

Mr. President,

The Maldives delegation would like to thank the Special Rapporteur on violence against women for her excellent and thought-provoking report.

The Maldives delegation agrees that violence against women should not be viewed as a stand alone problem but as a component ~~of~~ and extension of the broader issue of gender inequality.

Like many countries, the Maldives unfortunately suffers from a prevalence of violence against women. However, such violence often goes unreported and unpunished.

In order to respond to this it is important to deal both with the specific issue of violence against women, and to deal with the broader societal causes and drivers of that violence – the political economy framework described by the Special Rapporteur.

In terms of the former, it is important, as a starting point, to respond to the widely-held public misconception in the Maldives that women are not discriminated against. It is also important to create an environment in which women who have suffered domestic violence are able to come forward. At present many do not because it is perceived as a shameful issue which brings disgrace and disrespect to the family.

Looking at the legal framework to prevent and deal with violence against women, there are at the moment no laws in force regarding domestic violence, there are no firm data on the extent of violence against women, and there are no specific laws covering sexual harassment ~~or spousal rape~~. These are clearly important gaps and the Government is determined to fill them. In that regard I am pleased to inform the Council that gender violence legislation is currently being drafted and will be submitted to Parliament later this year.

Turning to the broader political economy, it is clear that efforts to deal with violence against women will not succeed without broader changes in how society perceives and deals with women. For example, in the Maldives there has been a sharp decline in women's participation in the labour force since the late 1970s. Linked with this, over recent years there has been a rise in more strict interpretations of Islam which raises concerns about the suppression of women and the violation of their rights.

The Maldives believes that legal reform can play an important role in responding to these issues, however for such reforms to work, perceptions also need to change as does our response to unequal power relationships between the genders across socio-economic, legal and political realms.

This point was clearly evidenced during last year's Presidential elections in the Maldives. Although the election, under the new Constitution, was the first in which women were allowed to run for the Presidency; in the end not one of the eight candidates was a woman. This trend continued into last

month's parliamentary elections in which only 5 of 77 elected members were women.

The Maldives believes that these statistics matter because of the importance of providing positive role models for the role of women in society.

With this in mind, the Maldives delegation would like to ask the following two questions:

1. Does the Special Rapporteur, from other case studies, have recommendations on how to increase the number of female representatives in Government?
2. Does the Special Rapporteur, from other case studies, have recommendations on how best to use the positive example of female elected officials to reduce inequalities across the rest of society, inequalities which lie at the heart of and lead to violence against women?

Thank you.