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Permanent Mission of the Republic of Maldives
to the United Nations Office at Geneva

**60th Session of the
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
16 February – 6 March 2015**

**Introductory Statement by
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Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives
Head of Delegation at the Review of Maldives
(Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports)
27 February 2015**

Check Against Delivery

Madame Chair

Distinguished members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalaam Alaikum and good morning.

On behalf of the Government, allow me at the outset, to convey to this esteemed committee, our steadfast commitment to the promotion and protection of women's rights which has always remained a key priority of the Government of Maldives.

Let me take this opportunity to convey to this committee the progress achieved and the main challenges faced by the Maldives in the advancement of women and the commitment of the Government in implementing the CEDAW in line with the domestic legislative framework, and the Constitution of Maldives. The Maldives welcomes the comments received for its 2nd and 3rd Combined report submitted to the CEDAW

Committee and acknowledges the reports submitted by individual organizations and Civil Society. The Government acknowledges and appreciates the role of NGOs such as Hope for Women as well as National Institution, Human Rights Commission of Maldives, in promoting CEDAW and protecting the rights of women.

I also would like to note the responses provided by the Government to the List of Issues raised by this Committee. We hope that we are able to conduct a constructive dialogue with the esteemed Committee today and take back with us suggestions and recommendations that would strengthen our national efforts to fully implement the stipulations of the CEDAW.

Madame Chairperson,

Please allow me to introduce my delegation. I am proud to lead a delegation that gives a glimpse to the prominent role women play in national development in the Maldives. With me I have:

1. Dr. Hala Hameed, Minister of State for Law and Gender
2. Ms. Geela Ali, Minister / Chargé d'affaires, Maldives Mission
3. Ms. Fathimath Azza, Director General, Ministry of Education
4. Dr. Mariyam Jenyfa, Senior Medical Officer, Ministry of Health
5. Ms. Rishfa Rasheed, Counsellor, Maldives Mission
6. Ms. Shiuneen Rasheed, First Secretary, Maldives Mission
7. Ms. Aminath Shirani Naeem, Director, Ministry of Law and Gender

We strongly believe that equality of women in all walks of life, within the family, and in public life, is indeed a prerequisite for social justice and inclusive development that benefits all segments of society.

Madame Chair,

The Maldives has made significant strides in eliminating discrimination against women. The 2008 Constitution of the Maldives guarantees the same rights and freedoms to both men and women and upholds the principles of non-discrimination and equality. The enactment of the Constitution marked an important milestone in the political empowerment of women and laid down the building blocks necessary to safeguard women's rights in a modern and globalized environment. The Government of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom came to office in November 2013 with a manifesto outlining two key policies relating to women's rights: the empowerment of women, socially, economically and politically, and zero tolerance for violence against women. The six pledges that follow from these two policies are, eliminating barriers for women to join the work force; fostering opportunities for women's participation in political sphere; enhancing economic empowerment of women; adopting zero tolerance to violence and harassment against women through the enactment of relevant legal instruments; protecting families from experiencing negative consequences from divorce; and, ensuring equal distribution of matrimonial property after divorce.

Though a small country with limited resources and faced with both old and new challenges, the Maldives has stood firmly in its efforts to promote the rights of women and will continue to do so. Nationally extensive work has been undertaken at the institutional level to improve the legislative framework and legal safeguards that protect the rights of all in the society, especially women. I am particularly pleased to highlight the significant strides achieved over recent years including the enactment of Sexual Harassment and Abuse Prevention Act and Sexual Offences Act that were ratified by the President in May 2014. These two legislations complement the Domestic Violence and Prevention Act of 2012, which is an important piece of legislation that has filled a vacuum in our legal system and marked a major step forward in Government's efforts to protect women against violence. In addition, the new Penal Code of the Maldives which will come into force in April this year comprehensively defines all crimes including that of rape.

I am pleased to note that the legislative developments above were important Concluding Observations of this Committee in 2007, in its review of the combined 2nd and 3rd Report of the Maldives.

Madame Chair,

Eliminating the inequality gap between men and women is one of the top most issues on the agenda of the Government. In this regard, the progress Maldivian women have made in the areas of education, employment, health and other fields are significant. When the Maldives first ratified the CEDAW our domestic laws needed revisions in order to fully comply with the convention. The 2008 Constitution removed the gender bar that prevented women from contesting for President. Consequently, the Maldives withdrew its reservation to Article 7a of the Convention, enabling eligibility for Maldivian women to contest in all governance structures. The Government is also working towards the partial withdrawal of its reservation to Article 16 of the Convention. The Government is committed to complete the formalities that are required to this effort.

Madame Chair and Distinguished members of the Committee

The Gender Equality Law (Bill) is one of the most important Bills in the national legislative agenda of this Government. The said Bill which was formulated with the technical support of Asian Development Bank, the Maldives is looking into domesticizing most of the parts of CEDAW. The legislation is aimed at promoting gender equality, and prohibiting gender discrimination, including gender-based violence. It will also ensure equal opportunities for boys and girls in accessing and benefitting from education, training, learning and acquisition of skills and knowledge and benefit from scientific and technological studies, inventions and innovations. While the Government is committed to improving the domestic legislative framework to safeguard the rights of vulnerable groups in the society, we firmly believe that enactment of laws does not go far enough. While it sets up the institutional base the implementation and enforcement of laws and cultivating a culture of respect and eliminating stereotypical ideas within

community is as important in ensuring gender equality and the protection of rights of women in society.

Madam Chair,

Gender Focal Points have been appointed in all ministries, departments, and public companies, and we have begun training them on gender mainstreaming tools in order to incorporate the concluding observations of CEDAW in their sectoral work. Due attention will be given to sectors such as social protection and livelihoods. The Government has been working with various partners on the gender diagnostic of these sectors and we hope to follow it up with appropriate policy and programming.

Distinguished Members of the Committee;

I would also like to thank CEDAW Committee for drawing attention to some of the specific areas for intervention. With reference to the List of Issues, I would now like to share the measures undertaken and progress made towards ensuring some of the key rights of women.

The Infant and Maternal Mortality Rate when compared within the last 10 years have been significantly reduced. The Infant Mortality Rate in 2002 was 18 per 1000 live births and in 2012, this rate decreased to 9 per 1000 live births. Similarly, Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in 2002 stood at 160 per 100000 live births and decreased to 13 per 100000 live births in 2012. One of the positive developments on women's reproductive health rights is the medical termination of pregnancy within 120 days of conception, permitted by the Islamic Fiqh Academy for pregnancies resulting certain circumstances such as rape.

Further, a number of programmes have been focused on youth, adolescents and adults in creating awareness on family planning, importance of contraceptives and reproductive health of both men and women. Health facilities have been established in islands and

Atolls to provide better access to health services throughout the country. The National Family Planning Guideline ensures that every citizen has the right to reach out for family planning services.

It is my pleasure to note that the Maldives has made significant progress in ensuring gender equality in recent years. Gender gaps in education have shown a marked decline. Gender parity has been achieved in literacy rates, enrollment, and attainments at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Girl children are in fact the majority high achievers in both primary and secondary education. 59% of Top Ten Achievers of GCSE O Level are girls. In secondary education, the best ten students of the year 2012 comprised of 60 percent girls. In 2013, the best students of the year comprised of about 59 percent girls. In tertiary education, graduates of 2014 March comprised of 71 percent girls. Graduates of 2014 August, comprised of 69 percent girls. Similarly, 59 percent of the students studying in different Higher Education Institution are girls.

Madame Chair

The Maldives is a vibrant and energetic society, with both men and women contributing to the development of the country. In order to facilitate greater contribution by women the Government has recently introduced flexible working hours allowing pregnant women and women with children under the age of three to apply to work from home through a standardized approach. Furthermore, the Amendments to the Civil Service Regulations in 2014 now allows for the entitlement of a total of 60 days, excluding public holidays and weekends, as maternity leave. The Maldives Monetary Authority (Central Bank) has also recently set in procedures allowing for six-month maternity leave with full pay. Furthermore, in order to increase women's representations in public companies board of the Capital Market Development Authority amended the Corporate Governance Code mandating all registered companies to hold a minimum of two female representatives in the Board of Directors. Currently, 13 out of 59 Board Members of companies with government shares are women.

Government is well aware of some of the emerging trends and stereotypical practices such as child marriages and non-vaccination of infants, though cases are few in number. Although there are no official reports on the number of such cases the Government is committed to work together with authorities in addressing these issues. The Government had announced the enforcement of relevant legislations and appropriate safeguards to promote and protect rights of children, girls and women from practices of under aged or forced marriages as well as non-vaccination of infants.

Madame Chair and Distinguished members of the Committee

The Maldives has always been a strong supporter of the international human rights framework especially the treaty mechanisms. As a Small Island Developing State we face enormous challenges in meeting treaty reporting deadlines as well as comprehensively implementing the treaty obligation fully. Nonetheless, the Maldives remains one of the few countries that have ratified 7 of the 8 core international human rights treaties and CEDAW remains one of the most important nationally. Since its ratification and to present day, the Maldives has overcome significant challenges faced in ensuring gender equality and the protection of women's rights. We continue to face new and emerging challenges including issues related to religious extremism. Nonetheless our successes are immeasurable and our commitment unflinching.

I thank you Madame Chair.