

**Statement by**

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**Item 2: Panel on Access to COVID-19 Vaccines**

**49<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council**

**10 March 2022**

Thank you, Mr. President,

Allow me to start by thanking all the speakers for their invaluable contributions to this panel discussion on vaccine equity.

Mr. President,

The COVID-19 pandemic proves to be life threatening as new variants continue to evolve. The world is enduring the cumulative and interconnected health, economic, social and human rights issues stemming from this pandemic.

The Maldives is fully committed to ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access to the COVID-19 vaccines. To that end, at the start of 2021, the Government launched the COVID-19 national vaccination programme, offering free vaccination to all residents in the Maldives, regardless of nationality or legal status. At present, we have reached over 80 percent coverage of the eligible population. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our international partners for their generous contributions that led us to achieve this milestone.

Mr. President,

We whole-heartedly acknowledge the tireless work undertaken by several UN entities and the COVAX Facility to distribute vaccines around the world. However, we must redouble our efforts to overcome the challenges of accessibility, affordability and equity of vaccines and COVID 19 therapeutics faced by many, especially in the developing countries.

The Maldives believes that a multilateral solution is the best way forward to address current inequities. In this regard, an exceptional and time-bound waiver of certain intellectual property rights concerning vaccines and therapeutics will greatly enhance the affordable and equitable supply of medicines and therapeutics, including vaccines against COVID-19. Since no one is safe until everyone is safe, we urge all states to engage in constructive dialogue to ensure universal access to COVID-19 medicines and vaccines for all, and to leave no one behind.

I thank you.