

**Speech by the  
Minister of Environment and Energy,  
Dr. Mariyam Shakeela  
on Intergovernmental Conference,  
Tbilisi+35: Environmental Education for  
Sustainable Development**



**Date: September 6-7, 2012  
Subject: Introductory Input  
Length of speech:10-15 minutes**

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

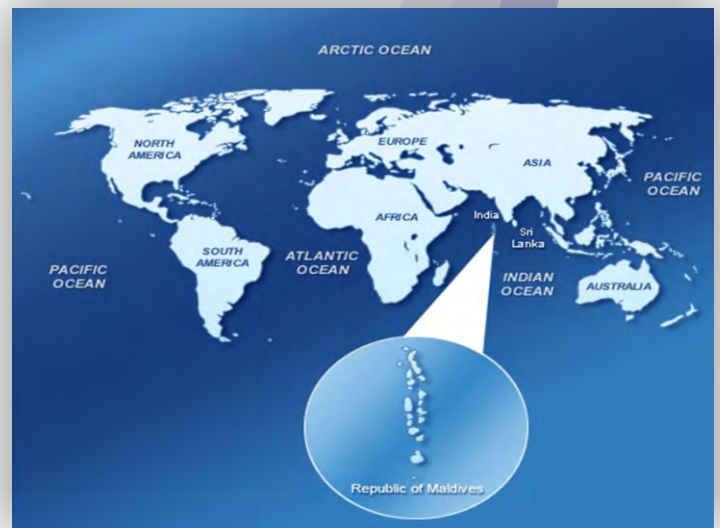
Assalaam Alaikum, and a very good afternoon to you.


Let me begin by thanking the Government of Georgia on behalf of my Government and its people, for giving us the opportunity to represent Maldives in Tbilisi+35. It gives me immense pleasure to visit your beautiful country and to take part at this very important gathering.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am here today from the Republic of Maldives, a country so tiny that you need a magnifying glass even to see it on a map. Out of its 1190 islands, scattered across Indian Ocean, only 200 are inhabited and another 105 are developed as tourist resorts. 80% of its land is just over a meter above sea level, and the highest point is not more than 2.5 meters above sea level.

If you see anything else higher than 2.5 meters you can bet it's a man made structure or a rubbish pile. We are also one of those nations whose very existence is threatened by climate change and related issues. While we occupy top place in many people's travel list as a holiday paradise, we also find ourselves occupying that place simply because travelers see us as a must place to visit before we disappear. Looking at this with humor one can say that this is a great boost to our tourism as people rush to us. But as someone who has personally experienced the Tsunami on Boxing Day of 2004, this is not a laughing matter. The irony here is our contribution to the cause of climate change is only 0.003% and yet the need to address the issue is far greater for us than anyone else here. We in Maldives are optimistic and determined to do what we can to see that it does not happen. But we need the support of all of you to join hands together to help us and all other potentially vulnerable countries.



<b>COUNTRY OVERVIEW</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1190 islands</li><li>• 200 inhabited islands</li><li>• 105 islands as resorts</li><li>• Total area : 90,000 sq km</li><li>• Total Land area : 900 sq km</li><li>• Population: 350,000 approx.</li><li>• Economy: Fishing and Tourism</li></ul>

The image shows a 'COUNTRY OVERVIEW' section. On the left is a map of the Maldives, a long, narrow chain of islands. A vertical blue line indicates a length of 823 km, and a horizontal blue line indicates a width of 130 km. The map is labeled 'REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES' at the bottom. On the right, there is a list of key facts about the country.

Despite the idealistic concepts set decades ago, and despite our continued efforts since the Tbilisi Declaration, to integrate the concept of sustainable development into our education framework, we are still living in a world that does not promise a secure future. Most recently in Rio, we resolved to embrace the concepts of sustainability and improve our education system in pursuit of sustainable development. Today here in Tbilisi as we sit and discuss, one of the pressing questions in our mind, is how could we attain a sustainable world? What strategies and treaties would help us? Let us face the reality that, signing treaties and making agreements alone will not solve our problems. While some progress has been made, it is sad to state that the international community as a unified voice has so far failed to take sufficient action and does not have the collective will to take tangible action and prevent catastrophic climate change. We need to take action. We need to curb our own irrational acts, adopt a holistic approach that will transform people's psychological, economic and social perceptions, show commitment and responsibility, and not just stop at agreeing to all these declarations. But in Maldives, and other such defenseless states, non-action is not an option for us, and so we raise our voice wherever we could.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a country with one of the most delicate island environments, and extremely fragile marine ecosystems in the world, we have numerous issues which if I start listing would be so large that I would be standing here even tomorrow. So, to summarize; we are threatened by rising surface temperatures, severe coastal erosion and sea level rise, and absence of waste management systems, and these issues pose key development challenges for the country. Maldives also lacks hugely in natural resources and rely heavily on tourism and fisheries, where most people are employed. Unsustainable practices from both tourism and fisheries would render our natural resources unfit for use. Protecting our environment is therefore, crucial for our survival and we, the Government of Maldives, is strongly committed to establish, strengthen and maintain a sustainable environment, through education and whatever other means possible.



## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES



Maldives has set a goal to become carbon neutral by 2020 and one of the objectives is to promote renewable energy. Although not even remotely close to what we require, we have managed to harness renewable energy, and several projects are underway. Feed-in-tariff mechanism is already introduced and we are busy working on an investment plan that will see us achieve the target if we manage to draw sufficient support for this. CFC has been completely eradicated way ahead of time and HCFC will also be eradicated by the World Environment Day of 2020.

I am also proud to state that Maldives has taken huge steps to integrate active Environmental Education for Sustainable Development measures within the community, by involving public-private partnerships together with island communities, political organizations, educational establishments, the business community, various associations, clubs, institutions and NGO's. Through them we engage in a variety of activities to furnish our youth and community members and leaders, with the knowledge and skills to proactively protect and govern the natural resources.

## COASTAL EROSION



- Of the 194 inhabited islands, 113 have reported beach erosion.
- The sand at the beach and the shore line are being washed off at a greater rate than it is accreted on many islands.
- The process of coastal erosion and accretion is extremely complex with inter-relations to oceanographic, climatic, geological, biological and terrestrial processes with human intervention affecting the growth and the stability of the reefs and island structures.

## VULNERABILITY TO CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEA LEVEL RISE



- More than 80% of the islands in Maldives are less than a meter above mean sea level (MHAHE 2001),
- 73% of islands have buildings less than 100 feet from shores.
- Flooding is common due to wave exacerbation during storm surges.
- Loss of beaches and infrastructure due to accelerated erosion will devastate the tourist resorts and inhabited islands.

## SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL



- The majority of inhabited islands do not have adequate waste management facilities
- Maldives generates 324,000 tonnes of waste annually
- This volume increases by 30% each year, generated by the locals and tourists
- Island waste management centres are rarely used and random disposal of waste is a common practice

Maldives

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Through collective efforts of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Environment and Energy, by 2002, Maldives had achieved universal primary education goals (MDG2). Lower secondary education is offered in 188 out of 200 islands, higher secondary education is available from 38 schools in 18 atolls and we have achieved a literacy rate of 98%. Environment Studies was mainstreamed into the National Curriculum in 1984 and it was made a mandatory subject, from year 1-5, with 6 sessions per week. Furthermore, the curriculum also focuses on the environment through other subjects such as general science, social studies and fisheries science, and it is being constantly reviewed and updated to keep up with the changing times. At the same time the focus is also on a long-term education strategy to strongly promote the need for personal initiatives and social participation, and to achieve sustainability through widespread understanding of the interdependence and fragility of ecological systems. Our latest curriculum further incorporates and emphasizes values relating to the environment and sustainable practices as a key competency from kindergarten through to year 12, and as I speak, a special large scale training has been initiated for teachers to deliver this curriculum. At the National University, Bachelors in Environmental Management has also been introduced.

Furthermore, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, "Climate Change Advocacy Camps" will be implemented in four different atolls this year, and projects are underway to revive and strengthen the 'eco clubs' of schools and to initiate a "Green Award" which we believe will be an incentive for students and teachers to play a more dynamic role and instigate a greener and sustainable lifestyle.

Through existing environment clubs and through schools, we celebrate special occasions such as the World Environment Day, organize workshops and various competitions and motivate students through awards and prizes. As a result of all these efforts, our youngsters are aware of the threats that the environment is facing and of the relevance of

## WATER POLLUTION



- Land---based pollution sources
  - Contamination from solid waste
  - Untreated Sewage and Wastewater disposal
  - Agriculture/mariculture
- Sea/Marine---based pollution sources
  - Oil pollution
  - Eutrophication
  - Ballast water

## Coral Reefs of the Maldives



- The coral reefs of the Maldives are 7<sup>th</sup> largest in the world
- Maldives has around 2000 fascinating coral reefs
- Every island and every atoll is surrounded by coral reefs that serve as natural barriers that protect the islands. Renewable
- Coral reefs are also home to many sea animals and plants

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



Despite the various programs we have established, relatively speaking, Education for Sustainable Development is still a fairly new focus for education in the Maldives. Besides geographical difficulties, we also face challenges due to lack of capacity for funding, technical assistance, absence of skilled educators among the islands, and lack of adequate resource materials to develop and implement necessary programs. We as a small nation, whose very existence is threatened by environmental challenges, seek assistance to implement some of the planned programs.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Maldives we realize that conventional education is no longer enough and that education has to be beyond just a lesson taught in school in order to establish a green culture among youth, and thus, affirm a sustainable environment. We need to provide lifelong learning opportunities, with the essential elements of moral philosophy for conceptual change, revolutionize thinking, and create from among our students, the next generation of environmentally conscious, responsible 'green citizens' who, in future, in their specialized professions as affluent decision makers will bear substantial ethical responsibility for mankind's impact on nature. It is our moral duty to convince our youngsters that they are very much part of the problem, and therefore they have to become a very important component of the solution to ensure a greener, cleaner future for our children's children, and generations yet to come.

In closing, I would like to extend an invitation to all of you to visit us in Maldives, not because you feel it is going to disappear from the face of the earth, but because you want to come and see a country that, despite its challenges, is resilient, determined and optimistic to achieve sustainable development.

Thank you for your attention!



- Climate Change Advocacy Camps in 4 islands
- Introduce a Green Award
- Reviving Eco-clubs
- Renewable Energy programs

