

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



**Unofficial Translation  
of the  
2007 Presidential Address**

Thursday, 22 February 2007  
Male'

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

*Honourable Speaker of the People's Majlis:*

*Assalaamu Alaikum,*

I am here today to declare open the People's Majlis for this year, and to deliver a statement on the policies and plans of the Government for the year ahead.

I thank the Honourable Speaker and the Members of the People's Majlis, for the warm welcome you have extended to me.

*Honourable Speaker:*

The bases of the main policies of the Government, with the Grace of the Almighty Allah, are:

- Safeguarding the tenets of Islam in the Maldives and promoting the Islamic faith among the Maldivian people.
- Protecting the independence and sovereignty of the Maldives, promoting the fundamental rights of the people, and pursuing progress, happiness and prosperity for the people.
- Consolidating the prevailing peace and harmony in the Maldives, and reinforcing national unity.
- Strengthening modern democratic values and institutions in the Maldives, and increasing the accountability of the Government.

In advancing these core policies, the Government will, in the year ahead, develop and strengthen mechanisms for the pursuit of social progress, prosperity, stability and peace for the Maldivian people.

In this regard, the main policies of the Government in economic development will be to:

- Further strengthen and broaden the economic base of the country, promote and facilitate further growth in the key economic sectors of tourism, fisheries, agriculture, transportation, business and commerce and craftsmanship, and expand investment opportunities in these sectors.
- Expand job opportunities, and increase household earnings, corporate revenue and national income.
- Protect the national environment and natural resources, promote sustainable development, increase public awareness on environmental issues, and strengthen the role of the Maldives in regional and international forums on environment-related issues.

The main policies of the Government in social development will be to:

- Promote respect for parents and elders, enhance family ties, encourage compassion towards one another, and uphold the rights of children, women and youths.
- Promote gender equality in the Maldives.
- Facilitate youth development and productivity.

- Further improve national education standards, increase access to education for as many people as possible, and widen vocational training opportunities.
- Expand healthcare services, increase awareness on health issues and promote physical and mental health.
- Safeguard the people from the ills of narcotic drug abuse.
- The main policies of the Government in governance and administration will be to:
  - Establish the necessary mechanisms and systems to institutionalise democratic reform.
  - Further strengthen and modernize public administration, and increase the quality, scope and efficiency of public services.

The main policies of the Government in foreign affairs will be to:

- Safeguard national independence and sovereignty, increase the opportunities for national development and progress, promote international peace and co-operation, and enhance national prestige.

- Further strengthen and expand ties with the international community as well as increase participation in regional and international forums for the advancement of the interests of the Maldives.

*Honourable Speaker:*

The Budget for the year 2007 emphasises improving and expanding services to the people, strengthening public administration, increasing job opportunities and promoting democracy.

I assure this distinguished Majlis that the Government will take all possible steps to implement the recommendations of the committee that evaluated the proposed 2007 Budget.

*Honourable Speaker:*

The Government will, with the blessing of the Almighty Allah, overcome the constraints faced in the implementation of the programme to repair and construct homes damaged in the tsunami, and continue to carry out the programme in a speedy manner. This work requires the co-operation of the island communities.

*Honourable Speaker:*

With the Grace of the Almighty Allah, the national economy is today on a strong footing, having recovered from the effects of the December 2004 tsunami.

The rate of growth of the economy slowed down by 4.6% in 2005. However, in 2006, the economy grew by a record 19.1%.

This remarkable turnaround was attained as a result of the country's main economic sector, tourism, rebounding strongly throughout 2006.

The growth of the tourism sector also had a catalytic effect on ancillary industries, and these also registered promising growth figures in 2006.

At the same time, the efforts to attain full national recovery after the tsunami and other infrastructure development projects in the country were implemented at a very promising pace.

There is no doubt that these achievements could not have been attained without the close collaboration of the Government and the people. Therefore, I wish to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to all the people.

In 2007, the Government hopes to complete the drafting of the Third Tourism Master Plan, and we are confident that the Master Plan will be published this year.

One of the most important objectives of the country's tourism policy has been the introduction of tourism in each and every atoll, and to extend the benefits of the industry to the greatest possible section of the population. Also, international flight operations will commence this year to Addu Atoll, to enable tourists to fly to Addu Atoll directly from Europe.

This year, the Government hopes to identify ways to further develop and modernize the country's fisheries sector. The Budget for this year includes the necessary funds to continue the loan scheme to build large fishing vessels under the fisheries development programme in the Atolls, and to promote fisheries-related economic development activities in the Atolls.

A further five islands have been earmarked for the expansion of investment in fisheries. With the Grace of the Almighty Allah, these five islands will be placed on bid for lease during 2007.

There is budgetary provision also for the extension of small loans for agricultural enterprises. 10 new islands have been identified for leasing out during 2007, for agricultural investment.

With the Grace of the Almighty, the Government will announce during March the revisions to the current foreign investment policy, to further open up opportunities for foreign investment in the Maldives.

The Government has launched a project to provide soft loans for small and medium enterprises, and develop employment and vocational skills. These measures will increase national productivity and income opportunities.

*Honourable Speaker:*

The programme to relocate island populations under the population development and consolidation programme will be stepped up this year. This programme will be implemented with public-private partnerships, and in tandem with industrial activities.

Today, opportunities for secondary education have been increased in all parts of the country. The number of students who complete secondary education is increasing by the year. The Government will continue to invest efforts to facilitate increasing opportunities for higher education and vocational skills development. The Budget attaches a very high priority to human resource development in various sectors. This includes skills development courses for school-leavers and Government employees.

In my Presidential Address last year, I announced that the Maldives College of Higher Education would be upgraded to the standard of a university. In the absence of a statutory framework for the creation of a university, the Government is drawing up a regulation for the administration of a university. With the Blessing of the Almighty, the regulation will be completed very soon, and the College will be upgraded to a University.

To secure a happy future for the nation, we have to attach a high priority even today to ensuring that every phase of education produces young people who are imbued with high moral standards and self-discipline. I call on all relevant authorities, schools, parents and guardians to make a substantial effort to achieve this goal.

By the end of last year, a hospital had been established in every Atoll. In addition, healthcare facilities were set up in many other islands, and doctors were dispatched to several islands.

The work on compiling the second national ten-year healthcare project has been completed. With the Grace of the Almighty Allah, the project will be announced in the near future.

The Government attaches a high priority to widening the role of women in Maldivian society, and ensuring that the rights of women are upheld.

In addition to women who are victims of domestic violence, children and youths in families in which women are abused also suffer immensely. Domestic violence and abuse in a family will have spiralling threats and negative impacts on society. Making a concerted effort to stop such brutality is a matter of high priority.

We are conducting a number of programmes of vocational training and job market orientation for youths, who comprise the largest share of the country's population. The Government will undertake special efforts in 2007 to encourage our youths to work together and care for one another.

There is no doubt that the abuse of narcotic drugs is one of the biggest social challenges facing the Maldives today. The Government has always attached a very high priority to safeguarding the people from the ill-effects of narcotic drugs and substance abuse.

However, the solution to the problem of drug abuse still eludes us. Therefore, the Government will take further measures in 2007, to stop drug abuse, and to improve the quality of rehabilitation services offered to drug users in the country.

A national policy on shelter is currently being formulated.

Over the years, the Government has relentlessly called on the international community to take urgent action to protect low-lying countries, such as the Maldives, from the perils of climate change and sea level rise.

In this endeavour, the Government took the initiative in 2006 to publish a book on the dangers of climate change, with the objective of bringing this global environmental problem and its potential effects on the Maldives and other countries to the attention of world leaders.

The Government will continue to work towards improving the telecommunications services in the atolls in 2007, as part of the national telecommunications policy. 5 of the 10 islands to be developed as regional airports to further expand transportation services, have already been identified.

In order to improve accessibility to islands, the Government will continue the programme for dredging of harbours and development of ports, in accordance with the schedule that has already been announced.

*Honourable Speaker:*

I am pleased to note that numerous important political reforms were introduced in 2006, as part of the democratic reform agenda. Significant progress was made last year in increasing political participation and

strengthening freedom of expression. Important reforms were also implemented in the criminal justice system and other areas.

In the area of human rights protection, the Law on the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives was amended in 2006 to strengthen the statutory powers and independence of the Commission. Last year, the Maldives also acceded to numerous important international human rights instruments, in order to secure for the people the safeguards provided in those treaties.

The ongoing work to revise the Constitution is one of the most important aspects of the democratic reform agenda. I, therefore, reiterate my call on the Members of the People's Special Majlis to complete their work as soon as possible.

The Government wishes for the constitutional reform effort to reach its conclusion before the end of May of this year, and to focus thereafter on putting in place the necessary mechanisms in order to hold the first multiparty elections in the country in 2008.

I call on all political parties in the country to extend their full cooperation in the implementation of the reform agenda, and to attach the highest priority to the interests of the nation.

Therefore, I am very happy that delegations of the two political parties represented in the People's Special Majlis are now holding a series of meetings to accelerate the reform programme.

The Government is committed to introducing further reforms in 2007 to strengthen the criminal justice system, and to protect the fundamental rights of the people. The Government will also continue to undertake measures to modernise the judiciary to bring it in line with the economic and social progress achieved by the country. As capacity building is one of the most important areas for the development of the judiciary, the first round of in-country training programmes to provide tertiary education for magistrates began earlier this year.

The Government will continue to take measures to encourage a free and vibrant media sector in the Maldives that promotes the public interest.

The Maldives will open new diplomatic missions in 2007, as the country is approaching the smooth transition period for graduation from the list of least developed countries, and carrying out rapidly expanding interactions with the international community.

*Honourable Speaker:*

Islam is the pillar of our national identity and independence. It is Islam that reinforces the fraternal ties amongst people and the peace and harmony in the country. Our political and social stability are also founded on the country's Islamic faith.

Therefore, it is the duty of each and every Maldivian to protect and sustain the country's Islamic faith and heritage. We must remain unified and steadfast on the path of Islam.

The Government has always attached a high priority to promote religious awareness among the people. These efforts will be strengthened. I wish to thank the many individuals who are contributing to the cause of raising public awareness on Islam.

Such efforts, however, must not undermine the religious unity of the people. We must not allow the growth of religious extremism in the country, as the Noble Quran teaches us that Islam is a religion of tolerance and moderation, and as the Holy Prophet had advocated making things easy for people.

I wish to now turn my attention to an important endeavour which the Government has been pursuing for many years. It is the publication of a new translation to Dhivehi of the Noble Quran. This has been an endeavour of great magnitude. With the Blessing of the Almighty Allah, this new

translation will be printed and available later this year. The Government will gift a copy of this translation to each and every household in the country.

*Honourable Speaker:*

As the Maldives pursues wide-ranging political reforms, we must attach a high priority to peace and stability in the country. The reform agenda must not lead to divisions and discord among the people. We must always give the highest priority to national unity and to the overall national interest. Every patriot would readily accept this fact.

*Honourable Speaker:*

The Members of the People's Majlis had deliberated extensively on the many bills that were tabled before the Majlis in 2006. Your advocacy of the people's best interest in your deliberations highlights the real role of the Majlis.

I request the People's Majlis to conclude its consideration of the pending bills from 2006, and to ensure their early passage. The Government will submit a number of bills this year, to further develop the legal framework of the country.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Honourable Speaker and all the Members of the People's Majlis, for their hard work and important national service during 2006.

I sincerely hope that the support and assistance that this Majlis has been extending towards the democratic reform agenda will continue in the time ahead.

My humble prayer is for the Almighty Allah to:

- Grant us the strength to remain steadfast on the righteous path of Islam.
- Bless the Maldives with continued independence, peace, harmony and stability.
- Bestow upon the Government and the people the blessing to work in partnership for the benefit of the nation.
- Bless our efforts to usher in a modern democracy, in which our people can enjoy even greater prosperity and happiness.

With this prayer, and with the Blessing of the Almighty Allah, it is my pleasure and privilege to declare the People's Majlis open for the year 2007.

*Thank you.*