

Annex 2: Statement by H.E. Ms. Dunya Maumoon, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Maldives, to Launch the Candidature of the Republic of Maldives to the Human Rights Council for the term 2014-2016

Tuesday, 26 February 2013

Distinguished Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalaamu Alaikum.

"Had we a place to stand upon, we would raise the world"

This is a quote from British Author Thomas Paine in his 1791 book. This is how the Maldives sees the Human Rights Council. We see it as a place to stand upon, a foothold to enable us to continue our work to promote and protect human rights both internationally as well as back at home, in our beautiful islands.

The Maldives understands the power of human rights to promote and guide democratic reform. Reform that benefits women and men and to build a just and fair society.

You may ask why elect Maldives to the Human Rights Council. What can such a tiny country possibly offer?

But seriously, does size really matter? (pause)

In our case; it does not.

We believe that Maldives has a unique story to tell. A small country which had just embraced a democratic system; one that was going through its own teething problems; raising above its weight, debating on hard issues and quite shortly; playing hard ball in Geneva.

We have shown our ability to the world through our work internationally but also through our unwavering commitment to democracy and human rights, despite the many challenges we continue to face.

So what successes can I share with you today to demonstrate that we deliver on our promises? What have we contributed as a member of the Human Rights Council?

Firstly we believe that we have demonstrated clearly our firm belief in the compatibility between Islam and human rights. In the current climate of 'islamophobia' and negative stereotyping we have nevertheless shown our commitment towards ensuring the rights of women and men and other vulnerable groups. Our Prophet through his own example promoted equity and partnership between men and women. Violence and degrading treatment was not to be condoned in any circumstances. Our country has seen the passing of landmark legislation prohibiting "domestic violence" and increased public awareness on this issue. At the Council, the Maldives was one of the countries that led establishment of a core group on Discrimination of Women in Practice and in Law. We in the Maldives have also demonstrated our commitment to the rights of children in

many ways. Maldives played a key role in negotiating the language and finalizing the text of the optional protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Secondly, under the leadership of our Ambassador Ms. Iruthisham Adam, known well to all of you, Maldives has been able to play a unique bridge building role in forging consensus on critical issues within the Human Rights Council. As the smallest country to ever sit on the Council, and as a Small Island Developing State, the Maldives brings a range of unique experiences that add value to the international system. If elected, we will continue to play this key role at the Council.

The confidence entrusted on us was most recently demonstrated in our election to the post of Vice Chair of the Council representing the Asian Group.

Thirdly, the Maldives has long been the champion of the impact of climate change highlighting to the world the impact it is already having on our beautiful islands and on our communities. This plea was first taken to the international community by H.E President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Since then the world has turned its attention to the case of our 'paradise' which may soon be lost unless urgent action is taken. The issue of climate change is one of the most pressing to impact on the human rights of our people as well as communities across the world. The Maldives submitted its first resolution on Human Rights and Climate Change during the 7th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2008 bringing the issue to the forefront of the Council's discourse. Maldives also adopted a follow up resolution during the 10th Session of the Council in March 2009. If we elected Maldives will continue to be the voice for the disempowered communities affected by climate change strongly advocating our 'right to survival'.

Distinguished Representatives

Looking at the Maldives human rights records we have made enormous strides in our over the past few years. With the launch of the ambitious Reform Agenda in 2004 by former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom we have made rapid strides towards a modern democracy ensuring better protection of human rights for all citizens. During the Reform phase Maldives signed and ratified all the key conventions including ICCPR and ICESCR. We have now signed the Convention on Enforced Disappearances and hope to ratify that soon.

Another key area for Maldives in ensuring the human rights and human dignity of the large number of migrant workers in our country. We are keen to address the shameful issue of 'human trafficking' which is now affecting us. In this regard we have now submitted 'anti-human trafficking legislation to parliament and will open a victim shelter to provide support to victims next week.

For a small country with limited technical and financial resources, treaty reporting continues to remain a challenge. Maldives has been working with OHCHR to address and we were among one of the first countries to adopt the Common Core Document.

Maldives has been widely recognized as progressive and forward looking given our open invitation to all Mandate holders of the Council. Indeed we were pleasantly surprised by the good response from the Mandate holders and the constructive engagement we have seen over the past few years. The most recent has been the visit by the Special Rapporteur on Independence of Judges and Lawyers just a few days back. The

challenges that our country faces are particularly acute in the area of the Judiciary, but our commitment is unwavering and we look forward to strengthening the key arms of Government as we consolidate and strengthen our democracy.

Distinguished representatives, Ladies and Gentleman

In conclusion, let me note that the Maldives membership of the Council has been catalytic in promoting human rights and strengthening of democracy in our country. This has been demonstrated by the commitment of the country to human rights and our unique democratic experience as a Muslim country and a Small Island Development state. We look forward to your support to re-electing us and to ensuring that the story of Maldives is one of success. We shall persevere despite the many challenges facing us.

If reelected Maldives pledges to continue to play an active role in the spirit of cooperation, inclusiveness and mutual respect to ensure that the Council functions as a credible and effective tool to bring tangible on the ground improvement to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms world wide.

In particular we pledge to

- 1) Continue to promote human rights internationally using the unique experience of a progressive Muslim democracy.
- 2) Promote gender and women's rights internationally and also continue our focus on child rights drawing on our experience.
- 3) Bring in the perspective of SIDS in particular continuing our role as an advocate on the devastation from climate change.

I thank you all.