STATEMENT BY
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AT THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC CONFERENCE
ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT: BEIJING+25 REVIEW,
Bangkok, 27-29 NOVEMBER 2019
Madam Chairperson,

Distinguished Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalaam Alaikum.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and the Pacific for hosting this Meeting to review the regional implementation of the Beijing Platform for Actions and the commitments emanating from the twenty third special session of the General Assembly. We are very delighted to have the opportunity to participate in this meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me share with you some of the experiences and achievements in the area of women’s empowerment along with gender and development in the Maldives.

When our current President assumed office on 17 November 2018, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih shared with us, his vision for the women and girls in the Maldives. A
vision where, our daughters are brought up in an environment ripe with equal opportunities, our policies are geared towards women’s social and economic participation, our women are financially empowered, and our women are given just treatment in the face of the law.

We, in the Maldives recently endorsed Strategic Action Plan. This document outlines the developmental targets and priorities of the Government for the five-year period 2019 – 2023. It sets out realistic strategic goals that would help achieve key developmental milestones in realizing our hopes and dreams of a Jazeera Raajje, including key targets for women. We have the Gender Equality Policy following which the Gender Equality Action plan is in the process of finalization.

Both documents are an explicit example of mainstreaming and social inclusion where it is geared towards empowerment of women and gender equality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Maldives has signed key international instruments committing itself to gender equality and women’s empowerment. Maldives as a Gender Development Index (GDI) of 0.919. The Maldives Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is 76, however the under-representation of women reflected in seats held by women in national parliament
The new Constitution of the Republic of Maldives enacted in August 2008 guarantees to all persons the same rights and freedoms, and upholds the principles of equality and non-discrimination. It is my pleasure to inform you that the new constitution allows women to run for the highest political office. Hence, the reservation to Article 7a of CEDAW has been lifted. And we are in the process of working through to lift the Reservations that we have on Article 16 of CEDAW, as a progress.

The current Government’s policy provides a comprehensive vision of women’s empowerment and promotion of gender equality through gender mainstreaming. The gender equality policy of the Government covers various aspects and includes a policy direction for all ministries to address women’s issues recognizing that women and men have different needs and priorities. Hence, the Gender Equality Policy of the Government of Maldives is to mainstream gender in all sectors and to develop a just society where equality of women and men are upheld, women and girls enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms on an equitable basis, and both women and men, boys and girls are able to realize their full potential and participate in and benefit from democracy and development both in public and private life.

Distinguished delegates,
The Government of Maldives is committed in the inclusion of women at all level from planning to implementation and substantial progress is being made. To ensure the sustainability of women in work force, policies such as flexi hours, increase in maternity leave (from 60 days to 6 months) are introduced. To reduce the challenges faced during divorce by specifically women, government encourages to draw a prenuptial agreement and training programs are conducted to raise awareness on importance of prenuptial agreement. In addition, Family Law was amended to ensure equal distribution of matrimonial property. To empower women to move from a violent relationship and prevent them from being domestically abused, Domestic Violence Prevention Act was ratified under which victim could apply for protection order to prevent the perpetrator from further abusing the victim.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Maldives has appointed about 33% representation of women in the current Government Cabinet and Women Ministers hold Ministerial positions such as Defense, Transport and Housing.

For the first time in the Maldivian history 2 Female Judges are appointed to Supreme Court.

Schemes such as economic loan schemes that are introduced has special percentage allocated for youth and women to increase the number of women entrepreneurs.
A special award was introduced “Rehendhi Award” to celebrate outstanding women in different areas who work for the betterment of their families, society and the country. This award also celebrates sectors that provide an environment for women to work securely and take necessary measures to address challenges faced by women in the work force.

As we all know, the role and status of women in societies are to a large extent created and reinforced by gendered prejudices and stereotypes. Hence, concerted efforts have been made to improve the socio-cultural positioning of women through gender sensitization programmes and awareness of women’s rights at all levels in partnership with civil society. As changing societal attitudes is a long term venture, a lot of challenges are being faced in removing the shackles that confine women to domestic spheres and bring them to a world of choices.

Under the government’s social protection scheme, benefits are being provided to the most vulnerable people in the communities. This includes benefits for single mothers, orphans and caregivers of the orphans.

The first-ever codified Family Law explicitly states violence and abuse amongst others as grounds on which a woman may petition divorce. Whilst the focus is on
strengthening families this allows women an exit option out of harmful domestic relationships.

The Maldivian girl-child does not face any overt discrimination and has equal chances of survival, growth, development as her male counterpart. New Law for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Juvenile Justice Law was passed this month which will strengthen child and family protection work along with well-coordinated mechanism.

Ladies and gentlemen

With these achievements we still have challenges.

Maldives Demographic and Health Survey of 2016-2017 key finding on violence against women in every 1 in 4 women experience violence. This has a strong impact in our women’s physical, psychological and sexual well-being and their mental health which hinders their active participation in public life.

Lack of gender focused affirmative action policies coupled by traditional beliefs, religious misconceptions and attitudes towards gender equality issues at all levels hinders equal access to available opportunities for women. However, both Gender Equality Law and Gender Equality Policy will have avenues to address these issue effectively.
Prostitution, trafficking and other forms of exploitation are emerging challenges that are further complicated by issues like STIs, HIV and teenage pregnancies.

The Beijing Conference has been a very powerful force in itself, in creating awareness and bringing light to issues. I believe it has also been a catalyst to collaboration among the region and forming networks.

I am confident that this meeting will prove to be successful. It is only through sharing our experiences in forums such as this region can learn from its neighbours and strengthen itself. I have no doubt that if we share a sense of motivation and commitment, and move forward, together. Once again, I would like to thank ESCAP for organizing this meeting and providing this opportunity. I wish you all success in our future deliberations.

Assalaam Alaikum and thank you all.