Remarks by
His Excellency Dr Mohamed Fahmy Hassan
at the
General Debate (under Agenda Item 2)
of the 81st session of the
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Organizers: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Date and time: 21 April 2024

Duration of remarks: 3-5 minutes

Venue/Format: Bangkok, Thailand / In-person

Abridged scenario: …

Audience: ESCAP Members

More information: The theme for the session is "Regional cooperation for resilient and sustainable urban development in Asia and the Pacific". This session aims to foster inclusive urban growth and promote steadfast action for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.



Length of text: 781 words

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, my delegation extends its sincere gratitude to ESCAP for organising this session.

This year's theme resonates powerfully with Small Island Developing States like the Maldives.

Achieving our development goals is strongly tied to realising urban development that is climate resilient, inclusive, safe, and sustainable. It is also closely tied to the support of our bilateral and regional partners.

But, too often, for SIDS, urban development comes with too many challenges. And, these challenges are being worsened by outdated international systems, ongoing conflicts, climate crisis, and unchecked technologies, among others.

To truly realise the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring these challenges are addressed, and no one is left behind, we need stronger regional cooperation.

Mr/Madam Chair,

President Dr Muizzu took office with a bold vision for a more resilient and sustainable Maldives. The very essence of this vision is his ambitious target for Maldives to become a developed nation by 2040.

Every element to reach this goal will be captured in our short-term and long-term development plan, which are underway. It will consider in depth, the ground realities, including economic and climate-related risks, demographic shifts, geographical barriers, and structural challenges that hinder equitable access to services.

On the sustainable urbanisation front in specific, the Maldives has made notable strides. One key milestone is the Urban Development Act ratified in November 2024.

It offers a solid framework for nationwide, sustainable and resilient urban growth. It includes development standards that consider environmental and socio-economic factors in urban planning. It also addresses decentralisation, with urban areas to be set up throughout the country to support and contribute to regional development.

The Urban Development Authority, mandated by the Act, is now drafting a master plan for urban areas, which is due for completion by May 2025.

A key urban development initiative of the current Government is the RasMalé Eco-City. A project, which will create 65,000 climate-resilient homes, integrating green spaces, renewable energy, and eco-friendly infrastructure. It will set a new target for sustainable urban development, not only for the Maldives but also for the wider region.

To address the wider housing crisis across the nation, the Government of Maldives plans to build around 80,000 housing units. At the center of these plans are the public-private partnerships, and foreign investors.

Mr/Madam Chair,

As a nation heavily dependent on tourism, economic expansion remains at the top of our national priorities. To this end, the Government of Maldives is committed to expanding this sector to include medical and wellness tourism, adventure tourism, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions), and culinary tourism.

This also demanded the Government to undertake the project to expand the main international airport, the Velana International Airport, to welcome up to 7 million passengers annually, increasing regional connectivity.

To further improve regional connectivity, reduce crowding, and boost sustainable growth, infrastructure projects such as the expansion of 15 domestic airports, and the Greater Malé Port Project to decentralize port operations are also in progress.



On the climate front, the Maldives is exploring innovative financing methods such as the ‘debt-forgiveness-for-resilience-building' initiative to allocate resources for sustainable development, including climate-resilient urban infrastructure.

High debt levels, and debt burdens continue to hinder SIDS progress towards SDGs. This is why we remained committed in our call for improved access to affordable and accessible financing. Decisive action at all levels is needed to ensure SIDS are not left behind.

Mr/Madam Chair,

The Maldives greatly values its partnership with ESCAP in promoting resilient and sustainable urban development.

With ESCAP’s financial and technical support, the Maldives is now preparing for its first Voluntary Local Review of our capital city, Malé. Directed by ESCAP’s regional VLR guidelines, this initiative will help align SDGs with the capital city’s Strategic Action Plan, informing future planning, and strengthening the local capacity for SDG monitoring.

And such actions mark a significant step forward in localising SDGs, and complements our 2023 Voluntary National Review, which highlights the need for inclusive and sustainable urban development. This collaboration is a good example of effective regional cooperation.

Mr/Madam Chair,

This year is a pivotal year for the Maldives. It marks the 60th anniversary of our independence, and of our UN membership.

Looking back, we are proud of how far we have come as a firm believer of the multilateral system and an advocate for SIDs. We are committed to doing even more!

For SIDS like us, resilient urban development is not just about sustainability — it is about survival. This is why; the term “urban” needs to capture our vulnerabilities. It

needs to reflect the very real challenges SIDS face – but also the very real solutions that SIDS have developed, implemented, and perfected.

We look forward to working with our partners to build a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable future for the Maldives, and the region.

I thank you.

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First Draft: Bangkok Mission, 10 April 2025
Commented by: MoCHI, 15 April 2025, and MoFP, 14 April 2025
Reviewed by: MoHST, 15 April 2025, Aishath Rifga, 18 April 2025, and Fathimath Razana, 19 April 2025
Checked by: Midhfa Naeem, 20 April 2025