

Statement by

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**Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives,
at the 78th Session of the General Assembly**

23 September 2023

(15 Minutes)

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Distinguished delegates,

1. Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election to this important position. It is a testament to one of our key principles – that SIDS can lead. And SIDS must lead!
2. I also thank His Excellency Csaba Kőrösi for his leadership of the seventy-seventh session.
3. Mr. Secretary-General, we commend your leadership and commit our full support for your tremendous work.

Mr. President,

4. Our global community today grapples with multifaceted challenges. From ongoing and new conflicts to pandemics, climate change to food insecurities, gender-based inequalities to intolerance. Addressing them requires recommitting to the values of peace, prosperity, progress, and sustainability. Mr. President, the Maldives firmly supports your priorities.
5. The Maldives has always been a principled and committed member of this organisation. Just 5 days ago, we celebrated 58 years since we gained membership of the United Nations.
6. In the past 58 years, the Maldives has reaped the many benefits that multilateralism has to offer. From being the poorest, we became only the third country to graduate from Least Developed Country status. We have assumed leadership roles at the UN. And our track record, our credentials and our achievements speak for itself.
7. We have demonstrated that size nor vulnerability holds us back. But hope, commitment, and our principles drive us forward.
8. We have approached every session of the General Assembly in this same spirit. And for the 78th Session, the Maldives wishes to highlight **six areas of focus** that will guide our engagement in this crucial body.

Mr. President,

9. **First**, we will work towards ensuring a more fair, just, and equitable multilateral system – one that caters to everyone, but especially its weakest and the smallest.

10. Small States deserve a seat at the table. We have the most to gain from multilateralism – and indeed, the most to lose.
11. Small States know that a rules-based international order, one where all states have an equitable voice, is essential. Small States know that shared problems can only be solved through shared solutions. Small States stand up for principles, because it is those principles that will safeguard, at our time of need. Small States, like the Maldives, have therefore, always looked at ways to contribute.
12. This is why we have put forward our candidatures to the Security Council, for the term 2033 to 2034, the Economic and Social Council, for the term 2027 to 2029, and to the Committee of the Rights of the Child, for the term 2025 to 2029. Enhancing the representation of small States at decision making bodies is essential to ensure that this organisation lives up to its ideal – to leave no one behind.
13. A fair, just, and equitable multilateral system also requires the revitalization of the United Nations as a whole. At the forefront of this revitalization is the much-needed reform of the Security Council, a goal the Maldives has advocated for from the very beginning.
14. In 1979, we were among the 10 countries that requested for the inclusion of an agenda item on the question of equitable representation and expansion of the Security Council in the work of the General Assembly.

15. Today, we reiterate our calls to increase the number of both permanent and non-permanent seats, while ensuring equitable geographic representation. We reiterate our call for a dedicated seat for Small Island Developing States in an expanded Security Council. We believe that this will make the Council more responsive and responsible.

Mr. President,

16. **Second**, we must confront the climate crisis.

17. Warming beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius will lead to catastrophic ecological loss, causing severe damage to our lives and livelihoods.

18. We have recognised that the climate crisis is a threat to security, to development, and human rights at multiple platforms.

19. We are proud to have led the work, towards the adoption of the landmark resolution, recognizing the “Human Right to a clean healthy, and sustainable environment”- a milestone we celebrated in this very Hall, last year.

20. Domestically, we will continue to display strong and ambitious climate action.

21. We have a net-zero target of 2030. We are conserving and protecting parts of our ocean, marine species, and corals. And we are taking concrete steps to phase out single use plastics.

22. At the upcoming COP28, we must all raise climate ambition, to secure our future, for the future.
23. As we approach the first ever Global Stocktake at COP28, science must be given precedence. We must make an urgent call to close the gap between ambition and implementation. A definitive roadmap to reduce emissions, in line with the Paris Agreement's main goals, is crucial.
24. We must also see adaptation as a universal challenge, and demand adequate financing. We must operationalize and capitalize the loss and damage fund and scale up existing funding arrangements.
25. Given the intrinsic link between climate and the ocean, we must also do more to protect this vast and important resource.
26. As a “large ocean” state, we have an intrinsic responsibility to protect the ocean and its marine resources. A responsibility many of us share.
27. We have seen the value of working together to fight climate change and protect our environment.
28. Earlier this year, we asked the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the obligation of states with respect to climate change. The historic Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was adopted, promising to deliver for nature. The historic BBNJ Agreement was adopted, and we call for international support to build capacity in implementing provisions

of the agreement. We also call for ambition during the intergovernmental negotiations to develop an international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution.

29. It is time to turn agreement into action!

Mr. President,

30. Our **third** priority area is to renew our commitment to the 2030 Agenda with the provision of adequate and sustainable financing for development. The SDG Summit and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development have already expressed our collective commitment towards addressing these issues.

31. Today, we stand at the midpoint of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

32. The Maldives showcased its progress, presenting our second Voluntary National Review in July at the High-Level Political Forum.

33. We identified that physical and digital connectivity can accelerate our achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

34. Recognizing this, the Government of Maldives has established an Integrated National Public Ferry Network, which connects our widely dispersed islands to one another. We are also undergoing a digital revolution, with the proliferation of online education, telemedicine, and e-payment systems. We are bringing services closer to the people who need them.

35. These efforts are, in turn, supporting Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises – the backbone of our economy. The provision of easy payment procedures, coupled with enhanced physical connectivity, have expanded the reach of MSMEs beyond individual islands.
36. Issues like this are what we intend to bring to the Fourth International Conference on SIDS next year. As Co-chair of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference, we witnessed a robust foundation laid out during the preparatory meetings for a forward looking and action-oriented Programme of Action for SIDS.
37. We also recognise that sustainable development can truly be fostered with sustainable and affordable financing.
38. We need a global response to guarantee the necessary liquidity support for developing countries, especially SIDS, to facilitate a recovery that addresses the scale of the debt burden exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. And so, international financial institutions must reassess their eligibility criteria in providing concessional loans and grants. They must look beyond GDP as the sole measure of development. The answer lies with the early adoption and use of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index!
39. We urge IFIs to use the MVI as a tool, ensuring that the vulnerabilities of developing countries are integrated into decision-making, enabling easier access to affordable financing and debt relief.

Mr. President

40. Our **fourth** focus area of focus is eliminating gender barriers and ensuring gender equality.
41. Women deserve more than a seat at the table; they should play an active and equal role in shaping decisions.
42. The Maldives is committed in its endeavour as a champion for women's rights and gender equality.
43. One of our initiatives in this regard, was the establishment of the International Day of Women in Diplomacy, celebrated every year on 24 June. We recognize the invaluable role of women in diplomacy who continue to lead us towards a more sustainable future. And it is our hope that the seats behind me on this podium, will one day, be occupied by women.

Mr. President,

44. Together we must work to promote and protect human rights – one of the pillars of our foreign policy, and our **fifth** area of focus.
45. The need to protect human rights was the basis of our democratic journey. The right to express ourselves without reprisal. The right to peaceful assembly. The right to freely choose our leaders. These rights are sacred.
46. This month, the first round of our Presidential Election went ahead in a peaceful and orderly manner. In this election we saw a

record number of candidates – we believe, a sign of a maturing democracy. We assure the global community that the run-off which will be held in just a few days, will also proceed in a similarly peaceful and orderly manner.

47. Our firm commitment to protecting human rights at home is mirrored by our international engagement.

48. I am proud to share that, with the recent ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Maldives is now a state party to 8 of the Core International Human Rights Conventions.

49. We also take great pride in our active participation in the Human Rights Council since its inception. We are glad to assume our role as a Council member once again this year, also serving as Vice President from the Asia Pacific Group.

50. We will work with all states towards the protection of human rights around the world. In this regard we have recently made a written submission to the International Court of Justice demonstrating our support towards the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. Their rights can only be most effectively protected through a two-state solution based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

Mr. President,

51. This brings me to my **sixth** and final area of focus. Upholding international peace and security.
52. The Maldives advocates for the unwavering adherence to the Charter of the United Nations.
53. The people of Ukraine, Myanmar and many other countries across the world deserve peace and prosperity. Most importantly, they deserve a dignified life.
54. We must also work towards bringing non-traditional security threats to the forefront of global discourse on peace and security.
55. Terrorism and violent extremism continue to plague us. It transcends borders. It has no single face or faith. As such, the Maldives remains resolute in its unwavering commitment to countering terrorism and extremism, and we condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.
56. We also condemn the repeated and public acts of the desecration of the Holy Quran in some European countries. The repeated and public acts of the desecration of the Holy Quran cannot be justified under the guise of freedom of speech and expression, and is of grave concern. It is necessary to combat the rise of islamophobia and hate speech through concerted global action.
57. We will also continue to raise our voice on the links between climate change and sea level rise, and peace and security, which are becoming more and more apparent.

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General,

58. Mutual respect and deep-seated cooperation are the cornerstones for effectively addressing our collective challenges. Together, we have the potential to achieve peace. Together, we can chart new paths towards sustainable development.

59. And together, we can leave behind a future that is better than what we found.

60. The Maldives will continue to collaborate with our fellow nations in the international community, united in our shared commitment, to deliver that vision.

I thank you.
