Honourable Executive Secretary, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen, it is my honour, as the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation of the Republic of Maldives, to address this conference on behalf of the Maldivian Government.

Despite the challenges, we have got together here today, to discuss issues of global importance in the Transport sector and to overcome these hurdles to emerge stronger as one. Looking back at the past 24 months, it has been one that has kept all the world leaders, respective Ministers and relative heads of organisations on their toes. The global pandemic has reshaped the way we live. We have had to let go of certain ways to adapt to the new normal and it has not been easy. Likewise, one sector that has felt the full force of the effects of the pandemic has been transport.

The Maldives is geographically isolated spread from north to the south over 800 kilometres. Our Nation is unique in the physical distribution of islands where we require different methods of transport to get by and commute between these islands. The National Plan for transportation is based on three main principles. Affordability, Green Energy and Effective Connectivity.

Given the dispersion, we have laid out a transport network plan where, when our aviation connectivity policy is implemented, resident will be able to reach an airport within 30 minutes using the Integrated ferry network that is being launched in early 2022. This is the first time in the Maldives, that a comprehensive plan has been laid out to ensure that the residents are ensured deserved and desired mobility and ensure seamless connectivity which will boost economic activities between the countries and enhance growth of the economy.

In the islands and major cities, we are pushing green initiatives to reduce conventional fuel-based vehicles and promote environmentally friendly vehicles to ensure that we reach the government’s goal of Maldives reaching Net-Zero by 2030.
The Maldives being a vulnerable state to climate change, we set out a plan to reduce our emissions and decarbonize by 2030. Hence, the plan to implement more environmentally friendly transportation methods. To enable this, strategies have been laid out in the National Strategic Action Plan. We are in the process of establishing a mini bus project which would feed into the broader land public transport network. The mini busses would be electric vehicles and this is going to be a project that’s first of its kind. Along with the changes to the legislation, one of the most important areas of focus has to be the infrastructure.

Green transport is sustainable, great for the environment but also require investment into the infrastructure. The Maldives is actively looking for partners to form a relationship to pilot projects in the Maldives in relation to greener, cost effective and sustainable transport solutions. The Maldives’ population being under 500,000 gives the opportunity for us to be a great sample size to experiment with new technology and methods. Measures for the establishment of a sustainable transportation system.

In order to sustain the transportation system and ensure its longevity, countries should have a holistic approach to commercialize the aspects that can be commercialized and ensure that over time, the cost of the investment is covered. That being said, we must all know, public transport is a basic right and we, on the policy level should always fight to ensure that our people’s basic rights are protected.

Looking at the Maritime Sector,
Time and time again, the Maldives has reiterated the importance of the maritime resources and what the industry means to the country’s prosperity. Maritime sector is one of key areas of focus for the new administration in the Maldives. The Government is focused on strengthening the legal framework governing the maritime sector to ensure international standards on quality, safety, compliance and protection of the natural environment.

Both the strengthening of the legal framework and also enhancing the regulatory framework are being done in line with all the IMO instruments to which the Maldives is a party. We are ensuring that full and complete effect is being given to these IMO instruments in our legal and regulatory framework and also in our maritime administration.
From 2019 to today, the country has gone through drastic changes. Despite the pandemic, our national shipping line is expanding its fleet, training more Maldivian seafarers and leading from the front to ensure that the national needs are met. In this regard, I am pleased to highlight that we have recently announced scholarships to train deck officers and engine officers, in a bid to ensure that the human resource capacity in the maritime sector.

In terms of projects directly concerning the communities, the Government is also focused on increasing the connectivity of the administrative islands as well as improving the mobility of individuals, goods and services. This will achieve higher standards of living and economic development for all our people. The Maldives is now on the verge, launching our integrated national ferry network. This will connect all the islands from the north to the south.

Last but not the least, I would like to highlight the most heavily affected sector of the Transport, Aviation.

As a small Island nation, we are highly dependent on air transport for tourism and domestic travel needs. The preferred mode of transport for visitors is by air and the tourism industry is heavily reliant on the air transport sector.

The unprecedented restrictions on air travel worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic have heavily affected both our aviation and tourism industries. Due to surges in COVID-19 cases and to restrict the import and spread of the disease, the Government decided to close the Maldivian borders in March 2020.

Despite the challenges we are faced with, the Maldivian air transport sector is on the path to recovery. The data for the period of January to August 2021 has shown that aviation sector has recovered by 65% against the same period in 2019. It is expected that the sector will recover by 75% in comparison to 2019.

Over 79% of the residential population have completed COVID-19 vaccination and 98% of the aviation workforce has been fully vaccinated.

The fight against COVID-19 and the recovery comes with challenges. The lack of consistent and harmonized travel measures in major tourism markets continues to affect the aviation and tourism recovery effort from an economic perspective.
Nevertheless, all notable progress is achieved by overcoming, great challenges. As I close, I would like to call on all member states to work together, share the lessons learnt and lend a helping hand to those states in need to overcome this global pandemic to build back better to ensure no state is left behind and emerge victorious, together as one.

Thank you.