



# MALDIVES

## **Statement by Her Excellency Dr. Mariyam Shakeela, Minister of Environment and Energy and Acting Foreign Minister at the UNGA General Debate**

***New York, 1 October 2013***

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

Let me begin by extending my heartfelt congratulations, on your assumption of office of the President of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

I wish to commend the Secretary General on your leadership during a trying and testing time globally. We are further confident of your leadership and this organisation's resolve in tackling the many unprecedented challenges of our time.

Mr. President,

Challenges, old and new, seem to be a recurring theme during this General Debate. And it should rightfully be so. It is only when we are facing enormous challenges, when we are feeling the most uncomfortable, the most vulnerable, the most unhappy and the most unfulfilled, that we are most likely to think above and beyond; start searching for different answers to the same questions.

The most pressing challenge for the United Nations is most definitely to remain relevant to the realities of the twenty-first century, as it remains the ultimate guarantor of sovereign equality of nations and the only international institution that all countries, big and small, can look upon to ensure justice, freedom and peace. The Maldives, along with other states, have been calling on to reform the United Nations Security Council, to make it more inclusive and therefore credible; to be reflective of the voices of not only the powerful, but also the weak; to be more representative of the global populations and geographical distributions. In addition to the Council's composition, its working methods must be improved. Only then, can the United Nations restore its credibility, authority and legitimacy.

Mr. President,

Global challenges carry significant importance to the Maldives. The situation in the Middle East is particularly close to the hearts of Maldivians.

We are appalled at the human cost of the conflict in Syria. The use of chemical weapons at any time, by any one, for any means must not be tolerated. In this regard, the Maldives welcomes the United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 on the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria, which was adopted unanimously. The Council's decision, we hope, will take us a step closer to ending the atrocities taking place as we speak. Violence begets violence. Thus, we call on both sides of the conflict to choose the path of dialogue, not of violence.

The Maldives also calls on this august Assembly to recognise the true aspirations of the Palestinian people. We urge you to support a two state solution with the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital on the lands occupied in the 1967 war. Is it fair that Palestinian children grow up without a country of their own? Is it fair that the Palestinian need for security, stability, prosperity and development go unanswered and unfulfilled because of the continued

violence? Excellencies, we have discussed and talked about this issue enough! It is time for action! We are encouraged by the renewed US led Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. It is our earnest hope that these talks will ultimately lead to a peaceful and secure future for future generations of Palestine and Israel.

Mr. President,

With the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals fast approaching, the focus of the world and this Assembly has turned to the post 2015 agenda. However, accelerating the achievement of the original Millennium Development goals is an urgent necessity. Thus, the Maldives call on all nations to fulfill their Overseas Development Assistance commitments and in doing so help the most vulnerable populations overcome their challenges to achieve the MDGs.

We in the Maldives have made remarkable progress on the MDGs, having achieved five out of the eight ahead of the deadline. Although we have not achieved three MDGs, we are proud of the work we have done towards achieving them, in particular, on the advancement of women. The country has shown promise in addressing gender equality, especially in the area of health and education. It has nearly achieved universal access to basic healthcare for women and is proud of high literacy rates among boys and girls alike. The Maldives regards improving the socio-economic rights of women as an integral part of national development and a core component of sustainable development.

Unfortunately, some of the MDGs that have been achieved are facing setbacks, even regressing due to emerging issues, especially the loss of ODA associated with LDC graduation, while persistent challenges hinder the achievement of all MDGs. Therefore, achieving and sustaining the progress on the MDGs would remain the key development challenge for the future.

While formulating the post 2015 Developmental Agenda, we should be mindful of the fact that MDGs are multi-dimensional and interconnected. They are not an end in itself and a final solution, but merely a beginning. The Maldives is encouraged by the multi-stakeholder mechanisms that are ongoing within the UN. It is our hope that all these mechanisms are considered holistically and not in isolation, towards a more concrete post 2015 development agenda.

It is also our sincere hope that the Millennium Development Goals are not left incomplete and the post 2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals are not seen in isolation to MDGs. We hope that Sustainable Development Goals will be seen as a continuation of MDGs whereby its achievements compliment, and its gaps are addressed and reflected in the formulation of SDGs and the post 2015 development agenda. We also hope that no nation is left without an avenue towards progression and that no Small Island Developing State is left behind.

Mr. President,

As we talk about the development agenda we set for ourselves at the turn of this millennium, I cannot help but wonder: will the Maldives and other low lying island states survive to see another century, let alone a millennium? The Maldives is a small nation: small in terms of population and size. A nation that has, despite our small size, advocated loud and clear for international actions towards addressing climate change. A nation that has helped the world to see that the right to a safe and secure environment is a basic human right.

I urge all UN institutions to solidify and strengthen all standards, and move towards the creation of an international mechanism. We need to strengthen institutions and cultivate a more dependable and consistent approach towards climate change and the consequent human rights issues that will become the most pressing challenges facing humanity.

For example, the IPCC Report that was presented to world leaders just last week underscored the need for urgent action on the issue of climate change. The report concludes that, on a "business as usual" scenario, low lying nations will face grave existential threats.

What does this mean for the Maldives? With 80% of our small nation barely one and half meters above sea level and with more than 45% of settlement footprints within 100 meters of the coastline, all facets of our lifestyle, culture and economy almost exclusively depend on coastal and marine biodiversity. At present our biodiversity contributes to 71% of our national employment, 49% of public revenue, 62% of foreign exchange, 98% of exports, and 89% of GDP. Any loss of this biodiversity will result in catastrophic consequences for the Maldives.

These are facts. But we have known these facts for a long time. What we need now is action! Our inactions speak louder than words.

Mr. President,

As a nation, Maldives has witnessed the trials of graduation without due consideration to the inherent vulnerabilities of small island nations. Simply having a high Gross National Income or a high Human Development Index does not make SIDS less vulnerable to external shocks including emerging threats such as climate change. Nor does it remove the difficulties associated with their smallness and remoteness, and achieving economies of scale.

The Maldives is a perfect example of a SIDS graduating from LDC status based on distortive data and geographically disassociated global aggregates and indices. Even upon graduation, the country continues to face numerous economic, social and climate change challenges. This must be a lesson to gain from, as we develop the post 2015 development Agenda.

SIDS require differential treatment because of their unique inherent vulnerabilities. This is why the Maldives and other countries in the same plight, have been advocating relentlessly to find a comprehensive definition for SIDS. SIDS need to be given full recognition within the global governance regimes, multilateral and financial institutions and adequately integrated and institutionalized within the UN system. Doing so, would help to target assistance more effectively. This is also why we support a SIDS focused goal on the post 2015 Developmental Agenda.

Mr. President,

All of the challenges I have outlined are key to the Maldives. However, the most pressing challenge to the Maldives remains democracy consolidation and concerted efforts by external forces to prevent the emergence of an indigenous democratic system of governance in the Maldives.

Few weeks ago, the Maldives held its second multi-party elections. It was one of the most competitive elections in the country's history. Yet, it did not produce a clear winner. Some of the parties that competed in the election have identified serious issues with the conduct of the elections, and have asked the Supreme Court of the Maldives for a ruling. We are expecting the Court to come out with a ruling in the coming days. The integrity of the second round of our Presidential election cannot be maintained without ensuring the integrity of the first round through Constitutional means. We await the Supreme Court's verdict to continue the electoral process, allowing for a new President to be sworn in on November 11<sup>th</sup>.

However, some external forces are attempting to shape the outcome of, what in effect is, an internal issue. The Maldives is small. Our democracy is at an infant stage. Our institutions are young. That does not, however, mean that larger countries have a right to intervene and attempt to dictate outcomes in domestic affairs of the Maldives.

Non-interference in internal affairs of sovereign states is a core principle in the Charter of this Organisation. Yet small states have frequently been the victim of the predatory designs of larger countries. It is for that reason that the Maldives initiated the Resolution 44/51 on "The Protection and Security of Small States" at this Assembly in 1989. The call for protecting small states from external threats is further reiterated in the Resolutions 46/43 and 49/31, recognizing the particular vulnerabilities of small states to external threats and acts of interference in internal affairs. The

Resolutions also call on all nations to respect the principle of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Therefore, my delegation trusts the United Nations to be the ultimate guarantor of the security of small states like the Maldives.

Mr. President,

Democracy consolidation is not just about holding elections. Nor is it about having a democratically sound Constitution. In the Maldives too, we quickly found that changing the Constitution, or having a multi-party election, did not instill democratic values within our society.

For democracy to be cultivated and consolidated, the supremacy of the constitution must be upheld above all. The institutional deficiencies we face, must be addressed within constitutional provisions. And the political leadership must sustain an unshakable commitment to the principles and values of democracy. The rule of law must prevail.

Our institutions are young. Therefore, institution building and reform remain a key challenge for the Maldives. More importantly, cultivating a culture of respect for human rights, tolerance, pluralism, and freedom remains incredibly important as we move through the democratic journey.

Mr. President,

These are the reasons why the Maldives decided to present its bid for re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Our membership on the Council over the last three years has helped the country to take some unprecedented and bold measures to bring the country's national human rights mechanisms up to international standards. The Maldives believes that its continued membership would help it to further accelerate ongoing efforts in modernizing institutions and in promoting a culture of respect for human rights and democracy in Maldivian society.

Mr. President,

Without democracy, rule of law, human rights and peace, we would have nothing, we would achieve nothing, and we would sustain nothing. In order to tackle the many challenges confronting the Maldives, we must adopt an inclusive form of governance, where the voices and opinions of even the most vulnerable and the most disadvantaged in our society are heard. Without equality and justice, societies cannot prosper after all.

Mr. President,

Democracy consolidation is a long and arduous journey. But it is one worth making. Our pace may not be as fast as the international community desires. But the Maldives is in the process of solidifying the foundations of our society for development, for democracy, and for the protection of human rights. But that does not mean that we don't need the international community's assistance.

We know better than most, that to be an emerging democracy is to be constantly challenged by volatile, new and emerging issues. There is no leeway to stumble, no room to hesitate. And we will not falter in our resolve. We will strengthen and redefine our institutions. We will adhere to our constitution. We will work with our international partners. And we will move forward as a nation and as a sustainable society.

Thank you.