

Address
by
His Excellency Dr Mohamed Muizzu,
President of the Republic of Maldives
at UNGA79 General Debate
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Mr President,

Mr Secretary General,

Assalamu alaikum, and good afternoon.

Mr President: congratulations on the assumption of your Presidency of the General Assembly.

Our appreciation also, to your predecessor, for his strong leadership.

We extend our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts in steering the Secretariat.

We gather here today at a delicate moment in world history. Let's not mince our words today. Humanity is in deep trouble facing an ever-growing list of crises. Conflict, poverty, hunger, climate change, the wealth gap, the cost-of-living crisis, migration, occupation, opioid addiction, the list goes on and on and on...

Infact, I have a map here of the world with countries which are facing some sort of crisis in red. Do you see any countries in green who are not facing a crisis? You know why? Because we are all deep in the red! Humanity is in crisis! And in many cases its manmade!

But we look the other way, continuing with business as usual. While the alarms are ringing, the band is still playing the same old tunes, as the whole ship descends deeper and deeper into uncharted waters.

We need Nations United in harmony not a United Nations in misery.

These are crucial times for the world, important years for my country. In 2040, the Maldives will celebrate 75 years since regaining its independence – seventy-five years as a sovereign nation. As we look forward to that milestone in our nation's life: What can we hope to achieve? What do we wish to accomplish? And is the world ready to play its part?

I took office as the President of Maldives, last November. Duty-bound by the aspirations of my people. The same aspirations I hold dear to my heart. Not just for the present, but for the future, too.

Today, I am here at the United Nations, with a vision of where I want to take my country.

By 2040, I wish to see the Maldives as a full-fledged developed nation.

A nation that commands respect, is relevant, and one that embodies resilience. A society that is inclusive and just. A country that exemplifies sustainability and democratic governance.

Destiny is not mere fate. It's the consequence of the many choices we make. The many decisions we take. And the many hours we work.

Becoming a developed nation may seem like a daunting task, and a distant possibility. But I can tell you this. With a goal in sight, and a plan in hand, it is achievable.

Because, prevailing and even flourishing against formidable odds, is nothing new for Maldivians.

In 1965, when we regained our independence, we were among the poorest countries in the world. One-third of our population was illiterate. More than one out of every 10 babies were dying before their first birthday. We had no industries, barely any exports, and even fewer prospects.

And in just five decades, we have reached upper middle-income status.

A feat we are incredibly proud of.

I believe the Maldives can become a developed country: By investing in the country's productive capacity and increasing its productivity; By transforming our economy into one that is fully digitised and driven by artificial intelligence; And most

importantly, by leveraging the natural beauty and marine resources of the country.

Boosting productivity will be the key to economic transformation. This we will do by reforming and strengthening our institutions, increasing our State capacity, and leveraging the private sector. We will also identify and implement policies that support investments in key sectors – such as the digital economy.

The Maldives has over One thousand one hundred islands, spread over ninety thousand square-kilometres. Enhancing digital connectivity is key to achieving inclusive development, mobilising economic activity, and fostering a more diversified and resilient economy.

We believe the future is intelligence driven. This is why we are working towards a digital economy that can contribute up to 15 percent of our GDP by 2030.

This can be realised through investing in our ICT infrastructure. We are using and expanding artificial intelligent systems to deliver essential services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare. We are also delving into cutting-edge applications of 5G technology; using drones for medical supply delivery, implementing smart road systems, and utilizing AI-enhanced technology for erosion detection and environmental monitoring.

The transformation can be sustainable, only if we transform our education and financial systems. We need to invest in digital literacy from a young age – to build a generation that can use

artificial intelligence to enhance public service delivery, build new products, and successfully compete in the global digital economy.

We need to bridge the digital divides within the country. Including through improving data collection and utilisation. We need to strengthen the regulatory frameworks - strengthening existing institutions, cultivating start-up ecosystems, and providing the impetus for the future we envision.

Becoming a developed country will also require fostering new industries. This is why we are also working on building a robust financial sector in the Maldives. With this in mind, in May this year, I set up the Development Bank of Maldives with a focus on improving and investing in economic diversification.

The result we desire, is inclusive development; where equality of access to opportunities is guaranteed; where women and young people are key players in our development – not mere spectators; and where every Maldivian citizen has adequate housing.

To support these objectives, my government has launched a 6.5-million-dollar loan facility. It's specifically for women entrepreneurs – of which 25 per cent is allocated to those with disabilities. In the first phase, over one hundred projects will be funded across 19 of the 20 atolls and Malé, and across 21 business activities. I have also recently launched a Presidential Youth Advisory Board. This Board will advise and inform me directly, on the needs and views of young people.

Inclusivity is at the heart of one of the most ambitious, large-scale urban development projects in the country's history – Ras Malé. This is my promise to the Maldivian people. A solution to alleviate the long-term housing crisis. An urban oasis where citizens can fully participate in all aspects of city life. Ras Malé will utilise modular housing, leverage a state-of-the-art transportation system that is accessible to all. It will be developed as a climate resilient and safe island.

Tourism drives the Maldivian economy. My vision is to expand the tourism sector further. This means, building complementary industries centred around innovation and creativity. This means, more sustainable practises in construction, emphasising the importance of green and sustainable tourism.

We are also expanding our main international airport, our air connectivity network and the fleet of our national airline.

These steps will support the expansion of the tourism sector, and at the same time, generate more revenue for the country.

But tourism is also highly vulnerable to external shocks – conflicts, calamities, and causes beyond our control can, and have had, far reaching, critical implications.

We need the international system to anticipate and address these threats. Threats, such as armed conflict, terrorism, violent extremism, transnational organized crimes, climate change, ocean degradation – crimes that transcend national borders.

Part of addressing these threats is to safeguard and protect people's fundamental rights.

In 2015 the world came together to endorse humanity's fundamental rights by committing to the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs. But 6 years to the SDG deadline we're only on track in less than a fifth of those targets. In June this organisation, the UN, issued a report saying the world is failing to deliver on sustainable development goals.

This week we agreed on 'A Pact For The Future'. But do we want this document – The Pact to go the same way as this one, the 2015 SDG commitment?

I'm sorry but we can't keep doing this. We can't keep meeting, talking, pledging but not doing. We don't want these days to come back to haunt us. The days when we had a chance but not a will.

We believe the best approach to protecting fundamental rights is to cultivate a culture of respect for those rights. This requires support.

The Maldives has a good track record of treaty ratification, implementation and reporting. We champion the right to environment, because we are keenly aware of the consequences of environmental degradation. We also believe that violation of a right by any country – large or small, rich or poor, with powerful friends or not – must not be tolerated.

This is why the ongoing massacre – the genocide – by Israel in Gaza, is a travesty of justice and the international system. The

repeated destruction of homes, hospitals, schools, humanitarian infrastructure; the repeated cycles of killings of men, women, children, babies; thousands upon thousands. The world is struggling to process the deaths of so many civilians in Gaza and now Israeli raids in Lebanon are claiming hundreds more civilians lives there. Their cries haunt anyone with humanity. Their tears, bitter on our conscience

Israel's targeting of journalists – the eyes and ears of humanity, the killings of journalists, Palestinian journalists, Lebanese Journalists, Al-Jazeera journalists, the closure of Al-Jazeera offices – how can we interpret this as anything other than brutal attempts to prevent the world from knowing about the crimes taking place?

Israel must be held accountable for these acts of terrorism, for these violations of international law & UN resolutions. We must accept a sovereign and independent Palestinian State on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We welcome the decision to seat our brothers and sisters from Palestine with us here in the General Assembly, for the first time, instead of behind us. Now, we must ensure that Palestine becomes a full member of the UN.

Mr President,

The Maldives is gearing up for an economic transformation that will change lives. But our policies can deliver the desired results only with sufficient international financial support.

The Maldives has always taken ownership and responsibility for its own development. While we have received extensive support towards our development, we urge the multilateral development funds, banks, and bilateral donors, to view us as your partners. Not just as recipients of aid; to stop looking at our inherent vulnerabilities as limitations; to adopt tailor-made approaches which are mutually beneficial; to reduce the cost of borrowing; to make the financial system work for us – not penalize us; to make your terms flexible; your financing less rigid; to make your lending targeted, affordable, and responsible.

Mr President,

Climate change is the most serious threat to our world; the defining challenge of our generation. It's washing away decades of progress in mere minutes. It's diverting already depleted resources from long-term development to emergency relief and reconstruction. Preventing countries from adapting to climate impact. And the vicious cycle continues.

The Maldives has always walked the talk. We are investing in renewable energy. Our goal is to have thirty-three percent of the country's electricity demand from renewable energy sources by 2028.

On behalf of the Maldivian people, I implore you. Do your part. Act now.

We must face the climate emergency head-on. With science, determination, and resources. The rich and emitting countries

need to meet the financial pledges already made – especially on adaptation, where the financing gap continues to widen.

As we work towards COP29, we must ensure the new goal on climate finance matches the level of climate action required. This means: the new goal must go beyond 100 billion dollars. It must include, as a minimum, loss and damage response, mitigation, and adaptation, as sub-goals.

One of the biggest victims of the climate crisis is the ocean. The Maldivian people and their livelihoods – are dependent on the health and wealth of the ocean. We need to step up efforts to sustainably use and manage our ocean resources: address plastic pollution; conserve biodiversity.; and protect endangered species.

This morning, I ratified the Global Ocean Treaty. We urge you to do the same.

We urge you to do your part to address climate change, overcome pollution, and reverse biodiversity loss.

The transformation the Maldives seeks cannot be achieved without an enabling global environment. Small countries like mine need a multilateral system that champions us. And delivers for us.

The United Nations is the epitome of the multilateral system. It is well positioned: to promote sustainable development; to maintain peace and security; to promote and protect human rights; to enforce equality, the rule of law, inclusivity, and representativeness.

But what we are witnessing is the opposite: inability to stop climate change and environmental degradation; inability to stop war and genocide; inability to stop exploitation and suffering; inability to stop unequal representation.

Hence, the United Nations needs reform and revitalisation. It needs to be representative.

The Maldives cannot – and will not – watch and stand idle, while the multilateral system fails; because our development, our advancement, and our survival is tethered to the world.

That's why the Maldives is seeking to get elected to the Economic and Social Council for the 2027 to 2029 term. We count on your support.

If elected, the Maldives will strive to make the UN development system more relevant to our times. Continuously recalibrating and adjusting. Utilising the latest science and evidence. Listening to a variety of opinions and views.

The United Nations must enforce its decisions across the UN system, and at the local level. The United Nations is only relevant when it makes a real difference in the lives of people.

Mr President,

Fifty-nine years ago, the Maldives reached out to the United Nations, as its first port, in a sea of uncertainty. We came here, to this great Hall: seeking recognition, seeking a partner.

We came to you, as a poor, and impoverished country. But with a vision for prosperity. A vision which we made great progress on – with your support.

Today, once again, we come to you, aiming higher, to reach further, and do better. With a vision to make the Maldives a developed nation by 2040.

For I believe development is destiny. And our destiny beckons, towards a brighter future. For the present, and future generations.

I thank you.
