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MALDIVES

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Statement by

H.E. Fathimath Niuma

Deputy Minister of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
At the General Debate of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable
Development (HLPF)

“Building momentum towards the SDG Summit”

Mister President,

Distinguished Delegates, Assalaam alaikum

I stand before you today as the representative of the Maldives, expressing our deep concerns about the slow progress and stagnation in achieving the SDGs.

We note, that only 12 percent of the SDG targets are on track globally. With only 7 years remaining, we find ourselves falling behind on our commitments. 50 percent of the 17 Goals show weak and insufficient progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further demonstrated the extreme vulnerability of SIDS to external shocks. Our economies have been crippled by high inflation, weak economic growth, tightening financial conditions, unsustainable debt burdens, and the escalating climate emergency. As a SIDS we must urgently address the target of reducing emissions by 45% to limit global warming to 1.5°C. Failing to achieve these goals would have dire consequences for the sustainable future of SIDS.

The ambitious mandate of our administration is centered around redirecting our development efforts towards a more inclusive and sustainable path. This aligns with our longstanding vision of inaugurating and strengthening a Blue Economy in the Maldives. To this end, we have committed to reducing our emissions by a



quarter and aspire to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030 with sufficient support and heavy investments towards renewable energy.

As custodians of vast expanses of oceans, we recognize the inextricable link between our economies and the health of our oceans. We are designating one island, one coral reef, and one mangrove in each of our atolls as protected areas, establishing over 70 protected areas in our national waters. Additionally, three of our atolls have been declared UNESCO biosphere reserves, further highlighting our commitment to protecting marine ecosystems.

In terms of connectivity, and accelerating the achievement of SDGs, we have initiated an Integrated National Public Ferry Network Project, which is currently implemented in 2 zones of the country connecting 63 of the 187 inhabited islands. We aim to enhance access, reduce inequalities and open up economic opportunities, connecting remote islands to regional hubs with this project.

We are also undergoing a rapid digital transformation to connect the dispersed population digitally. We are investing in digital infrastructure to provide high-speed internet to all 187 inhabited islands, paving way for online education, telemedicine, facilitating e-commerce, and providing public services.

While we have made progress on health indices, the burden of mental-health and non-communicable diseases, such as cancer, requires urgent attention. As our population ages, we recognize the need for enhanced social protection, a focused population policy and planning.

Gender equality remains a key priority and challenge for the Maldives. With the endorsement of the Gender Equality Act and launching of the National Gender Equality Action Plan, we have witnessed an increase in women's representation in leadership roles, with one-third of cabinet and local government seats allocated to women.



While we have made significant strides in global development indices, our income and wealth distribution is, like many countries, very un-equitable. We acknowledge the persistent income inequality and multidimensional poverty, particularly in the atolls where 59 percent of the population resides. Efforts must be intensified to uplift the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of our population.

To confront our challenges and meet the development aspirations we have set out for ourselves, including the 2030 Agenda and our own SIDS-focused and national development pathways, we need access to more affordable finance, that can address the impacts of climate change beyond our capacity to cope. In this regard, we have called for the establishment of a quantitative index, such as the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI), which can provide a comprehensive understanding of our reality.

As we move towards the SDG Summit and the Fourth International Conference for SIDS, we welcome the UN Secretary-General's "SDG Stimulus" and call upon the international community to follow up on this proposal. These critical events provide significant opportunities to find effective solutions and ensure that SIDS maintain a continued place in the global community.

Maldives remains firmly committed to the SDGs and stands proud and resolute in its battle for a better future. We must accelerate our efforts, address the existing and additional challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and strengthen our resolve to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Let us work together to build the momentum required for the SDG Summit and ensure a prosperous and resilient world for all.

Thank you.