

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Address by
His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom,
President of the Republic of Maldives,
at the 2005 World Summit
High Level Plenary Meeting of the 60th Session
of the United Nations General Assembly,
New York,

Friday, 16 September 2005

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Your Excellencies the Co-Presidents, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me begin by congratulating you, Distinguished Co-Chairs, on your election to jointly preside over this important Summit.

I also commend the Secretary-General for his inspiring report.

Before I proceed further, I extend sincere condolences to the American people and the Government, following the tragic deaths and massive destruction, caused by Hurricane Katrina. Despite, the smallness of my country and its severe economic difficulties, I am

happy that we were able to make a modest contribution to the efforts to alleviate the suffering of the affected people by the Hurricane.

Your Excellencies:

Time, indeed, is precious. Therefore, I shall not spend the time allotted to me to speak at length. I would rather dial 999, for my people are today facing an unprecedented crisis.

Five years ago, I left this hall not only sharing the euphoria over the Millennium Declaration, but also with the confidence that the Maldives can and will achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

As our Country Report 2005 would show, the Maldives has already attained the goal of halving extreme poverty and that of achieving universal primary education. We are also on track to achieve targets of reducing child mortality, attaining greater gender equality and improving maternal health.

But, today, I speak with a heavy heart, grieving over the losses my people have suffered as a result of the devastating tsunami of last December.

The Maldives is the only country to have faced a nationwide disaster from the tsunami.

Our economic asset losses are estimated at a staggering 62% of the GDP.

Tourism, which has been the engine of our national economic growth for the past three decades, has suffered a sharp decline.

Livelihoods destroyed by the tsunami have not been restored.

Surging oil prices are draining our foreign exchange revenues.

And, for the first time ever, the Maldives is in need of significant budgetary support.

Clearly, if this alarming trend continues, our ability to catch up with the MDGs would continue to slip.

We are indeed grateful to all those who had assisted us in the relief phase following the tsunami. Many continue to help us with the recovery and we thank them all.

Much as we believe development is our responsibility, our means of self-reliance are woefully insufficient.

In forums that had discussed the economic future of the Maldives, we had signaled the critical importance of the decade ahead of us.

One needs only to look at the demographic challenge facing the country. Over the past forty years, the population has tripled. Furthermore, we have a very young population.

Although we have successfully brought the population growth rate down, the task is only half complete. We now need to ensure that every working-aged Maldivian finds gainful employment.

Achieving the targets of environmental sustainability is also a formidable challenge. The recent environmental tragedies around the world yet again show that we all have much to do to protect our global environment.

Indeed, the decade ahead will make or break our vision 2020.

Your Excellencies:

Despite the unprecedented setback caused by the tsunami, we are resolute in our quest of the MDGs. Our view is that if a goal becomes elusive, we should not change the target. Nor should we abandon our vision. Rather, we should speed up our actions.

This we have shown in the pursuit of our national agenda for democratisation, reform, good governance and human rights protection.

But for our people to enjoy the fruits of greater democracy, we need urgent international economic and financial assistance. At this critical time, a mere smooth transition period of graduation from LDC status will not be adequate. It is imperative that our country's graduation be deferred until we return to the pre-tsunami levels of development.

If a country of a mere 300,000 people cannot be saved from poverty, despair and ruin, the credibility of our claims to save the entire world in ten years would indeed be in serious doubt.

Small states like the Maldives happen to be in the frontline of most of the crises that afflict or threaten the world. From environmental degradation through international lawlessness to energy crises, it is the small states who are often the first victims.

But, the good news is that we, the small states, will also be among the first to know if the world has really found the will to act.

I hope that as I conclude my remarks, my urgent call would have gone through to 999.

I thank you.