



MALDIVES

[Check Against Delivery]

Sustainable Development Summit:
Interactive Dialogue 2 - Tackling Inequalities, empowering women and girls, and leaving no one behind

Statement by:

H.E. Ms Dunya Maumoon, Minister of Foreign Affairs
New York, 25 September 2015

Distinguished co-chairs, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The number of people living in extreme poverty has declined by **more than half**,
Under-nourished people in developing regions have **fallen by almost half**,
Ninety per-cent of countries have more women in parliament since 1995,
Ninety-five per-cent of the world's population is covered by mobile-cellular signal.

Yet even as we speak,

Over eight hundred and eighty million people are estimated to be living in slum like conditions,
Women still earn **twenty-four percent less** than men globally,
Global emissions of carbon dioxide have increased by **over fifty percent**; water scarcity affects **40 percent** of people; and poor people across the world are suffering more from these changes.

There is no compelling argument to be made for denial of basic rights to some over all: no justification for differentiation in power over your own destiny. **There is no legal argument to be made**; equality is at the heart of every treaty, every convention, and every agreement.

And **there are more than enough economic arguments to be made**; equal societies grow faster, inclusive societies develop more sustainably and are more resilient, educating girls and including women in the economy has been proven to be not just the right choice, but the smart choice.

Yet why is it that the things remain so bad?

There is no shortage of solutions, of ideas, or compelling arguments. **There is just no political will**: no drive to change the status quo; no enough willingness to make the bold decision, and take the right step.

Excellencies,

In the Maldives, we started with a **focus on socio-economic equality** during the time of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. We began with ensuring that every person knows how to read and write, achieving near universal literacy rates. We then moved to free universal education. Now, higher education loan schemes, the opening of our National University and countless colleges have expanded the access to education.

In the health sector, nation-side immunisation programs, resulted in the eradication of polio, neonatal tetanus, whooping cough and diphtheria. A universal health scheme, has guaranteed healthcare for all.

The Government has prioritised public housing as a top policy issue. Despite the numerous challenges associated with being a SIDS, including our scarcity of land and remoteness, the Maldives is making progress.

Maldivian women have had the right to vote since 1932, and have been a prominent part of our labour force and our economic activities. Women have equal access to education, healthcare, and decent work. Yet, while we have clearly made progress, female unemployment remains high, few women have roles in formal political activity, and much more needs to be done to eliminate gender-based violence.

President Yameen's Government remains committed to a development approach that puts "people" at its core. Realising and ensuring that basic rights are ensured and protected for all, across our widely spread out country, is of utmost importance. This will be our way forward, in ensuring that we retain our development gains, and avoid the middle-income trap.

Excellencies,

We must also address the **inequalities among our countries**. Small island states like the Maldives, are one-fifth of the UN Membership. But we remain outside of the majority of processes that shape our destiny. Our structural challenges remain misunderstood, or under-studied. Creative ways of ensuring that our limitations are taken into account remains to be found.

How can we ensure the development goals are met, if developing countries have limited say and limited sway in the decision-making?

Therefore Excellencies, let us not waste time in asserting and re-asserting things we know. Let us do what is required for us to do. Let us truly will ourselves to make the changes to ensure "No one will be left behind".

Thank you.