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**Statement by
Hassan Adam, Minister - Counsellor
At the Regional Preparatory Meeting
for the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) SIDS
for the 4th International Conference on SIDS
24 July 2023**

*“Gaps and Challenges: Implementation of the SAMOA Pathway: National and Regional Perspectives”
5 minutes*

Statement delivery date: 24 July 2023

Time allocated: 5 minutes.

Theme: Gaps and Challenges: Implementation of the SAMOA Pathway: National and Regional Perspectives

Key issues addressed in the statement:

- Hope for the upcoming International SIDS Conference to facilitate bold and enduring solutions for SIDS.
- Challenges faced by the Maldives in catching up with the realization of the SAMOA Pathway, including impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy.
- Limitations in terms of financial resources and access to financing, leading to challenges in implementing the SAMOA Pathway and facing fiscal vulnerability.
- The need for discussions around the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, debt relief, and resilience.
- Challenges related to limited technical expertise and institutional capacities for sustainable development initiatives and data management.
- The recognition of the importance of oceans and marine life and the commitment to sustainable fisheries management.
- Call for collaboration to build momentum for the upcoming SDG Summit and Fourth International SIDS Conference



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Thank you, distinguished chair Excellency Ambassador Jagdish

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Mauritius, & UNDESA for this important meeting, a significant step towards the 4th International Conference on SIDS. Thank you, dear Mauritians, for the warm welcome and exceptional hospitality during our brief stay.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates

While we begin working on the next blueprint for SIDS and initiate preparations for the upcoming International SIDS Conference, our hope is for this meeting to facilitate bold and enduring solutions for SIDS. Despite having only three days for intensive deliberations, we are confident that when we leave, our discussions and collaboration can persist, driving positive changes for SIDS.

Excellencies,

With just a few months to the realisation of the SAMOA Pathway, our islands are still struggling to catch up. The implementation of the SAMOA Pathway in the SIDS of our region has encountered various gaps and challenges, and the Maldives is no exception. The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the Maldives, leading to disruptions in economies, health systems, and social development efforts. In 2020 alone, our economy contracted by 33.5%, as we felt the brunt of the reduction in tourism revenue and loss of livelihoods, especially among women and youth. Healthcare services were stretched to the limit, education was disrupted, and development projects were delayed. And while we combatted the effects of COVID-19, we all continued to suffer greatly from the effects of climate change. We are glad to note that the tourism sector has shown signs of gradual recovery,

We also encountered significant challenges in our implementation of the SAMOA Pathway in terms of financial resources and access to financing. The difficulties in accessing sufficient financial support have been further compounded by the restricted access to international financing mechanisms and the burden of high levels of debt. These factors have limited our ability to allocate the necessary funds for crucial development activities.



Excellencies,

Resilience must be at the heart of our efforts. We must enhance our ability to withstand future challenges.

Allow me to make four points:

First, building resilience requires a deep commitment to strengthening our institutions and technical expertise. Maldives is challenged by limited technical expertise and institutional capacities necessary for implementing complex and multidimensional sustainable development initiatives to achieve the SAMOA Pathway targets. This includes challenges in key sectors such as renewable energy, water and sanitation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction, and, most importantly, data collection, management, and use. Limited availability of reliable, up-to-date data and statistics continue to be a major barrier for informed decision making and data driven decision making in the Maldives. It also means that we have limited contributions to make in global statistics, which means our experiences are often not accounted for. Reliable, up to date data, and the ability to interpret and use that data, is required for effective policy-making and progress monitoring. We must invest in strengthening data collection, analysis and reporting capacities to track SDG progress and identify areas where interventions are needed the most.

Second, reducing inequalities – especially inequalities within our societies - and enhancing access to services such as quality education, health and economic opportunities, especially for those residing in remote areas, must be prioritized. We must aim to reach the furthest behind first. This is why, last week, when Maldives presented its second Voluntary National Review, we chose to focus on facilitating transport and digital connectivity. We firmly believe that leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first means reaching the most marginalized communities in remote islands.

Third, we must do more to carry forward our deliberations on the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index and find solutions to enhance debt relief and resilience. Given our deep structural and natural challenges, we cannot withstand any additional shocks, be they



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economic, social, or environmental. Our continued and strong advocacy is essential to the MVI being implemented by partner countries, international financial institutions, and multilateral development banks. We must be united and strategic in our efforts.

Fourth, as custodians of vast expanses of oceans, we also recognize the inextricable link between our economies and the health of our oceans. We are working diligently to establish 70 protected areas in our national waters and are firmly committed to protecting marine life. Our advocacy is also crucial to enhance the management and conservation of tuna stocks, embracing sustainable tuna fishing practices and promoting liberalisation of trade in fish, including eliminating tariffs on fish exports.

Excellencies,

In our capacity as the Co-Chair of the Preparatory Committee of the Fourth International SIDS Conference, I can assure you that the Maldives is dedicated to ensuring that the next SIDS blueprint builds upon the successes for the previous three SIDS programme of actions, while also keeping in mind our commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The new action plan must be focused, results oriented, and geared towards addressing emerging and future challenges. Let us work together to build the momentum required for the upcoming SDG Summit and Fourth International SIDS Conference, aiming for a prosperous and resilient world that benefits everyone.

Thank you.