



*Check Against Delivery*

*Statement by*

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**Minister of State for Foreign Affairs,  
Republic of Maldives**

*at the*

**Fourth Session**

*of the*

**Human Rights Council of the  
United Nations**

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Mr. President,

It's a great pleasure and a privilege to address the 4th Session of the Human Rights Council, and I thank you for this opportunity.

I would like to start by congratulating you on the manner in which you continue to steer the work of the Human Rights Council in this, its first crucial year. Although a significant amount remains to be done if the year is to reach a successful conclusion, the Government of the Maldives has no doubt that under your skilled and astute leadership we will be able to meet the great expectations placed upon the Council by the United Nations General Assembly and by people all over the world.

Mr. President,

As you are aware the Maldives is embarked on a sweeping programme of constitutional, democratic and human rights reform. When completed, it will engineer a political transformation to match the economic and social developments achieved by the country over the past thirty years.

Our objective with the political reform programme is clear: to create a model democracy in the Maldives founded upon the promotion and protection of human rights.

The Maldives Government sees the Universal Periodic Review mechanism as an extremely important tool to help us realise this ambition. This is the case for two main reasons.

Firstly, a key tenet of the reform agenda is that it should take place in full *cooperation with* rather than in *isolation from* the international community. For that reason, the opportunity to have our efforts reviewed on a regular basis by our peers is extremely important and welcome. Linked to this, the Maldives also sees the UPR process as an important opportunity to identify areas where the international community can assist us through, for example, capacity-building and technical assistance.

Secondly, the Maldives is fully aware that producing a new constitution and adopting new legislative bills strengthening human rights protection are only the first steps. Equally important will be to ensure that these new provisions are fully and effectively implemented. Thus a regular opportunity to publicly





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discuss and assess progress with Council Members and other interested stakeholders will, we believe, help maintain momentum and focus.

Mr. President,

Because of the importance we attach to the UPR process, my Government is heartened by progress in the working group charged with establishing the modalities for the mechanism. The cooperative spirit in which the working group discussions have taken place, helped in no small part by the outstanding chairmanship of H.E. Ambassador Loulichki certainly bodes well both for the ultimate effectiveness of the UPR mechanism and for the effectiveness and success of the Council more broadly.

Notwithstanding this generally positive picture, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly stress to the Council that the final UPR process must, if it is to be a truly universal and effective mechanism, take special account of the needs of Least Developed Countries. Specifically, and as the Maldives and many others have advocated from the very start of the UPR discussions, we believe that it is imperative that a special fund be established to pay for in-country orientation and technical assistance programmes on the UPR process. The fund should also help capital-based experts from LDCs to travel to and stay in Geneva for the UPR dialogue. Without such orientation and familiarisation programmes and support facilities, there is the very real risk that many LDCs, especially those that do not have a Mission in Geneva or those with very small Missions, will get left behind and will fail to derive any benefit from the UPR.

Mr. President,

I would also like to take this opportunity to quickly update the Council on recent progress with the Maldives' constitutional, democratic and human rights reform programme.

Firstly, I am proud to announce that the on 19 December last year the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its optional protocol, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights officially entered into force in the Maldives. As of that moment, human rights in the Maldives became guaranteed not only by the Constitution but also by the weight of international law. Although we recognise our shortcomings and realise that we have much work to do to bring ourselves fully into line with the 2 Covenants, the Maldives took the conscious decision that it is best to sign the Covenants and then work with the Human Rights Council, the OHCHR and the





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relevant Treaty Bodies to gradually bring our laws and practices into line, than to wait on the sidelines. We therefore look forward to presenting our first report under the ICCPR at the end of this year and thereafter working with the UN system to address shortfalls.

Secondly, it gives me equal pleasure to announce that the national Human Rights Commission of the Maldives is now fully staffed and operational – with the authority of national legislation conforming to the standards set by the Paris Principles. The Commission has already begun its important work to protect the rights of individual Maldivians and to hold the Government and other State actors to account.

Thirdly, the Maldives continues to urge UN special procedures to visit the country to assess and report on developments. Following hard on the heels of the recent visit by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion, Ms. Asma Jahangir, two weeks ago we were pleased to welcome the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Mr. Leandro Despouy. We look forward to hearing and responding to Ms. Jahangir's and Mr. Despouy's reports at this session and the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council respectively. Moreover, we look forward to the future visit to the Maldives by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, Mr. Ambeyi Ligabo, a visit that we see as vital to the wider reform process.

Mr. President,

If much has been achieved then it is equally true that much more remains to be done. In that sense, 2007 is a vital year for the Maldives. Under the Reform Roadmap we are committed to completing the new Constitution by the end of May – a deadline that the President, H.E. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, recently reminded all parliamentarians *must* be met. A raft of vital reform bills including *inter alia* a new Penal Code, a Police Bill, a Criminal Procedure Bill, a Detention Procedure Bill, a Bill strengthening the right to freedom of assembly, and various Bills in the area of press freedom all must be adopted this year.

Mr. President,

The imminence of so many important deadlines naturally raises the question of whether or not we can complete the task in time.

Mr. President,



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For our part, the Government remains optimistic that the deadlines set by the roadmap can be met and that, consequently, multiparty elections under a new Constitutional settlement will be held, as planned, by the last quarter of 2008. This optimism is born out of three principle considerations.

1. Firstly, the Government remains absolutely committed to completing the reform process in the time allotted by the Roadmap.
2. Second, as Mr. Despouy, the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers remarked following his recent visit to the Maldives, there is now a clear bipartisan consensus for reform in the country. In his end-of-visit press briefing, Mr. Despouy noted that: “The Government authorities are committed to a far-reaching reform of the Constitution, and the various leading members of the opposition with whom the Special Rapporteur met are also convinced that there is no way these reforms can be delayed”. This growing consensus has recently manifested itself as wide-ranging talks between the two main political parties, designed to speed up the completion of the new Constitution, fast-track key reform Bills, and create a general environment conducive to completion of the reform agenda.
3. Finally, the increasing positive engagement of the international community is without doubt a welcome and heartening development for the Maldives. It is easy to criticise from the sidelines. What is more difficult is to allocate the time and resources needed to visit and talk to a country, to understand it and to cooperate with it to bring about real and lasting improvement in human rights protection. Over recent months and years, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion, the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, the United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Commonwealth, the European Union, and the Association for the Prevention of Torture, to name but a few have allocated their time and their resources to help us in our endeavours, and for that, Mr. President, we are sincerely grateful.

For these important reasons, Mr. President, we are confident in our ability to complete the journey upon which we have embarked.

Thank you Mr. President