

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



**71<sup>st</sup> Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child  
Geneva, 11 – 29 January 2016**

**Review of the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of the Maldives  
19 January 2016**

**Statement by His Excellency Mohamed Anil,  
the Attorney General and Minister-in-charge of the  
Ministry of Law and Gender of the Republic of Maldives  
19 January 2015**

#### **OPENING REMARKS**

Mr Chairperson,

Distinguished members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalaam Alikum and Good Morning

My delegation and I are pleased to join you today, to present the responses provided by the Government of Maldives to the List of Issues raised by this esteemed Committee and on the progress the Maldives has made since our last reporting in 2007. We hope to hold a useful and constructive dialogue with the Committee and take back with us, your support that would strengthen our national efforts to fully implement the Convention.

Before I proceed any further, let me introduce my delegation: from my right, Dr. Ali Naseer Mohamed, the Foreign Secretary of the Maldives, Dr. Hala Hameed, Permanent Representative of the Maldives in Geneva.

1. Mrs. Mariyam Azra Ahmed, Minister of State for Law and Gender
2. Mrs. Fathimath Azza, Director General, Ministry of Education
3. Ms. Rishfa Rasheed, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Maldives in Geneva
4. Ms. Hawwa Shafeea Riza, Senior State Attorney, Attorney General's Office
5. Mrs. Aishath Rishmee, Assistant Director, Ministry of Health
6. Mr. Abdulla Ashraf, Assistant Director, Ministry of Law and Gender
7. Ms. Laila Shareef, Senior Desk Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Chairperson,

Last year, the Maldives celebrated fifty years of independence. It was fifty years of progress despite enormous challenges. And fifty years of struggle in coping with inherent vulnerabilities by building resilience of the nation, resilience of the communities, and most importantly, resilience of children.

It has been eighteen years since the Maldives presented the first Report on the implementation of the CRC to this esteemed Committee. Since then, much has changed. What has not changed, Mr Chairperson, is the Maldives unwavering commitment. The commitment to protect the rights of the child. And with that commitment, we have made significant progress.

The Maldives achieved five, out of the eight MDGs several years before the deadline.

Infant mortality has been reduced from 121 per 1000 live births in 1977 to just 7 in 2015.

Maternal mortality has been reduced from 680 per 100,000 live births, to just 34 in 2015.

Literacy rate has been increased from 70 percent in 1977 to over 98 in 2015.

Vaccine preventable diseases such as neonatal tetanus, whooping cough, polio, and diphtheria are non-existent.

Malaria has been successfully controlled for decades, and we continue to maintain low prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

Despite these successes, the Maldives is not complacent about the real challenges we face in sustaining the gains, and at the same time, accelerating progress at much faster rate.

The 2008 Constitution provides a solid legal framework for safeguarding and promoting the welfare and rights of the children. The new Constitution guarantees non-discrimination and equality. And it also guarantees State assistance and special protection for children against abuse and undue benefit from their labour.

The Government is also working on an ambitious legislative framework to strengthen the legal protection for children.

A new Child Rights Protection Bill, that has been submitted to the Parliament to replace the Rights of Children Act, will internalise the Convention into domestic law. The newly drafted Social Work Bill intends to introduce a care system, which harmonizes with the existing protection laws.

Another landmark legislation, the Juvenile Justice Bill, which is currently in the parliament, will modernize the juvenile justice system outlining comprehensive set of rights of a minor in conflict with the law.

The Gender Equality Bill, that once passed, will cement our national standards on gender equality and will make our policies consistent with the Convention on Rights of the Child.

The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2012), the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Abuse Act (2014), and Sexual Offences Act (2014) have strengthened the legal framework to protect women, children, and other vulnerable groups from violence and sexual abuse. The Child Helpline allows for nationwide toll-free reporting of incidences of abuse both by children the general public to report incidences of abuse. A registry of convicted child sex offenders has been recently published. Safe Homes have also been established across the country to prevent re-victimization and to provide psycho-social support to child victims.

More recently, the Maldives acceded to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children. This also outlaws involvement of children and already enlists it as higher level felony in the existing Anti-Human Trafficking Act (2013)

In addition to the structural measures, the Government recognises the importance of cultivating values that promote child rights. The Maldives, for example, achieved near universal school enrolment, including gender parity, several years before the country made primary and secondary enrolment compulsory.

The Maldives has maintained a high enrolment rate for both primary and secondary education. A key part of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom's "no child left behind" policy to ensure free education for every child in the country until 18 years of age. This is also reflected in the First Amendment to Child Rights Protection Act (2014) which provides the right to education without any discrimination. It also obligates the State to provide free primary and secondary education to all the children living in the Maldives. The policy also aims to address alternative pathways

incorporating skills education and training. The inclusive education policy has greatly enhanced access to education for children with disabilities. Establishment of 54 Specialized Education Needs units within the mainstream schools across country aims to eliminate systematic discrimination and provide equal opportunities for schooling.

By the end of 2016, it is envisioned that there will be at least one teacher trained to attend to children with special needs, in all schools across the country.

The Protection and Financial Assistance to Persons with Disabilities Act (2010) strengthened the protection and rights afforded to persons with disabilities. Early intervention centres have been established in Male' and three more atolls to provide early diagnosis, education and care for the children with disabilities. In addition, children with disabilities receive regular welfare assistance with specialized access to social housing schemes.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Maldives has made significant strides in establishing an environment where both infants and their mothers are well protected and the dangers of childbirth is minimised. The Maldives has established universal health insurance. There is sustained investment in improving the quality of access and delivery of health services through introduction of sea ambulances and training of doctors for General Practitioners services. Available evidence suggests that children's nutrition status has improved over the past decade and immunization coverage for the country on average has been maintained between 98 to 99 percent.

Mr. Chairperson,

Each day across the globe, we see children been recruited and drawn into ideological and foreign wars where they are stripped off their identity. The Maldives is not immune to this global menace. As a country that has maintained a policy of moderation and openness, we have always denounced such acts of terrorism. The recently enacted Anti-Terrorism Act makes it a criminal offence for anyone to take part in any illegal warfare anywhere in the world. Returnees would be subjected to strict monitoring and rehabilitation programme conducted by the State.

Mr. Chairperson,

The social framework, historic and traditional values have evolved over the decades, to be intimately linked to Islamic practices. And it follows, therefore, that Islam forms the basis of our Constitution, and all our laws. Calls to introduce values and practices that are contrary to the values of Islam will not be accepted by the people of Maldives. The Government works closely with all relevant stakeholders, including religious leaders, to promote the true Islamic values of tolerance and respect in our society, and our conviction to uphold the respect for human rights.

The State continues to provide alternative care for victims of abuse and neglect who has to be separated from their families to prevent further abuse. Since 2005 Children's home in Male' has been the main shelter for those children and one safe home in Male' and additional four safe homes in four different atolls have been established in early 2014. The main purpose of establishing safe homes in the atolls is to provide

immediate protection for the victims who will be removed from their immediate environment and also to ease congestion of the Children's Home in Male'. However, in order to provide better protection and care in more appropriate facilities, a new Children's home is being built in HulhuMale' and is expected to be in operation next month.

Foster care for children under State care has been continuously provided. The foster regulation, that is currently in place, will be replaced by Child Rights Bill will provide a strong legal backing to fostering. Children are currently handed over to the foster families when approved by a Foster Care Panel. Children under foster care are regularly monitored by the Ministry of Law and Gender until they turn 18 years of age. The State has recently increased efforts through mass media to promote the importance of fostering children and community responsibility in providing care for children in need.

Mr. Chairperson,

The progress that Maldives has achieved over the past few decades is, by any measure, remarkable. Yet, the advances are accompanied with significant challenges and emerging issues.

Among the most daunting challenges is the incredibly high economic cost of bringing the systemic changes envisioned in the 2008 Constitution. Providing the protection

services to a population of 340,000 dispersed into 188 islands that are spread in an area of 90,000 square kilometres in the Indian Ocean, is incredibly expensive.

Another significant challenge that hinders our progress is the speed of change. The young democratic system in the Maldives is replacing the conventional sources with new concepts less familiar to the society. These are changes that some democratic systems took centuries to build. The swift changes require adequate time for the country to develop a pool of human resources with sufficient capacity, to minimise the gaps and to transform the changes into norms in the society.

For the next fifteen years, the Maldives policy on child protection will be guided by the Sustainable Development Goals that was adopted by the world leaders in September last year. As we did with the MDGs, the Maldives will be relentless in its pursuit for the SDGs, well ahead of the deadlines.

The commitment of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom and his government in protecting and promoting the rights of children in the Maldives is unshakable. The President's pledge to champion child rights at national and international levels is not because it is an obligation; but because it is the right thing to do. We pledge to continue to improve our child protection system so that every child can realise her and his hopes and aspirations; to bring a smile to every child's face every day; and to equip every child with the power to shape her and his destiny.

Thank you, and Wassalaam Alaikum Warahmathullahi Wabarakathuh