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## EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES IN THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND

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### **Agenda Item 2: Environment and development in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region**

On behalf of the Maldives delegation, I wish to express sincere appreciation for the comprehensive presentation and for the substantive reports issued under this agenda item for our consideration.

The year 2020 may one day be viewed as a pivotal moment in humanity's effort to address many issues – the loudest wake-up call the world has yet received. While the lockdown has been beneficial for the environment with sharp declines in the carbon emission, COVID-19 has spared no country, rich or poor by exposing the vulnerabilities of our health, social systems and the fragility of our economies and the environment.

The Maldives, a chain of coral reefs and coral islands, is custodian to one of the most diverse and unique marine biodiversity ecosystems in the world. Our reefs and islands also provide a safe haven to numerous species of migratory birds and other marine species. The economy and the livelihoods of the people of Maldives are largely dependent on the marine and coral reef biodiversity. There are few examples in the world where an entire nation's wellbeing is so strongly linked to its marine natural resource base. For such a country, any threat to its biodiversity means adverse impacts on its future development.

In our commitment to protect and conserve biodiversity, we have declared 3 atolls as Biosphere Reserves, in order to protect biologically and ecologically significant habitats and breeding grounds. We are also protecting wetlands and mangroves and their biodiversity in the country. We have a Migratory Bird's Regulation that gives protection to all migratory species of birds, which has been in effect since 2014. The import of bird species as pets is also controlled through regulations.

In the recent past, Maldives has made substantial progress towards mainstreaming biodiversity concerns into national development planning. As such, we have many regulations and enacted legislation, particularly the Environmental Protection and Preservation Act to ensure conservation of biological resources and build the legal framework for minimizing the impacts of developmental practices. We have incorporated biodiversity to most of the Island Developmental Plans and sector plans of all government organizations. However, mainstreaming biodiversity in the private sector and making it a priority at national level still remains a challenge.

Maldives is working at the forefront of climate change and committed to contributing effectively to the efforts at forging common and united action. Continuous efforts are being undertaken to increase adaptation and mitigation actions and opportunities especially for SIDS, and to undertake low emission development. The current administration intends to increase the country's share of renewable energy to 70% of the peak load by 2030. My government plans to achieve it through policy interventions and as part of achieving energy policy goals and targets to provide clean energy across the country.

In September 2019, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih also presented an ambitious initiative, the Climate Smart Resilient Islands Initiative (CSRI) which calls for a holistic approach for islands to address climate change in the context of sustainable development, through utilizing natural solutions, promoting innovation and new technologies with associated capacity building, and enhancing access to finance. As part of this initiative, we are also opting for more sustainable ways of providing clean water and sewerage options, manage waste better and reduce pollution on land and sea.

With respect to the regional dialogue and best practices, Maldives is practicing sustainable fisheries and working with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission for better fish stock management. We are also collaborating with regional partners on the Blue Economy for sustainable use of ocean resources for socioeconomic development. Further, Maldives is exploring opportunities for collaboration in knowledge sharing, research and studies as well as financing, for protection of biodiversity, waste management, renewable energy and resource use in the country.

As an import dependent country, a critical concern for us is food security. My government has embarked on strengthening food security and opt for new technology in agriculture which is more sustainable and less harmful for the environment. The plan is to harness innovative, climate resilient technologies to achieve sustainability of rural livelihoods, with a focus on climate-smart agriculture and fisheries development.

Despite the many strides made by the Maldives within a very short timeframe, it is evident that Maldives has not reached its full potential and more importantly, that the benefits of this development has not reached all Maldivians. A country whose livelihoods, depends on the fragile natural environment remain extremely vulnerable to external economic and environmental shocks. As we build back our communities, economies and institutions from the COVID 19 pandemic's impacts, let us keep in mind to prioritize our actions and put sustainability at the forefront.

I thank you.