

H.E. Ms Iruthisham Adam, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE MALDIVES

**JOINT STATEMENT BY MAURITIUS AND THE MALDIVES IN THE
INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE DURING THE ANNUAL DAY ON THE RIGHTS OF
THE CHILD**

Mr. President,

I have the honour to make the following statement on behalf of the Small Island Developing States Mauritius and the Maldives

Mr. President,

Mauritius and the Maldives both attach the highest importance to the promotion and protection of children's rights. In the African Report on Child Well-being 2008, Mauritius emerged as the most child-friendly government of Africa as a result of concrete actions being taken to protect the rights of children. Similarly, the strong progress made by Maldives in promoting children's rights drew the recognition of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Both countries therefore welcome this annual full day meeting on the rights of the child as an important opportunity to discuss combating sexual violence against children.

Mr. President,

Mauritius and the Maldives have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but both, as Small Island Developing States with limited resources, face challenges in fully implementing the principles and protection mechanisms contained therein. In this regard, a strong, clear and effective legislative framework covering children's rights is imperative.

With this in mind, the Maldives is currently finalizing a Bill on Children's Rights, Child Care and Protection which seeks to incorporate all the rights, principles and provisions contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law and make them enforceable before the courts. The Bill sets out the rights and obligations applicable to children, parents, community and the government, confers the Child and Family Protection Service with the

right to take a child out of a home where he or she is in need of care and protection, without the approval of the parents, and establishes a nationwide Child Protection System.

The Maldives has also, in 2008, amended the country's Sentencing Guidelines to introduce tougher sentencing for perpetrators of sexual abuse, including child abuse, following the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Finally, in November 2009, the Maldives marked the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by launching a new Child Helpline. The new confidential service has proved extremely successful. In its first month of operation alone, the Helpline received over 400 calls. Of these, 37 provided information leading to cases, 15 involving sexual abuse. Four of the calls were made by children themselves, three to report sexual abuse.

Similarly Mauritius, further to the latest recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, has begun drafting a Children's Bill to consolidate the various pieces of legislation covering all aspects of children's rights and to harmonize all laws in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially in the areas of adoption and juvenile justice. Last year Mauritius ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and is now making necessary arrangements to introduce new legislations and amending existing ones prior to ratifying the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

The office of the Ombudsperson for Children in Mauritius was established under the Ombudsperson for Children Act 2003. The objective of the office is to ensure that the rights, needs and interests of the children are given full consideration by public bodies, private authorities, individuals and associations for individuals, to promote the rights and best interests of children and to promote compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mauritius has amended the Child Protection Act in 2005 to introduce the offences of child trafficking, abandonment and abduction, with tough penalties. In 2007, a National Parental Empowerment Programme was launched to provide guidance to parents regarding the sexual education of their children. A Community Child Protection Programme was launched that same year and the construction of a residential drop-in centre for the rehabilitation of victims

of commercial sexual exploitation is envisaged. Closer collaboration has been established between the "Brigade de Protection des Mineurs" and the Ministry of Children's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare, and awareness-raising campaigns are carried out regularly in schools and through radio and television.

Mr. President,

Considering the importance of effective secondary legislative frameworks as mentioned, Mauritius and the Maldives would like to ask Ms. Susana Villarán de la Puente the following question:

What are the principal elements that should be included in core national legislation on children's rights and child protection, including from sexual violence in order to actually and meaningfully improve the lives of children on-the-ground? Clearly such legislation must do more than merely list the rights and principles contained in the Convention. It must rather make those rights and principles real for the children of a country and must establish effective prevention, enforcement and response mechanisms to combat sexual violence.

Mauritius and the Maldives would also be interested if the panellist could provide examples of best practice in this regard.

Thank you Mr. President.