

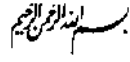


MALDIVES

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Statement by
His Excellency Dr. Ahmed Shaheed,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives
at the
General Debate
of the
Sixtieth Session of the
United Nations General Assembly

21 September 2005
New York



Mr. President,

On behalf of my delegation, allow me to congratulate you on your election to preside over this august Assembly. Your election to this high office shows the respect and confidence the international community has placed on your ability to guide the work of this session successfully. It also signifies the high regard the world has for your country, Sweden, for the important role it is playing to foster international peace, security, and development.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping, for the exemplary manner in which he guided the work of the fifty-ninth session of the Assembly.

- Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his inspiring report "In larger freedom: *towards development, security and human rights for all*".

I would also like to thank him and the UN system for the attention and support being given to the Maldives in our efforts to realize for our people the aims and objectives set forth by the United Nations Charter.

Mr. President,

It was forty years ago today that the Maldives was admitted to the membership of the United Nations. We were then the smallest country to have joined the UN, a matter which led to questions being asked in some quarters about the ability and viability of full membership for small states. We survived the so called "mini-state debate" thereby reinforcing the notion of the sovereign equality of all states regardless of size. We also survived the Cold War without losing the peace and stability that have been so essential for the social and economic progress of the country.

But today, Mr. President, we are facing a much more challenging task and much more serious questions about the economic viability of the country whose economy has been devastated by the Indian Ocean tsunami. Compared to other affected countries, the loss of life and property damage in the Maldives were small in absolute numbers. But in proportionate terms, we are the worst-affected country.

- Same 62 percent of the GDP has been destroyed.
- Over 7 percent of the population was internally displaced.
- Social and economic infrastructure were damaged or destroyed in over one quarter of the inhabited islands.
- 12 inhabited islands were turned into complete rubble.

Given the nationwide scale of destruction, timely assistance from the international community was crucial in dealing with the emergency relief requirements. We thank all nations, peoples and organizations for their generosity.

I would also like to extend a special vote of appreciation and thanks to President Bill Clinton, the United Nations Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery for his commitment leadership in coordinating international efforts to assist affected countries with the recovery. We are particularly grateful for his continued engagement given that nearly nine months after the tsunami, the situation in the country has not eased.

- There are still major funding gaps in the national economic recovery programme.
- An economy which had grown at an average of 8 percent per annum during the past two decades is forecast to contract by 3 percent.
- Rising oil prices, unforeseen tsunami related expenditures and revenue shortfall from tourism are creating significant financial pressures requiring, for the first time in our history, budget support from donors.

As a small country the Maldives places great store on the international community for its survival. We hope that our appeals for assistance will result in the extension of the support that is required to tide over the blip in the economy.

It is ironic that the Assembly had voted, just six days before the tsunami struck, to begin a transition period for the Maldives for graduation from LDC status. While we recognize the achievements secured by the people through their diligent efforts and the support of the donor community, it

would be vital that trade preferences and other concessions are not phased out through graduation before the country recovers from the extensive devastation caused by the tsunami.

Mr. President:

The tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean was a grim reminder of the ferocity of the elements and the helplessness of communities exposed to natural disasters. Just as we support the establishment of a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean region, our thoughts are also with the millions of people in the United States, India, China, Japan and elsewhere who recently have faced extreme weather events which brought unprecedented death, destruction and pain.

One cannot overstate the importance of protecting the environment and saving lives.

There is no longer a frontline comprising only small low-lying island states. Indeed, climate change can cause destruction anytime and anywhere. Prevention is the only option where there is no cure. We hope that the Kyoto Protocol will be implemented with full effectiveness.

Small states have the narrowest margins of safety and the least ability to mitigate or overcome environmental catastrophes. We would like to assert the critical importance of the early and effective implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for SIDS.

Mr. President,

Not only is the Maldives seeking to build back better after the tsunami but we are also going through a historic transformation of the governance structures of the country.

The Agenda for Democracy and Reform being pursued by the government focuses not only on making the Maldives a twenty-first century democracy, but also on strengthening human rights protection.

With the acceleration of the government's reform program over the past two years, sweeping changes have been brought to the political landscape of the Maldives.

Political pluralism has been strengthened by introducing a multi-party system into the Maldives for the first time in its history.

The country is also undertaking unprecedented legal and judicial reforms aimed at a comprehensive modernization of the criminal justice system in order to bring it up to speed with international norms and standards.

A Constitutional Assembly is in session to draw-up a modern democratic constitution which will embed liberal democracy in the country and strengthen adherence to international standards in civil liberties and human rights protection.

Just last week, the Maldives signed on to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. We are already committed to full transparency and openness in safeguarding human rights in the Maldives.

We believe that the engagement of the international community is one of the strongest safeguards in protecting human rights.

We have already acceded to a number of conventions on human rights and we are confident that the measures currently underway in the national reform program will enable us to fully comply and sign on to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

It would not be enough to say that we will do all that we can. Rather, we would like to say that we will do all that is required to ensure that our people live in larger freedom as envisaged in the United Nations Charter.

While we are mindful that Article 2.7 of the United Nations Charter precludes the internal affairs of States from UN forums, the Maldives believes that our aspirations to build a modern and mature democracy are important enough to be articulated before this Assembly. Moreover, given our limited resources and the dearth of technical expertise, the support of the international community is vital for the success of the ambitious democracy project being implemented by the Government.

I gratefully acknowledge the support being extended to us by the UN system and our bilateral partners in this historic enterprise in the Maldives.

Mr President:

Today, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Maldives admission to the UN, my President wrote to the Secretary-General thanking him and the UN membership for the collaboration and support

over the past four decades on matters of crucial national interest to the Maldives.

- We recall the support given by this Assembly to the requirements of protection and security of small states.
- We acknowledge the important role played by the UN membership in advancing efforts to protect the global environment.
- We are also gratified by the assistance that we are getting towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Already we are on track to attaining most of the MDGs.

We hope the Outcome Document of the High-level Plenary will expedite the march of the countries towards attainment of the MDGs and to conquer disease, despair and deprivation.

We hope that measures agreed to combat international terrorism, strengthen peace and international security, promote peace-building, and to strengthen the United Nations machinery on human rights protection will be followed-up effectively.

Sound multilateralism is crucial for our quest for a better world in an age of globalization. It is therefore important that effectiveness of the United Nations be strengthened.

We welcome the proposals made by the Secretary-General on all aspects of UN reform. While we recognize the need for comprehensive reforms, we hope that the reforms of the Security Council would be completed before the year's end in order to enable it to reflect more fully the realities of the twenty-first century.

Our support to the G4 draft resolution is based on these considerations and we hope that there will be wide support to that initiative.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate the firm commitment of the Maldives to the principles and objectives enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

We will work with the other members of the international community to uphold and promote these lofty objectives.

We seek a world, as envisioned 60 years ago in the UN Charter, of all peoples living in larger freedom free from want, free from fear and living with dignity that God Almighty bestowed on all of us.

Thank you Mr. President.