



**PERMANENT MISSION OF REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES TO UNITED NATIONS  
NEW YORK**

**Statement on Agenda Item 28 (a) and (b): Advancement of Women  
Third Committee of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly  
12 October 2011**

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(Check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

First and foremost let me take this opportunity to congratulate the winners of this year's Noble Peace Prize, Ms. Leymah Gbowee, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and Ms. Tawakkol Karman of Yemen. I also express our deepest condolences to the people of Kenya and the family of the Noble Peace laureate professor Wangari Mathai. We are saddened by the loss of such an extraordinary human being who advocated for the protection of the environment.

It is an honour to speak at this venue and a pleasure to see so many women address this body on behalf of their respective nations. Yet we all know that if it was not this venue and this issue, the representation of women would be minimal.

I mention this to stress one point; that even in this hallowed institution, the job is not done.

Mr. Chairman,

The Maldives attaches high importance to the advancement of women. Over the years, the Maldives boasted attaining universal primary and lower secondary education. We developed a culture of education for girls and boys alike in the almost 200 inhabited islands of the Maldives and imbedded a desire and respect for education amongst all socio-economic groups of the Maldivian people. This has translated into high levels of women in university-level education programs – including those enrolled in the Maldivian higher education institutions. Moreover, to address the low number of women securing tertiary education scholarships, the Government has recently facilitated some scholarships for girls and women in the fields where they are normally few, such as pilot training and engineering.

While these achievements are noteworthy, the Government continues to face some old and some emerging challenges. Like most countries, even in the Maldives the social and economic power structures have strengthened gender inequality. For instance, while we enjoy the leading public education system in the region in terms of primary and lower secondary education, we have less than 10% of our students



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continuing on to higher education due to the limited opportunities available in the Maldives. The geographical distance from rural island homes make higher study prohibitive for many young women – hence, while the equal opportunity exist, social norms restrict women’s empowerment even at this most basic level.

Secondly, women are still prevented from being equal partners of the three major economic sectors of the country: namely tourism, fisheries and construction. Social roadblocks have traditionally hampered women from venturing into these fields. For instance, tourist resorts are located on separate, private islands but women are not encouraged to work away from their home islands.

And thirdly, the Government is concerned with the rapid rise of fundamental interpretations of the Islamic faith that has seen a sharp decline in women engaging in many social issues, including education, workplace rights. The Government strongly believes that Islam is a faith that gives utmost respect, equality and security to women and we will continue to work to reverse this trend.

Mr Chairman,

As just highlighted the Government is fully aware that women in Maldivian society continue to face both de jure and de facto discrimination in various spheres of life. Nevertheless, advancement of women in all spheres of life is encouraged by the Government.

This has been demonstrated in many initiatives including the appointment of gender focal points in Government ministries, the development of action plans and policies aimed at addressing a range of key concerns for women such as health and well being, violence and safety, decision making and leadership and economic security are being taken at the national and island–community levels. All government agencies are also required to analyse the gender impact of all national initiatives. Furthermore, temporary special measures aimed at the economic empowerment of women have also been ongoing. Forty percent of Government sanctioned SME loans have been reserved for women entrepreneurs for example: with a view to alleviating women’s economic role in Maldivian society.

Mr Chairman,

Similar many parts of the world, the Maldives is not immune from the scourge of violence against women. We agree with the general assertion that violence against women is an all encompassing issue, and believe that the issue be dealt with in a culturally multifaceted manner. The various ways in which social and cultural norms affect the way in which both the victims, and the perpetrators view violence against women must not be overlooked. As such it is important to underscore that a holistic approach to combat violence against women is necessary, to effectively resolve this very complex and intricate issue. The Government is decisive on taking measures



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against this with its new Domestic Violence Bill. This is a landmark piece of legislation which has broken many issues that were traditionally marked as taboo.

Mr. Chairman,

The Maldives strongly believes in the goodwill of the international community. We have consistently worked towards the advancement of women as a community, regardless of cultural, religious and economic specificities. In this regard, the Maldives welcomes the Report by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Ms Rashida Manjoo, and take this opportunity to reiterate our invitation to the Special Rapporteur to visit the Maldives and offer an independent assessment of the situation on the ground.

While we do agree that a holistic approach to overcome discrimination against women is required in all societies, prevention and protection would require universal adherence from Member States to address the structural and systematic deficiencies faced by women all over the world. We in the Maldives, came to that important juncture three years ago with the transition to a democratic and representative system of government and have been strenuously working to strengthen our efforts, that the rights of all must be protected for us to evolve as a modern society.

In conclusion my Delegation wishes to appeal to this forum to give meaning to the resolutions we adopt. Unless there is real meaning in the words we utter here, there shall not be real-on-the-ground benefit for women. To deny women their advancement would be to deny half of the population their true place in our societies.

Thank you Mr Chairman.

