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MALDIVES

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Statement by His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Khaleel, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations at the High Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals at Sixty Third Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 25 September 2008

Honourable Co-Chairs, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

In 1965, when my country joined the United Nations, we were ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world. The inherent vulnerabilities and the development challenges we faced were enormous. The economy was largely based on subsistence fishery and the health and education sectors were severely underdeveloped.

Since then, the Maldives has achieved remarkable levels of socio-economic progress. For the past three decades we have successfully pursued a people centred path of sustainable development based on social equity, poverty eradication, economic growth, environmental protection and good governance. MDG targets are now fully incorporated in our national development priorities and I am happy to note that we are amongst those countries which are on track to achieving most of the targets by 2015.

Honourable Co-Chairs

We have already achieved Goal 1 eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and Goal 2 - universal primary education. We are also on track to achieving Goals 4, 5 and 6 on reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating communicable diseases, respectively. While challenges remain, significant progress has also been achieved on Goal 3, gender equality and empowerment of women. Concerted efforts are also being made to meet the nutrition targets for children.

Honourable Co-Chairs,

Achieving Goal 7, environmental sustainability, remains the only goal over which we have no control. The modest development gains we have made are now fundamentally threatened by the crippling effects of global environmental degradation. There is growing consensus that climate change poses the most immediate and far-reaching threat to human security, directly compromising the most fundamental rights, including the right to life itself, for millions of people around the world.

Achieving Goal 7, therefore, in our view is not only necessary for our sustainable development, but also, is imperative for the very existence of our island nation.

We are fully convinced that achieving environmental sustainability rests on our collective, moral and ethical ability to address the injustices of climate change. A comprehensive rights based approach to sustainable and just development, anchored in the concept of common but differentiated responsibility, should be central in our efforts. In this regard, we are happy that, on our initiative, the UN Human Rights Council had for the first time, earlier this year, recognized the link between human rights and climate change. The Council will formally debate this issue at its 10th session in March 2009 and we hope that due consideration will be given to the outcome of this debate by our colleagues at UNFCCC, in their deliberations to ensure an effective and equitable successor to the Kyoto Protocol.

Honourable Co-Chairs,

As members of this august gathering are aware, since 1987, the Maldives has continued to voice its concerns about the serious consequences of environmental degradation, especially to low-lying, coastal areas and small island states. Twenty years on, global action have not yielded the results of our expectations.

Yet, we refuse to give up hope. We believe that true partnership envisioned in goal 8, with a common and shared vision of commitment and multilateral solidarity can guarantee our targets. We indeed have the means and the resources, what is lacking is the political will.

On behalf of the government and people of the Maldives, I assure you, Honourable Co-Chairs, that we will continue to play our role, however small it may be, to realize our common goal of achieving environmental sustainability and thereby ensuring our own survival as a nation!

Thank you.