

Statement by H.E. Dr. Mohamed Waheed

Vice President of the Republic of Maldives

2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009, Geneva

Thank you Mr. President,

It gives me great pleasure to be here to represent the new democratic Government of the Maldives. The country's first multi-party election in November 2008 ended thirty years of autocratic dictatorship. It is my duty to thank the international community which compelled the dictatorship in its last three years to allow the existence of political parties, accept the legitimacy of the UN Convention on Human Rights, ratify a liberal constitution and allow for the first multi-party presidential election.

It was however only during our last rally before the election in October 2008 when I felt with certainty that democracy was truly attainable. In the evening of this rally, the air was filled with resounding calls for change and as we ended the rally with prayers the rain poured down as if the flood gates of heaven had opened. Yet

not a soul moved. It was as if our hearts filled hitherto by fear and hatred were cleansed and got ready for a new beginning.

For many it was unbelievable that change had finally come. The next day, following the announcement of results there was total silence. No celebration. No crowds on the streets. The transition was calm and belied the dictator's pronouncement that the alternative to him was chaos. For those of us who were forced to live in exile, languish in prison and suffer the wretchedness of torture, the verdict of the election ended thirty long and brutal years.

What sustained us in our adversity and motivated our longstanding peaceful struggle for democracy was the belief of human rights as a fundamental entitlement for our people and a fatal poison for any dictatorial system.

I am therefore pleased to inform the Council that the new government of the Maldives is single mindedly focused on the rights-based path to an entrenched democracy. Under the dictatorship, the Maldives was governed to protect a small number who maintained their position through intimidation, deception, violence and torture.

Mr. President,

The challenge of the new government is to ensure that the fruits of democracy will be enjoyed for generations to come. This challenge is profound and the new government appeals to the international community to continue their support for this endeavour. Human Rights need to be mainstreamed into our system of governance and public consciousness. Our judiciary needs to develop basic competencies after decades of abject neglect and absence of justice. Our new parliamentarians need to develop the ability to legislate on their own after decades of rubberstamping a decrees from the President's Palace.

Our police need to learn methods of social control other than intimidation and the promulgation of fear. Our security apparatus needs to reorient itself from internal political control to the protection of our national security and natural resources. Political parties need to strengthen their internal democracy, articulate political ideology and learn how to develop alternative public policy.

The new government recently published the report and recommendations of the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture which were suppressed by the former regime. This report provides a blueprint for many of the remaining and

urgent reforms, including the failure of the dictatorship to implement its obligations under the international treaties it had signed.

The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression is currently in the Maldives assessing and offering recommendations on the development of the free press. Last month the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing visited to assess the impacts of climate change on our people. We also hope to welcome the Special Rapporteur on violence against women towards the end of the year.

The new government recently completed a first draft of a common core document for treaty reporting and will table reports under the Convention against Torture, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.

The new government wishes to support the role of the Office of the High Commissioner in promoting and protecting human rights in the Maldives. The new government hopes to be able to expand our cooperation by hosting a human rights workshop in the country and by receiving expert missions to assist with treaty reporting and training.

Last but not least, the Maldives remains committed to play a full and constructive role as an Observer of the Human Rights Council. The new government looks forward to receiving the Council's feedback and recommendations on human rights in the Maldives next year as part of the Universal Periodic Review process.

Mr. President

The other primary threat to our islands is climate change. Only days into our new government, the President met with demonstrators from an island village of 2,400 inhabitants. The night before, no adults slept on that island because they were all struggling to save their homes from coastal erosion. In addition, their ground water is contaminated with the infusion of the sea waters and their livelihoods are being threatened due to the destruction to tropical reefs.

The recently published report of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and Climate Change provides definitive recognition that climate change has significant negative implications for the full enjoyment of human rights in the Maldives and for millions of people in vulnerable countries in other Small Island States as well as among already vulnerable population groups such as women, children, minorities, and the poor.

With this report due to be considered at this Session, the Council now faces the difficult but vital and urgent task of deciding how to respond to this new reality.

We therefore implore the Council to send out a strong signal to the international community, especially the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Global warming undermines human rights and that any international response must be premised on fully promoting and protecting those rights.

For this reason the Maldives will look to table a follow-up resolution this month requesting a panel discussion on human rights and climate change to be held during the June Session.

I therefore call on the Council to give important consideration to our ongoing efforts to entrench democracy and to take steps that will make a meaningful difference to international efforts to confront and respond to global warming.

Thank you.