

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**Translation of the Address by
His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom,
President of the Republic of Maldives,
at the
General Debate of the 61st Session of the
United Nations General Assembly,
New York, Wednesday, 20 September 2006**

In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful.

Praise be to the Almighty Allah, and peace be upon the Holy Prophet Muhammed, who was sent as a mercy to all humanity.

Madam President, Mr. Secretary-General, Distinguished Delegates:

The United Nations today is at a crossroads. It needs to become part of the 21st century. And it must do so with great urgency. It needs to gear itself to becoming an institution capable of taking on the serious challenges that confront the international community.

As we address these tasks, your election, Madam President, to preside over the 61st Session of the General Assembly is a tribute to your wisdom and skill. It is also a compliment to your great country. I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Madam President.

At the same time, it gives me pleasure to express appreciation to His Excellency Jan Eliasson, who presided so ably over the 60th Session of this Assembly.

Today, as the United Nations approaches the end of one era and the beginning of another, the Maldives expresses its profound appreciation to the outgoing Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. He has led this Organization for a decade, with great devotion and skill.

Madam President:

Modernization should be a top priority for any organization that wants to remain relevant in a time of rapid change. It is particularly important for the United Nations because of the central role that it must continue to play in promoting co-operation for international peace and security, economic and social development, human rights and the rule of law.

The Maldives believes that reform of the United Nations must be transparent, balanced, comprehensive and inclusive. In addition to modernising the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council must also be

strengthened. These reforms must make the Organisation more action-oriented and democratic. A reformed UN must be responsive to the entire membership, and be faithful to the founding principles of the UN. The Organisation must be adapted to carry out its mandate in full. There can be no doubt that these can be achieved by gearing the UN to implement all its mandates, decisions and resolutions, without fear or favour.

The question of equitable representation and increase in the membership of the Security Council is a crucial part of the reform process. The Maldives believes the membership of the Council must reflect the realities of the present day world. As the Security Council is the primary organ of the UN charged with maintaining international peace and security, its membership structure must strengthen the capacity of the Council to carry out its functions. Security Council reform should go beyond the issue of increase in membership. The sooner the Council is able to fall into step with current realities, the stronger will become the multilateral process. In this regard, the Maldives reiterates its support for the G-4 proposal on Security Council reform.

The Maldives welcomes the inauguration of the Human Rights Council in June this year. We hope that the Human Rights Council will contribute to strengthening the capacity of Member States to implement their obligations on the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law. We expect the universal periodic review to be objective and applied to all States equally.

Madam President:

For the Maldives, the next few years are going to be a crucial period in our national development. As a result of national efforts undertaken with the support of the international community, the Maldives is today set to say good-bye to least developed country status. The three-year smooth transition period will begin in January 2008.

Graduation from the LDCs list will pose numerous challenges to us. However, we look forward to that event as a positive development. We have already begun work with the donor community to identify ways in which the economic and social progress of the country will continue without disruption after graduation. In this regard, I would like to note the successful launching of the Maldives Partnership Forum as an annual event. The first such forum was held in June of this year. I wish to thank our donors for their continued commitment to support the development of the Maldives beyond graduation.

The Maldives' graduation from least-developing country status to that of a developing country coincides with an important political phase in the country's development. Over the past three years, we have been engaged in a major political transformation. These reforms are based on the sustained social and economic progress that has qualified the Maldives for graduation. The political reform programme that we began in 2003 covers institutionalizing political pluralism and strengthening human rights protection, media freedom and judicial reform.

The achievements of the programme to date include the formation of four political parties last year, the strengthening of the fundamental rights of the people, and enhancing the rule of law. Also, a Constitutional Assembly is in session to modernize the Constitution. Other projects are being implemented to overhaul the criminal justice system, setting up a modern police service, strengthening of media freedom and development of civil society.

We are also determined to meet the standards prescribed in international human rights treaties. Over the two past years, we have acceded to the Convention against Torture as well its Optional Protocol. We have also acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Just yesterday, I deposited with the Secretary General our instruments of accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol, as well as to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Madam President:

The Maldives has been the worst affected country by the 2004 tsunami. Twenty-one months into the recovery programme, a lot has been achieved. However, much remains to be done.

I take this opportunity to thank the donor community and friendly countries, for the support and assistance extended towards our recovery programme.

The biggest obstacle to the recovery programme is the substantial funding shortfall in key aspects of recovery, in particular, in the areas of repair and reconstruction of housing, transportation, water and sanitation and environmental mitigation. The funding gap is estimated at around US\$ 100 million.

In addition, as a result of the impact of the tsunami and of high petroleum prices on public finances, there is a budget deficit of US\$ 100 million.

During this critical juncture in our national progress, I call upon our development partners and to the international community as a whole, to continue assisting the Maldives

It is a matter of satisfaction to us that, despite the devastation caused by the tsunami and the short-term fiscal pressures, the Maldives has been able to meet some of the international development targets.

In reducing poverty and in providing primary education, the Maldives has already met the Millennium Development Goals. We are confident that we can attain the targets on healthcare and gender empowerment.

For small island states like the Maldives, globalization also presents numerous challenges. Greater attention must therefore be paid to prevent these countries from being marginalized, and to the integration of small states into the global market.

Madam President:

Instability in any part of the world has implications for the entire international community. One of the most intractable disputes of our time is the conflict in the

Middle East, particularly the non-realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The recent hostilities in Lebanon and the sufferings of the Lebanese people have their roots in the Palestinian problem. The Palestinian issue must be resolved in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The continued instability and violence in Afghanistan and Iraq is a matter of great concern to the Maldives.

Years of instability and conflict have ravaged the lives and society of the peoples of these countries. The international community has a responsibility to set them on the path of realizing their vast development potential.

Madam President:

The Maldives fully subscribes to the efforts made by the international community to combat terrorism. We are party to the major international conventions that have been formulated to defeat terrorism.

Terrorism is an assault on the values of freedom and human solidarity. However, our efforts to combat the menace should avoid undermining the very values that we seek to protect.

There is a resurgence of the vilification of Islam and Muslims. As the Maldives is a country that has been a 100 percent Muslim nation for over 850 years, we are dismayed by this trend. Islam has provided the basis for peace and social harmony in the Maldives. Islam preaches moderation, not extremism.

Violence and killing are abhorrent to Islam.

The Holy Quran says:

"Take not life, which Allah has made sacred, except by way of justice and law." (6:151)

Needless to say, we are deeply pained and outraged by the negative imaging of Islam and the effort to associate fanaticism and violence with our peace-loving faith.

The Holy Quran says:

"Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and being generous to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion." (16:90)

Only love can conquer hatred. Knowledge alone can overcome prejudice. Tolerance can defeat fear. Stable peace requires inclusion. Effective and meaningful dialogue amongst civilizations and mutual respect amongst diverse peoples are necessary to address the challenges that we face today. Tolerance and respect for diversity are given a high value in Islam.

Madam President:

Civilization is under serious threat from the continued degradation of the environment and its resultant effects of global warming, climate change and sea-level rise. The small island states like the Maldives and other low-lying regions of the world are in the frontline of danger from the rising seas. The extreme weather events of the past few years have been more frequent and destructive than ever before. They clearly demonstrate that the entire world is vulnerable to the devastation caused by climate change. The Kyoto Protocol has been a great disappointment. We call upon all countries to accelerate the adoption of urgent and realistic measures to stop climate change and sea level rise.

If we are to address the vast array of challenges that humanity faces today, we must effectively implement crucial blueprints and action programmes agreed through the multilateral process. We must breathe new life into Agenda 21. We must also adhere to the Monterrey Consensus. The Millennium Declaration must be followed up diligently. And, as Secretary-General Kofi Annan said earlier this month, the UN must move from a culture of reaction to one of prevention.

Madam President:

Today I am speaking to you in my vernacular, the Dhivehi language. It represents the legacy of several millennia of continuous settlement and the culture that it has produced in the Maldives.

Is not the protection of such legacies the touchstone of success of this global family of nations?

If the UN can make the small and vulnerable countries feel safe, then who would be facing any danger at all?

I thank you, Madam President.