise in consolidating democracy. To do that, it is important to recognise the unique challenges and the unique characteristics of small States. It is important to protect the social fabric of the tightly knit societies in our countries. It is important to review the current approaches and modalities in extending international cooperation for democracy promotion. It is important that international cooperation is not to be seen to be promoting a particular ideology. It should not be seen to be taking sides in domestic politics. International cooperation should be seen to promote and encourage a home-grown democracy that is consistent with universally accepted values and principles.

Mr President,

Regular, free, and fair elections is a fundamental component in democracies. Yet holding elections itself is not a sufficient condition for consolidating democracy. It requires patience. It requires making hard choices and compromises. And it requires cultivating and nurturing democratic values. My Government is implementing a comprehensive plan to nurture such values in the Maldives. We are committed to creating an environment that guarantees individual freedom; where human rights are fully protected; where democratic values flourish; and where human innovation thrives. We are committed to creating a democratic and free society that is able to shape its own destiny.

Thank you.