

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Address by  
**His Excellency Maumoon Abdul Gayoom**  
**Former President of the Republic of Maldives**  
**and Special Envoy of the President of Maldives**  
at the  
**Third International Conference on Small Island Developing**  
**States**  
Apia, Samoa,  
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*Mr President, Mr Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:*

*Good [afternoon]*

May I begin by congratulating the Government of Samoa for the excellent arrangements made for this landmark Conference in your beautiful country. And I join previous speakers in thanking you, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Malielegaoi, and the people of Samoa, for your warm welcome and the generous hospitality extended to me and my delegation.

*Mr President:*

The former Commonwealth Secretary General, Sir Shridath Ramphal, once said that “small states give a lead to the world in the area of ideas. The small, it seems, can carry in their hands lanterns of enlightenment, which the larger, more powerful, [and] more advanced . . . nations find too heavy to bear”.

Sonny Ramphal made these remarks at the first ever International Conference of Small States that was held in the Maldives 25 years ago. I had the great privilege of inaugurating the Conference. At that Conference, I also expressed our desire to create a platform to coordinate and harness small states’ positions on key global issues.

The Declaration of the Male’ Conference sought to draw global attention to the unique challenges that small states face, such as climate change, environmental protection, and sustainable use of the Earth’s resources. Most

crucially, the Maldives conference and its outcome document provided the basis for several global actions and declarations, such as the Agenda 21.

*Mr President:*

Since that Male' Conference of 1989, two UN conferences have been held on small states. Ambitious action plans have been agreed and adopted. Numerous pledges have been made. And yet, we have very little to show in terms of real progress.

Global CO<sub>2</sub> emission levels continue unabated. Our fragile eco-systems face increasing threats. Sustainable and innovative solutions we initiate remain unrealised because of lack of international support. It is deeply disappointing to the Maldives, and to the people of all small island states, to observe the lack of action, particularly by the industrialised economies.

*Mr President:*

The objective of creating a separate category for SIDS is to help small states in coping with vulnerability. The purpose of AOSIS is to assist small states in coordinating policy and positions, instead of defining these states in terms of what they are not. And climate change should remain the core issue of concern for both AOSIS and SIDS.

The Maldives is considered by many, among the most beautiful and exotic tourist destinations in the world. Yet today, the rising sea temperatures, unpredictable weather occurrences, more frequent El Niños, increased salination of fresh water lenses, accelerated beach erosion and erratic migration of fish stock are threatening our fragile ecosystems. That is why the Maldives and other small island developing states have consistently called for genuine action on climate change; to not bury it in the political maneuvering that is the reality of today's international diplomacy; to not wait until it is too late. No nation, large or small, can be indifferent to the fate of others, near or far.

And we have shown to the world that we, in fact, can lead. Although we are vulnerable, we are also valuable contributors in proposing common solutions to common problems.

In the past four decades, the Maldives has shown the world, that small states are not only viable, but they in fact have extraordinary ability to survive and even thrive in the turbulent global political arena. The Maldives drew international attention in 1987 to the dangers of climate change and sea-level rise. We engaged the United Nations on the serious security threats that small states face, and proposed a mechanism to address such threats. We highlighted the link between the dangers of climate change and the full enjoyment of human rights.

*Mr President:*

The declaration of this historic conference, the “SAMOA Pathway” can change the course of history in climate change and sustainable development negotiations. It is a Pathway that can help small states to build resilience; to build economies that are driven by innovation and creativity; and to help small states to encourage free enterprise and individual initiative.

*Mr President:*

For sustainable practices to be maintained over time, small states as well as larger states, need to reduce their dependency. While small size does pose difficult and unique challenges for development, size alone does not determine our destiny. With the right policies and right choices, we can become our own masters who will shape our future.

To do that, we need to establish partnerships; meaningful and enduring partnerships; partnerships that are defined not by more aid, but by more opportunities; opportunities that small states could seize to help themselves and to live their dreams.

So, we say to the leaders of the emitting countries: if you are not ready to lead the world on climate change, then give us the opportunity! SIDS are ready to lead! Don't stand in our way!

I thank you!

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