



MALDIVES

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Statement by H.E. Mr. Ahmed Khaleel, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations, on the occasion of “SIDS Day”, at the Sixteenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-16), 12 May 2008, New York

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, my delegation associate itself with the statement made by the distinguished Ambassador of Granada in his capacity as the Chair of the Alliance of Small Island State (AOSIS), and that of the Group of 77 and China.

The hard work that Ambassador Friday and other members of the AOSIS Bureau are doing to promote the cause of SIDS deserves our praise and admiration. I assure them of the full support and cooperation of my delegation in their work.

Mr. Chairman,

Sixteen years after Rio, the effective implementation of Agenda 21 is proving to be a difficult task. Human induced global climate change and environmental degradation is continuing to accelerate unabated and the plight of SIDS and low-lying costal areas remains as precarious as ever before. Severe droughts and famine in Africa and Asian SIDS have been causing untold misery to millions. Barbados Programme of Action for the sustainable development of SIDS and the Mauritius Strategy remains without effective implementation.

One wonders if the spirit of Rio is starting to fade away.

Mr. Chairman, I cannot speak for the global community. But I can speak for my country. In the Maldives, the spirit of Rio is alive and vibrant. The enthusiasm for sustainable development is strong and the enabling physical and social infrastructure for sustainable development, as well as the development of policies, institutions and legislation required to implement Agenda 21 is slowly,

but surely taking shape. The principles of Agenda 21 are now incorporated in the National Development Plan of the country.

Mr. Chairman,

The 2004 tsunami, that devastated my country, exposed the extent of our vulnerabilities and the serious impact that rising sea levels can have on our islands. Living on 200 different small islands scattered over thousands of kilometers of sea can no longer be an economically or ecologically viable option that our people can afford. Migration and resettlement from smaller to larger islands has become an important prerequisite for development and for our survival. Therefore, as one of the key adaptation measures for the predicted climate change, we have now embarked on a "*Safer Islands Strategy*", whereby communities living on smaller, less populated and potentially more vulnerable islands would be resettled on larger islands with better natural protection and enhanced coastal defenses. My Government fully understands the difficulties and the enormity of implementing this Strategy. Apart from the large amount of financial resources required, the cultural and social impact of uprooting communities from the land of their ancestors can be a formidable task.

The Maldives National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA), which we have recently submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, incorporates this strategy as its core. Our main priority is to reduce vulnerability and enhance adaptation to climate change. As members of this Commission would appreciate, these are major undertakings that a small developing country like the Maldives cannot afford without the full support and cooperation of the international community.

Mr. Chairman,

The thematic clusters considered by the Commission at this session - land, agriculture, rural development, and drought are important areas for the SIDS, like the Maldives. In the Maldives, due to the scarcity of land available for cultivation, poor soil conditions, lack of fresh water for irrigation and the scattered nature of the islands, agricultural development is relatively limited. Except for coconut and fresh tuna fish, all food items are imported to the country. Heavy import dependency, limited storage facilities and ad hoc distribution pose severe food security risk. We are now working with FAO and IFAD to develop the agricultural sector by introducing new and innovative techniques and technology so that it could become a vehicle for commercially viable sustainable rural development.

Mr. Chairman,

The special needs and peculiar circumstances facing Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are now well recognized by the international community. The Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy, unequivocally spells

out the vulnerabilities that SIDS face and maps out a course of action for their sustainable development. Effective implementation of these ambitious but modest programmes of actions therefore remains central to achieving sustainable development in SIDS.

There is no doubt that climate change is a global phenomenon that affects us all. For the SIDS climate change is not a future possibility. It is present, it is real and it is directly linked to their sustainable development. It is also an issue of their security and survival. For example, if the recent predictions of the IPCC are correct, there is a strong possibility that a child born today in the Maldives and many other low-lying SIDS may be unjustly deprived of the opportunity to live his or her life in full in the land of his or her ancestors. This would be an eventuality that would be unacceptable for our people. Therefore, we sincerely believe that a truly human approach to sustainable development is now needed. In this regard we are delighted to see the unanimous adoption of the resolution entitled "*Human rights and climate change*" at the seventh session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva earlier this year. We hope that the international community will contribute actively during the debate on the issue scheduled for next year at the Council.

Mr. Chairman,

Before I conclude, allow me to echo the concerns expressed by my fellow SIDS on the unfortunate situation that we have faced in scheduling of the SIDS Day this year. We sincerely hope that the SIDS Day will be given the importance and priority that the General Assembly had so rightfully accorded to it, in future sessions.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.