



Statement by

His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid

**Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Republic of Maldives**

at the

Seventh Session

of the

**Human Rights Council of the
United Nations**

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Mr. President, Madam High Commissioner, Excellencies, Assembled Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This morning at the Indira Ghandi Memorial Hospital, the main hospital in our capital city Male', 4 young children were born: 1 girl and 3 boys. I am pleased to inform the Council that all 4 babies, and their parents, are doing very well.

Mr. President,

You may wonder why I am mentioning this to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

I do so because, if the latest predictions of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, contained in its Fourth Assessment Report, are correct, then the four children who started their young lives this morning in Male' will not have the opportunity to live-out their lives in the country of their birth; on the islands that their ancestors have inhabited for the past three and a half millennia.

Mr. President,

I put it to you and to the distinguished Members of this Council that such an eventuality would represent a tragedy of unimaginable proportions, not just for the Maldives but for *mankind in general*.



I emphasise the words “mankind in general” because, of course, the effects of climate change do not stop at the border of the Maldives. Every single person in every single country on the planet is affected by climate change. The effects may not be felt evenly between countries and peoples; for example, people in poorer countries are disproportionately vulnerable. Yet, in the final analysis, we all inhabit the same planet and thus we all have a stake in working together to find a solution; both for our own sake and for the sake of our children.

Mr. President,

I make these points not solely to demonstrate the scale of the threat posed by climate change, but also to illustrate that beyond the science and the politics, climate change has a human face; a human dimension; that must always remain foremost in our thoughts. Without recognising and understanding this human dimension of the problem; how can we, the family of nations, hope to take, within the framework of the negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the difficult yet necessary decisions required to safeguard the future of vulnerable people around the world.

Mr. President,

When one strives to consider the effects of a phenomenon like climate change on an individual human being, it is clear that an assessment of the impact on their human rights is an obvious place to start. This is why, in short, the Maldives and other interested countries will table, during the Seventh Session, a draft Resolution on human rights and climate change.



The Resolution will simply ask the Human Rights Council to consider, in a considered, non-politicised and non-condemnatory manner, the implications of climate change for the full enjoyment of human rights. In order to inform the debate, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights would be requested to conduct, taking into account the views of States and other stakeholders, a study into how human rights are affected by global warming.

The Maldives believes that these small simple steps will play an important role in highlighting the real-world human impact of climate change and, in-so-doing, will support and complement the core climate change negotiations launched last December in Bali and due to be concluded at the end of 2009.

Mr. President,

As well as being a vital year for efforts to stabilise the world's climate, 2008 is also a landmark year in the democratic history of the Maldives. After almost three years of work, the Maldives' constitutional assembly is on the verge of completing the country's new constitution. The new text represents a quantum leap for democracy and rule of law in the Maldives; providing, as it does, for a full and clear separation of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government; the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and the creation of key independent oversight bodies such as a national human rights commission and an anti-corruption board.

Based on the new Constitution, together with a raft of secondary legislation covering, *inter alia*, criminal justice, party politics, freedom of assembly, press freedom, and electoral reform; the Maldives is looking forward, at the end of the year, to its first ever multi-party presidential elections.



Mr. President,

I am pleased to inform the Council that, linked to the broader Democratic Reform Agenda, the Maldives continues to make excellent progress in its efforts to strengthen human rights promotion and protection. For example, in October the Maldives signed the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, meaning that the Maldives is now Party to 8 of the 9 core international human rights instruments.

Crucially, as well as signing these conventions, the Government is taking visible and concrete steps to ensure that the principles contained in them are effectively implemented and applied at national-level. For example, the new draft Constitution, as well as giving domestic substance to international human rights principles through a new Chapter on fundamental rights, also takes landmark steps such as removing the gender bar from running for President and allowing freedom of assembly without prior permission. Looking further ahead, the Government announced, in December, its decision to draft the Maldives' first-ever National Human Rights Action Plan.

As always, these steps are being taken in concert with our international human rights partners. Last December, the Maldives welcomed the newly formed UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture. And in April we will welcome the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression – the third special procedure to visit the Maldives in less than two years and yet another demonstration of our continued commitment to openness and dialogue.

Mr. President,



Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to commend you on the manner in which you continue to guide the work of the Human Rights Council. I would also like to congratulate the High Commissioner and her Office for their tireless efforts to improve the lives and protect the rights of people around the world. The Maldives pledges its strong support to the Council and the Office of the High Commissioner as we all join hands with people around the world to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Mr. President,

As a concrete demonstration of our commitment and support, I am pleased to announce today that the Maldives has decided to respond to the Office of the High Commissioner's universal donorship drive by making a voluntary financial contribution in support of efforts to give practical effect to the ideals set out in the Declaration.

Thank you Mr. President.