

Statement for the General Policy Debate by the Head of the Delegation of the Republic of  
Maldives, Her Excellency Madam Sifa Mohammed  
Minister of Education and Chair of the Maldives National Commission for UNESCO  
36th UNESCO General Conference  
Paris, France, October 25th – November 10th, 2011

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Madam President of the 36th General Conference of UNESCO

UNESCO Director-General, Madam Irina Bokova

Honorable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and privilege in joining others in warmly congratulating you, Madam President, on your election to this very important post. I wish you every success in your new role.

May I also take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the Director-General Madam Irina Bokova, for her unrelenting efforts to reform UNESCO towards the noble causes of peace and shared prosperity!

Madam President!

The Millennium Declaration set 2015 as the target date to achieve the eight important goals. I am proud to announce that Maldives has already achieved 5 out of the 8 MDGs, way ahead of the 2015 deadline, making it South Asia's only MDG+ country.

Challenges remain the goals on gender and environment. While gender parity has been achieved in education and proportion of women in paying jobs is increasing, men still dominate decision-making.

Meeting the environment goals is especially critical to the country, considering the heavy reliance of the Maldivian economy to its environmental resources.

Therefore, much work is being done on towards meeting environmental sustainability although the country remains geographically vulnerable to climate change and environmental issues. Despite limitations, Maldives is set to go carbon neutral by 2020 becoming the first in the world to do so.

Madam President!

Protecting and safeguarding our natural heritage, especially under water heritage is a government priority. I appreciate UNESCO for having included in their priorities the focus on scientific issues of global impact such as the health of the oceans and climate change. I would like to make special mention that Baa Atoll of the Maldives has for the first time been placed on the World Biosphere Reserve List. And now we are working towards placing one of our heritage sites, The Friday Mosque, on the World Heritage List.

Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Education contributes to the economic stability of the nation by increasing the knowledge and skills of the people, leading to increases in income. In addition to economic stability, education promotes civil and international peace as well as cultural tolerance and

understanding. It has multiple effects, empowering people to bring about informed and necessary changes in their lives. Thus, not only does education benefit the person learning, but also the community in which they live.

I am encouraged by the significant improvement in education standards and the narrowing of the disparity gap in achievement levels across the atolls in the Maldives.

In the light of the recent social and political changes in the country, we have undergone the process of reforming our school curriculum to place greater emphasis on socio-economically relevant themes and issues, life skills, development of values and skill development in information technology.

Reformed curriculum upholds human rights, democracy and justice.

However, much has to be ensured, regarding the delivery of a holistic and quality education. We all know that quality education can only be provided for, by quality teachers.

As such the training of quality teachers is a priority area for the government. However, teacher education in the Maldives has not been able to keep pace with the rapid expansion of the education sector as a result of which local teachers, with lower or higher secondary level qualifications are employed in Maldivian schools due to the unavailability of trained teachers.

The lack of sufficient trained local teachers has also necessitated the employment of a large number of expatriate teachers, especially in secondary schools.

Madam President!

At the inaugural session of this conference, Madam Director-General has stated that “Half of the world’s population is under the age of 25”. It’s the same trend that we have in Maldives. Our population is very young.

Many of the young Maldivians require knowledge and skills necessary for today’s work. Hence, the government of Maldives has started an ambitious skills development programme to train many young Maldivians for jobs.

I understand that UNESCO always gives high priority to youth development and their participation in the national development, which will be quite crucial for a small island developing state like the Maldives.

Madam President!

This is the first time Maldives taking part in UNESCO general conference since many of us rejoiced in 2008, when the country held its first fully democratic presidential election.

In the same way that a democratic South Africa sent a signal to the world that Africa was changing, the democratic movement of the Maldives sent a signal that the Muslim world was changing. Despite the difficulties faced in the full transition to a democratic system the Maldives' message to the world has been that such transition can be peaceful. Nonetheless much remains to be done in the consolidation of our infant democratic system including the strengthening of the judiciary and the full set up of our legal system.

Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Before concluding I would like to draw this body's attention to the plight of the people of Palestine in establishing formal recognition of their right to statehood. I would like to reiterate the Maldives government's firm position of solidarity with Palestine. To this effect the Maldives strongly supports the application of Palestine to join UNESCO and the UN as a whole. We believe that time for Palestine to attain full membership in all international organisations is long overdue.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the Maldives's commitment to the high ideals that UNESCO stands for and of creating a better world for all.

Thank you for your attention!