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**Embassy of the Republic of Maldives**



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**Country Statement delivered by His Excellency Ahmed Khaleel,  
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs,  
at the 78th Session of the Economic and Social Commission  
for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)  
Agenda item 2 (a) General debate: “A common agenda to advance  
sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”  
23-24 May 2022**

Good morning/afternoon, Madam Chairperson and distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the Maldives delegation, let me extend my delegation’s warm greetings to Executive Secretary Armida Alisjabana and the member states of UNESCAP on the 75th anniversary of the Commission. I would also like to congratulate the Commission and its secretariat for the very useful and substantial contribution made by this Commission to the development of the region over the past 75 years. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to ESCAP for the very comprehensive theme study prepared for the consideration of this Commission Session. My delegation recognizes the challenges we face in building back better and takes note of the very useful recommendations in the study.

**Madam** Chairperson,

The past two years were unlike any other the Maldives has ever seen. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the full extent of our vulnerabilities. Our economy, largely based on tourism, came to an abrupt halt. Businesses were shut, schools were closed and many of our development projects had to be put on hold. Our scarce resources had to be diverted to fighting Covid-19.



**Madam** Chairperson,

Despite the debilitating impact of the pandemic, the saying that “every cloud has a silver lining” is true even in the case of Covid-19. It gave us the opportunity to concentrate and improve our healthcare system. Consequently, 90 public sector investment projects in the health sector including 13 new hospitals are planned for this year. These projects will improve the healthcare services available to our public who already benefit from universal health coverage.

The pandemic also served as a reminder that no one is safe until we are all safe. The Maldives has vaccinated 80% of residents regardless of nationality or legal status in the country, yet we cannot feel safe unless those with whom we interact are also vaccinated. We fully support the calls to declare vaccines a global public good with equitable access to all.

**Madam** Chairperson,

While we are preoccupied with Covid-19 we should not forget that Climate Change poses an even greater threat to humanity than the pandemic. Coastal areas and small island states such as my country have already started feeling the devastating impact of global warming.

The Maldives is an archipelago of 1200 coral islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean. It is the lowest-lying country in the world with an average ground elevation of less than 5 feet above sea level. Even the slightest rise in sea level has a huge impact on the Maldives.

Urgent measures are needed to tackle global warming if we are to avert the impending climate catastrophe. We are extremely worried by the IPCC’s finding that the world is not on track to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius in line with the Paris Agreement. The target is still achievable but only with immediate and deep emission reductions across all sectors. As noted by Maldives’ President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih at the 26th Session of the Conference of Parties held in Glasgow “if the rise in temperature remains unchecked at 1.5 and jumps to 2 degrees; that would be a death sentence for the Maldives”. We know of climate action by the international community. But more needs to be done and on an urgent basis.



On the 16th of this month, Maldives hosted an event to launch the Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the Global Goal on Adaptation. With this work programme in place, it is our sincere hope that countries will muster the necessary political will to reach the 1.5 degree target; that the gaps in adaptation funding will match the climate change challenges that we face today; and that funds will be allocated in such a way that they could be accessed more easily and in a more timely manner. We cannot continue to fund our adaptation needs from our already strained budgets.

**Madam** Chairperson,

Tackling the three overlapping crises identified in the theme study for this session would indeed be a challenge for any country. But it is a challenge we must take head-on. We must ensure that we pass on a planet that is green, blue and vibrant to our children.

I thank you.