



Republic of Maldives

Statement on Agenda item [28] Advancement of Women in the Third Committee

by Ms. Fathimath Liusa, Third Secretary

Permanent Mission of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations

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Check Against Delivery

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak on this agenda item, the Advancement of Women, which is an issue that is accorded a high priority by the Government of Maldives.

My Delegation commends the Secretary General for the reports prepared under this agenda item, and welcomes its recommendations. We also thank the comprehensive briefing by Ms. Lakshmi Puri, the Assistant Secretary General for Intergovernmental and Strategic Membership of UN Women, Ms. Nicole Ameline, Vice-Chair of CEDAW and Ms. Albrechtsen, the Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA.

Mr. Chairman,

The Maldives is proud of the progress made in the advancement of women and gender equality over the years. It has achieved high literacy rates among girls and boys alike, as well as near-universal access to basic healthcare for women. The Maldives regards improving the socio-economic and political rights of women as an integral dimension of its national development, and has thereby continued with a number of legislative and policy initiatives towards attaining these objectives.

In May this year, a new Ministry of Gender, Family and Human Rights was established to streamline the gender development activities in the country. The Government's efforts against gender discrimination are guided by the National Gender Equality Policy, which is based on a two-fold approach on gender mainstreaming in all areas, and strategic action on empowerment and advancement in specific sectors.

The Domestic Violence Act, enacted in April this year, has legal provisions to ensure that victims of domestic violence are given adequate protection and safeguards, through law enforcement and effective rehabilitation of offenders. Under this Act, a Family Protection Authority has been established and special family units have been set up to investigate all abuses, that take place at domestic environments. The Government is also currently operationalizing a separate shelter for women and girl children who are victims of domestic violence.

The enactment of the Domestic Violence Act is a significant achievement in the country, given that the first study of its kind published in 2007 revealed that 1 in 3 women, has faced some form of abuse over their life-time.

In meeting with its international treaty obligations, the Maldives as a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women is currently in the process of submitting its combined 4th and 5th periodic report to the CEDAW Committee.

Mr. Chairman,

The persistence of inequalities between men and women have proved a major hindrance to women's full participation in all spheres of society, particularly in their involvement and participation in politics, the decision-making process and in their access to resources. The Decentralization Act of 2012 provides many opportunities for women's participation in local governance through increased representation, as it enables each island to have a Women's Development Committee mandated to uphold the rights of women and increase their participation in political and social activities.

Economic empowerment of women is also an important area of focus in the Maldives. In this regard, the Small and Medium Enterprise programme, introduced by the Government in 2009, hopes to bring changes to women's access to resources, as it earmarks a certain percentage of financial, technical or capacity building assistance funds for women.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite these efforts and the development of the country, the Maldives continues to face a number of significant challenges. Women, particularly in the islands and in rural areas, have not had access to equal employment opportunities as men, and they continue to be mainly involved in unpaid household work. In addition to gender stereotypes, socio-economic changes have further reinforced the segregation of tasks between men and women, and increased inequalities between them. For instance, the modernization of the fishing industry has enabled fishermen to sell fish directly to buyers, factory ships and centralized industries, limiting the important role played by women traditionally, such as drying and processing fish.

Cultural expectations with regard to young women living away from home, have also impacted on both the numbers of women attaining tertiary or higher education, as well as limit their opportunities to work in the tourism industry. The recent increase in conservative schools of thought, on issues relating to women's rights in Islam, has further emerged as a challenge to women's full participation in society.

Mr. Chairman,

The Maldives also notes with concern, that despite the commitment and progress achieved in recent years, the prevalence of violence against women continues to remain high worldwide. We therefore believe, as recommended by the Secretary-General, that a comprehensive, coordinated and systematic approach by Member States is vital, and that it should include involvement of multiple stakeholders at all levels.

We support the recommendation by the Secretary-General that full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, is integral to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr Chairman,

The fight to advance the status of women is a global issue, and the Maldives reaffirms its commitment to also continue playing an active role internationally, in protecting and promoting the rights of women. The Maldives would continue its active voice in combating violence and discrimination against women, within its present membership at the Human Rights Council, and as a future member of the Executive Board of UN Women. My Delegation looks forward to working closely with all member states, UN bodies and civil society, towards the empowerment of women and gender equality.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.