



MALDIVES

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General Debate of the seventieth session of the UNGA

Statement by:

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Mr President, Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen

The first three words of the UN Charter reads “We the People”. Those words make it clear, that human life is at the heart of the UN Charter. And it must remain the key principle guiding our work. This year, we mark the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the Charter. Seventy years since the establishment of the United Nations. And there isn’t a more opportune time to ask ourselves: Have we served, “we the people” well?

The answer to that question is, probably yes.

I say that because:

Succeeding generations have been saved from the scourge of inter-state war: yet we remain unable to counter intra-state conflict.

Our faith in fundamental human rights is reaffirmed in principle; yet, the equal rights of men and women, and of nations, large and small, are ignored.

The rule of law, and values of good governance, are advocated for some, but ignored for others.

We promised to promote social progress and a better standard of life...and yes, extreme poverty has been reduced significantly, more children than ever are going to school, yet, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening, and ignorance, and intolerance are rampant.

The Charter failed to recognise the environment as an issue of importance, and we fail the environment, every day.

Despite all that, Excellencies, the United Nations is the best hope for humanity. And it must remain relevant.

If we want the United Nations to become more resilient,
If we want it to face the emerging challenges of our time,
If we want it to give hope to the many who perish away in dire situations,
...To inspire courage in the face of adversity,
...To protect the rights of nations regardless of size,
The UN must be reformed

Last week we adopted a new Agenda for Sustainable Development. It recognises at its core that development must be holistic. That poverty is a multi-dimensional problem. That, what matters is the human being, whose rights must be protected, and promoted. Yet here in the United Nations, we remain trapped in silos: hiding away, behind the excuse of mandates. Why is it that the Security Council must only discuss guns and bombs? Why can't the Economic and Social Council discuss war and peace? Why can't development, why can't war, have a human rights dimension? Why must issues be confined to one specific body?

We believe, that every problem can, and should be looked at, from every angle. It is the only way our responses to crises can be sustainable. In the real world, the real problems, and indeed the real solutions, do not fit neatly into separate compartments. A new way of approaching the global challenges of our time is necessary. So let us start organising our work differently.

One important way of doing that is to redefine the concept of security: to include all issues that threaten all of humanity, including climate change. For us in the Maldives, climate change is a security threat. It damages our economy, deprives us of our rights, of our land, and our way of life. It is a threat to the very existence of our nation.

Excellencies, when young children play by the beach, the waves lapping at their feet, when a fisherman looks to the sea for the day's catch, and when we feel the cool breeze of the ocean caressing us, we cannot imagine that, those same waters will become our watery grave.

Mr President, the Maldives is ready to act. We have always been the first in line. Together with other small island developing states, we have taken urgent action to keep the rise of global temperature below 1.5 degrees Celsius. We are reducing our emissions. We are working, in good faith, towards a legally binding agreement in Paris this year. And if we, the smallest can act, why can't the biggest?

Another such issue is oceans. Oceans are intimately linked with our lives and livelihoods. Oceans and their wealth are the drivers of our economy. They are the source of our food, and the backbone of our heritage and traditions. Without sustaining the wealth of oceans, we achieve nothing. This is why the Maldives banned turtle poaching in the early 80s. This is why the Maldives declared a biosphere reserve in 2012. This is why the entire Maldives is a shark sanctuary. We understand the value of our oceans and all the treasures it contains. Our oceans are home to some of the most valuable marine habitats in the world. Yet illicit exploitation of natural resources, maritime piracy and other criminal activities threaten and undermine the peace and security of our countries.

Excellencies

Building the resilience of our people must remain at the centre of all our efforts: abroad and at home. That is why President Abdullah Yameen Abdul Gayoom's government has embarked on a national development programme that is based on the "empowerment of people": empowerment of youth, empowerment of children, and the empowerment of women. Investing in people, we believe, is the best way to promote human rights. It is the best way, to guarantee a brighter future for the generations to come. And it is the best way, to ensure that the democracy gains we have made are consolidated and further enhanced. The Maldives is a nation that is governed by the rule of law. Regardless of the position a person holds in society, even when it is most inconvenient to do so, we will continue with our strong commitment in upholding the rule of law. I can assure you, we will not fail in that endeavour.

Mr President

The United Nations rose from the ashes of war and destruction: where swarms of refugees crossed borders and seas: left everything behind, to seek safety and security, and to save their lives and the lives of their children. We have gone through those times and built a better, more integrated, more tolerant world. Fear of the other, did not overtake humanity. Today, we see similar pictures of girls and boys, women and men, seeking safety from war and certain death. I urge you, show compassion. A good start will be to call it by what it is: a "refugee" crisis, not a migrant crisis.

These refugees are running away from senseless violence: barbarism that is carried out in the name of Islam. The Maldives condemns these acts of terrorism. The acts of these groups are not only un-Islamic, but also anti-Islamic. They are feeding into the rise of *Islamaphobia* around the world. The international community must not let these groups re-define our beautiful religion of peace, tolerance, and compassion.

Mr President

We thought apartheid was dismantled; yet the world remains indifferent to the apartheid policies that Israel pursues in the occupied Palestine. Three days ago, we witnessed the raising of the Palestinian flag at the UN. This was indeed a historic step, but a much more significant step will be, for Palestine to become a full member of the United Nations. A permanent solution would be for the complete withdrawal of Israel, and the establishment of the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Excellencies

The small island developing states of the world are different from the large states. We face different kinds of challenges that require very different responses. This is a fact that everyone now recognises. Yet, the international architecture, including the UN system, is not designed to accommodate the unique features of small states. This needs to change, and changes need to

happen now! Yet, we, the small states, don't want to be defined by only our vulnerabilities. We are ready to be part of the solution. In Samoa last year, the SIDS asked for building partnerships as the way forward. Alone, we might be weak: but united, we can move mountains.

The Maldives has always believed that we can do anything we set our mind to, if we remain sincere in our intention, and unwavering in our commitment. And the United Nations has never failed to inspire us to do so. That is why the Maldives joined the UN, less than two months after gaining independence. And just a few days ago, we celebrated fifty years of our membership. The UN has served us well. And we are committed to expand and further strengthen this valuable partnership.

We may be short of finance, but we have no shortage of smart ideas. Our President at that time, Mr Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, was the first to speak about the issue of sea-level rise at this podium. We were first to introduce the concept of "security of small states" to the UN, and the first to start advocating here at this Assembly, for the link between human rights and climate change. And we remain relentless in our pursuit of these issues, not only because it is good for the Maldives, but because it is also good for humanity.

Mr President,

Fifty years ago, when we applied for UN Membership, there were those that doubted our ability to survive, and questioned our capacity to contribute. After fifty years of being a UN member, I say to those sceptics:

...We are not only willing, but also able!

...We are not only viable, but also valuable!

And as Maldivians, we are proud of what we have achieved.

Thank you.