

Statement by

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Bridging the Gap Side Event

Theme: Outcomes of multilateral environmental action in 2022 and the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment

52nd Session of the Human Rights Council

27 February 2023

Thank you very much,

Distinguished colleagues, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The last time I spoke at this Council on behalf of the Maldives, I spoke on human rights obligations related to the enjoyment of a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. It is a matter of great pride for me that today, we have achieved success.

Success in our collective efforts to recognize the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

In 2021, this Council achieved a historic milestone by recognizing that environmental rights are fundamental human rights. And I am proud to say that under the Maldivian Presidency of the 76th UN General Assembly, we also reaffirmed the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment through UNGA Resolution 76/300.

The Maldives has long championed the link between climate change and human rights. In 2008, together with like-minded countries – many of you here with me on the Panel – we sounded the alarm about the human cost of the climate crisis and initiated the first-ever debate at this Council on the human rights dimensions of climate change. It has been a long journey. A journey that was rarely walked back then. But, over time, garnered widespread support.

We must recognise the valuable contribution of numerous youth movements, local community groups, indigenous people, academia, and environmental human rights activists who have dedicated themselves to securing this right. This victory also belongs to you.

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

The year 2022 saw an unprecedented level of multilateral environmental action, with environmental sustainability included in high level discussions on everything ranging from food, transport, and oceans to urban development.

We all know and accept that climate change knows no borders. Addressing this crisis requires global collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to multilateralism. The formal recognition of the right to a sustainable environment has unlocked the full potential of the international community in addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

In COP27, we came together to establish a dedicated fund to assist developing countries in responding to loss and damage from climate change. This is a welcome

development, and the Maldives looks forward to working with the international community on the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund as soon as possible. In 2022, State Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework – a new global biodiversity framework which is a landmark demonstration of our collective commitment to addressing biodiversity loss. This year, I note, is also the halfway mark for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

While the goals are clear, my dear friends, much work needs to be done to help mobilise the finance needed to achieve them. The existing climate and development finance architecture is extremely complex and cumbersome. It is not equipped to operate efficiently, fairly, and at the speed and scale needed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, including Small Island Developing States.

The Maldives is already moving forward and doing its part to secure a sustainable future for our citizens. We have a target of net-zero emissions by 2030, one of the most ambitious nationally determined contributions of any country. We are well on our way to fully phasing out single-use plastics by 2023. In 2021, we were also the first developing country to successfully phase out HCFCs, 10 years ahead of the commitments outlined in the Montreal Protocol.

Recognizing the fundamental right to a healthy environment means comprehensive protection and accountability for a wide range of harms, faced particularly by vulnerable populations. At its core, the impacts of the triple planetary crisis are about humans – their lives, their livelihoods, and their rights. We know that all human rights are universal, interrelated, and interdependent. We cannot provide our people with safe housing if there is no land left to build it on, and we cannot promise them

a peaceful, secure future if our planet itself is under threat. A clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is essential to protecting human life, wellbeing, and dignity.

We have been successful in getting the right recognised. The question for us – the core group, and indeed the international community is, what next?

We need strong evidence-based approaches to fully integrate the right into our work, including on implementing the Rio Conventions, in the review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This can be done through a strong science-policy interface, strong coordination – recognising the interlinkages between the various environmental tracks and acting in cohesion and coordination.

For all its hardships, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that, when the world truly cares about an issue, we can come together to overcome immense challenges. I can think of no greater issue than the future of our planet. Let us join forces to deliver on the pledges we have made, and protect our collective right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

Thank you.