

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



**Statement by  
His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom,  
President of the Republic of Maldives,  
at the State Banquet hosted in his honour by the  
President of the Republic of Singapore,  
His Excellency Mr. S. R. Nathan**

The Istana, Singapore  
Thursday, 18 January 2007

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

*Your Excellency Mr. S. R. Nathan, President of the Republic of Singapore,  
Madam Nathan, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

If there is a home away from home for me, it would certainly be Singapore. For every so often over the past 26 years, I have visited your beautiful country. In addition to numerous private visits, I have had the privilege of making a State Visit to Singapore in 1981 and two official visits in 1989 and 1998.

I have always associated Singapore with superior standards of hospitality and, indeed, the warm welcome and excellent arrangements that the Government of Singapore has made for me, my wife and the members of my delegation, have touched us deeply. I thank you and your government.

*Your Excellency:*

As a frequent visitor to Singapore, I have had the opportunity to tour many of the country's landmarks, savour its cultural richness, observe the rapid social and economic development taking place in Singapore, and of course, meet its friendly people.

Singapore is a country that is held in high esteem by the people of the Maldives. It is a model of economic development and progress. It is also an example of the heights to which a small country can rise, with a backdrop of stable governance and stable commitment to the development of the nation. Singapore is a country from which we in the Maldives are learning many valuable lessons.

*Your Excellency:*

The Maldives and Singapore are old friends and allies. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries nearly 31 years ago, we have found numerous ways to strengthen bilateral relations and development cooperation.

The two countries have collaborated actively in many international and regional bodies, including the UN, the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

Singapore is today one of our most important development partners. It has been contributing to our national development in various areas of importance, including the development of human resources in key sectors such as communications, healthcare and education, and police and security-related training. Economic and trade ties between the Maldives and Singapore have also expanded tremendously over the past decade.

We have benefited greatly from the growing interest of Singaporean investors. Today, there are major Singaporean investments in our tourism and hotel industry. The Maldives In-flight Catering Company – a joint venture between the Maldives Airports Company and the Singapore Airport Terminal Services – and in operation for almost eighteen years is a symbol of Maldives-Singapore cooperation. The Hulhule' Island Hotel is yet another successful example of such a partnership.

I am confident that this visit will generate further interest in the Maldives among Singaporean investors.

*Your Excellency:*

The close ties that exist between the two countries were further demonstrated in the aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami disaster, by

the prompt humanitarian assistance and support extended to us by the Government and people of Singapore. I wish to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to you, Mr. President, and to the Government of Singapore, for that generous support and assistance.

The package of assistance that Singapore extended to us after the tsunami consisted of three desalination plants, a school and a clinic. I am happy to report that good progress is being made in all these projects. Your government's decision to extend a water distribution network from the desalination plant installed in Laamu Atoll Gan has been warmly welcomed by the people of the Atoll.

The offer to train our healthcare workers under the train-the-trainers scheme of the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) has meant that the clinic will be supported by quality staff. I recall that, in early 2006, two batches of trainees were sent to Singapore under the scheme.

The Integrated Primary and Secondary School on Hulhumale' Island will also become a reality in the near future. The teaching staff at the School is to be trained also under the SCP train-the-trainers scheme.

*Your Excellency:*

The past two years after the tsunami have been a period of nationwide recovery and reconstruction. The Government and people of the Maldives,

in collaboration with bilateral and multilateral donors and friends, have been working hard to restore lives and livelihoods as soon as possible.

The successful completion of the humanitarian relief phase was followed by a dedicated drive to “build back better”. While a great deal has been achieved in restoring normalcy to the lives of the victims of the disaster, much remains to be done, in terms of the repair and reconstruction of homes and rebuilding of infrastructure.

We began 2006 still suffering from the economic effects of the tsunami. The disaster destroyed over a hundred fishing craft, damaged harbours and a considerable part of our economic infrastructure. It had also damaged 21 tourist resorts, and tourists arrival numbers in 2005 declined by over 30%. But now, a year further on, our tourism industry - the mainstay of our economy – has recovered to pre-tsunami levels. The arrival numbers for last year were almost on a par with the 2004 record. Fishery too is now registering excellent gains.

I am particularly happy to say that the Maldives remains on track to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals, and is looking forward with confidence to the commencement in 2008 of the three-year smooth transition period for graduation from the UN’s list of LDCs.

*Your Excellency:*

The 2004 tsunami was a powerful reminder of the extreme environmental vulnerability of the Maldives archipelago. Almost all of our islands were 6 to 12 feet underwater for some length of time on that fateful day. Although the tsunami may not be caused by climate change, it showed the enormous extent of destruction flood waters can wreak even in just a few harrowing minutes. Sea level rise is predicted to cause more persistent and long-lasting flooding. The lesson to be learned from that dreadful experience is that global warming and sea level rise must be stopped at all costs. Not only to ensure the survival of the Maldives, but also to save the entire humankind from the unknown terrors of an environmental winter.

*Your Excellency:*

As you know, since 2004 we have been carrying out a wide-ranging programme of democratic reform. The Roadmap for the Reform Agenda – published in March last year and which set out specific goals and timelines for our democratic transition – is geared to usher in a modern liberal democracy in the Maldives, in a short period of time.

The major milestones so far achieved include the establishment of political parties, the setting up of an independent national Human Rights Commission, accession to major international human rights treaties,

reforming the criminal justice system, strengthening the independence of the judiciary, and enhancing media freedom.

I am confident that 2007 will see the completion of the ongoing work of the Constitutional Assembly on revising the Constitution. Our aim is to hold the country's very first multiparty elections in 2008.

The pursuit of recovery, progress and political reform remains our main priority.

For this, we continue to rely on the support of our international friends, including Singapore.

Before I conclude, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to reciprocate the good wishes expressed by President Nathan. May I invite you all to raise your glasses to the health and success of His Excellency President and Madam Nathan, to the peace and progress of the people of Singapore, and to everlasting friendship between the Maldives and Singapore!

*Thank you.*