

**Statement by H E Ms Iruthisham Adam, Permanent Representative of
Maldives: Clustered Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression
and Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women
3 June 2011**

Thankyou Mr. President,

I would like to thank the Special Rapporteurs for their thorough research and enlightening reports.

The Maldives welcomes with appreciation the timely report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, on an emerging issue which presents us with new and unprecedented challenges. Since the beginning of this year we are witnessing the important role played by the internet in giving a voice to the demands of oppressed people and the space to exercise their right to freedom of expression. As such, we agree with the Special Rapporteur's assertion that the internet offers a key means by which individuals obtain information, assert their rights and participate in public debates on issues of social, economic and political interest. Additionally, the educational benefits attained from Internet usage directly contribute to the human capital of States. The Maldives also echoes the Rapporteur's request that all nations uphold the highest degree of transparency in their censory of content over the internet.

Mr. President

The Maldives welcomes the report of the Special Rapportuer on Violence against Women. We agree with the assertion that violence against women is an all encompassing issue, and believe that the issue be dealt with in a culturally multifaceted manor. The importance of the Rapporteur's explanation of 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 hoslistic approach to combat violence against women is necessary, to effectively resolve this very complex and intricate issue.

Mr. President,

Like any other part of the world, the Maldives is not immune from this challenge. Violence against women poses an enormous challenge to human rights reform in the Maldives. A 2007 report by the then Ministry of Gender and Health found that 1 in 3 women between the ages 15-45 reported some form of physical or sexual violence at least once in their lives. 1 in 5 suffered physical or sexual violence at the hands of their partner, and 1 in 6 girls under the age of 15 had suffered from sexual violence. Negative societal perceptions of the issue prevent effective reporting of cases as well as a general attitude that such cases are "private" matters.

Thus, the Government is decisive on taking measures against this and it is in this regard that it submitted the first-ever Bill on Domestic Violence Bill. This is a landmark piece of legislation in the entire history of the Maldives. With the submission to Parliament the Bill has broken many issues that were traditionally marked as taboo. Fundamentally, with the Bill Maldivian society has acknowledged that domestic violence does actually occur within the parameters of the family and secondly, that it is actually an act that needs to be criminalized.

The Bill and other pipeline projects form part of a wide government agenda to tackle violence against women. It is with this in mind that the Maldives has repeatedly invited the Special Rapporteur to undertake a visit to the Maldives: to offer an independent assessment and expert advice in this regard. We hope that the Rapporteur is able to accept this invitation in the very near future.

I thank you Mr. President.