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Statement by

His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid

**Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Republic of Maldives**

at the

Sixth Session

of the

**Human Rights Council of the
United Nations**

20th September 2007



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Mr. President,

It is a privilege and a pleasure for me to address the 6th Session of the Human Rights Council, and I thank you for this opportunity.

Mr. President,

Today's Statement is my first as Foreign Minister of the Maldives and it is with good reason that I have chosen to make my inaugural foreign policy speech here in Geneva before the distinguished Members of the Human Rights Council.

The Maldives has enjoyed rapid economic growth and social development over the past two decades. Nonetheless, the Government believes that socio-economic progress must be supported by a substantial governance framework that respects and protects individual rights and liberties. Human rights must not only exist, they must be felt and enjoyed by individuals if society is to evolve in a peaceful and sustainable manner.

Conscious of this reality, the Government is currently embarked on a sweeping programme of constitutional and democratic reform designed, in essence, to guarantee the full and effective protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Government, I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the successful completion of the Reform Agenda, embarked



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upon by the Government in 2004. Indeed, it is my firm belief that the momentum behind reform is now unstoppable and irreversible.

August's historic referendum to choose between a parliamentary or presidential form of Government represented a major step forward towards the completion of the revised Constitution – a key pillar of the wider reform programme. The high voter turn-out, the active involvement of the country's youth, and the fact that women were well represented as voters, polling officials and party agents, all demonstrate the continued interest of all Maldivians in the politics of the country and their continued enthusiasm for the democratic process.

Mr. President,

It is equally clear to me that foreign policy, and in particular our relations with international organisations, donor States, and non-governmental organisations, has a vital supporting role to play in helping the Maldives complete the reform programme and bolster respect for human rights. In a globalised world, the lines demarking borders and protecting sovereignty have become blurred. The world is no longer made up of separate, isolated sovereign States, but rather by a community of inter-connected and inter-dependent nations. Nowhere is this new reality more self-evident than the Maldives where our reliance on foreign tourists and our vulnerability to climate change make open and constructive engagement with the outside world not only desirable but essential.

This understanding, together with our need for technical and capacity-building support, has driven the Government's determination to engage, to the greatest possible degree, with the international community in the implementation of the Reform Agenda. The recent ratification of the two core human rights Covenants,



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the extension of an Open Invitation to Special Procedures to visit the country, and the Government's request for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to appoint a national Human Rights Advisor for the Maldives, are all practical demonstrations of this determination. Each of these steps serves to further promote and bolster the domestic reform programme and in-so-doing serves to further guarantee individual rights and freedoms.

Mr. President,

Further building on these steps, I would like to take this opportunity to publicly announce the Government's decision to sign the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities next month with the result that, when ratified, the Maldives will be party to eight of the nine Core International Human Rights Instruments.

Mr. President,

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I am determined that our engagement with the international human rights community will continue and indeed will intensify over the coming months and years. The reform programme upon which the Government is embarked is irreversible; and so is our determination to work with international bodies such as the Human Rights Council and the OHCHR to make those reforms a success.

Mr. President,

I would also like to use today's Statement to raise an issue of the utmost importance to the Maldives; an issue which has immediate and far-reaching



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implications for the human rights of all Maldivians. That issue is climate change.

Mr. President,

There is now a clear scientific consensus that global warming is real, that it is accelerating, and that it is very likely human induced. There is also a clear understanding that climate change is already causing severe environmental degradation, especially in low-lying small island nations like the Maldives.

In April of this year, the United Nations Security Council took the bold and far-sighted step of convening a first ever debate on climate change, based on the premise that global warming poses a threat to human security. In my address to the Security Council, I highlighted the dangers posed by global warming and climate change to small low-lying nations such as the Maldives. Though encouraged by increased global awareness of the issue, I emphasised that it is time we put our words into deeds.

The Maldives believes that global warming also has clear human rights implications including with respect to the right to self determination, the right to take part in cultural life, the right to use and enjoy property, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to water, the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the right to development and even the right to life itself.

As the international community prepares to launch, in December of this year, a major new phase of talks aimed at reaching global agreement on combating climate change, it is imperative that governments and international organisations



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do not lose sight of the individual human impact of global warming. For that reason the Maldives will host, in November, a Small Island States conference on “The Human Dimension of Climate Change”. For the same reason, the Maldives considers it imperative that the Human Rights Council, the main international body responsible for promoting, in a universal and non-selective manner, respect for *all* human rights, sends out a clear message that it is mindful of and concerned by the human rights implications of global warming.

The Maldives therefore calls on the Human Rights Council to convene, during 2008, a debate on human rights and climate change. The Maldives suggests that this debate be preceded by an informal meeting during which the relationship between climate change, environmental degradation and human rights can be analysed and discussed.

Thank you Mr. President