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Embassy of the Republic of Maldives



PREVENT  
DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE

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Intervention at the Eight Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development,  
23-26 March 2020

**Agenda Item 2: Regional perspectives on accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and the Pacific**

To be delivered by: Ms. Huda Ali Shareef, Permanent Representative of Maldives to UNESCAP  
Bangkok, 23 March 2021

Good morning everyone.

On behalf of the Maldives delegation, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the comprehensive presentation and for the substantive report issued for consideration under this agenda item. Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected Chair and vice Chairs to the Bureau of the meeting.

Undoubtedly the biggest challenge humanity has faced in the 21st century is the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has disrupted the established norms and practices, and caused socio- economic devastation for countries both in the short and long term. A year into the pandemic and we can already see how it has dampened the achievements in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Global poverty and unemployment levels are already on the rise. It is accentuating the inequality gaps and pronouncing existing vulnerabilities of marginalized groups in society.

Nevertheless, we are determined to reach our targets and work harder to achieve the SDGs. In fact, we believe that this is the most opportune moment to re-evaluate our past actions and work together to find common solutions to address the challenges the pandemic presents in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Maldives is notably one of the hardest hit countries during this crisis, in terms of its impacts on our GDP. Maldives is a country that is largely dependent on tourism which accounts for 27% of our GDP and 60% of foreign exchange receipts. The pandemic forced us to close our borders for the first time in the history of Maldives, which subsequently brought our tourism industry to a complete standstill. The direct impact on those employed in tourism, the operators and other related sectors reverberated rapidly affecting our people and the economy.

My Government made it a priority to take care of those who lost their source of income by providing income support, financial assistance for the most vulnerable, extension of loan repayment, tax exemptions and various indirect support measures to the private sector. The pandemic shows that when the government and private sector work hand in hand the outcome can be achieved faster and delivered more efficiently. This health crisis has also shown the important role of the private sector in contributing to the government's emergency response and the potential for strong partnership between the private sector and CSOs in delivering the relief



assistance and providing support to those in need. Such collaboration is vitally important for carrying out the development agenda and it would help relieve the government to focus on areas where government support is more critically needed.

As the countries in our region navigate the road to recovery, we need to be mindful of the need for resilience, to be inclusive and to adopt a sustainable path for a stronger recovery. It must be noted here that the sub-regions have demonstrated generosity and close cooperation offering support where most needed, from critically needed medicines and PPEs, repatriation support and cargo flights, as well as donation of vaccines and other assistance. We have in our region, many lessons to share and learn, from managing the pandemic, the social and economic crisis and how to emerge from the crisis stronger. It is important that the partnerships and collaborative work by the countries in the region continue forward as we revitalize and work to regain the progress in achieving the SDGs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revolutionized and accelerated the concept of digitalization. Both the public and private sector have been forced to rethink the way business is conducted. Digital connectivity has provided the means to track the affected and reach out to the people, to provide much needed assistance and manage the crisis more effectively. However, there is much to be desired in ensuring that digital connectivity reaches everyone equally. There are still too many who do not have access to internet and mobile devices, students who have been left out when schools closed and the digital mode was the only option for learning. Much work is needed to ensure digitalization is accessible, affordable and reaches all who need it on equal terms.

The pandemic has revealed how inequality and unsustainable practices make us vulnerable to future global challenges including economic crises, climate change and future pandemics. This is the time to double our efforts and commitments to address the gaps and the existing vulnerabilities at all levels of policy making. We strongly believe that regional cooperation will play a key role as we embark on the post COVID-19 recovery that is resilient, inclusive and sustainable. Let me reaffirm that the Maldives is committed to working closely with our regional partners and different stakeholders to get back to a development trajectory that can attain the SDGs.

I thank you.