

**Statement by His Excellency Ibrahim Mohamed Solih,  
President of the Republic of Maldives, at the General  
Debate of the 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations  
General Assembly**

*21 September 2021*

**Bismilliah ah Rahmaan ah Raheem.**

**Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Distinguished  
Guests;**

1. It is my singular honour to offer on behalf of a proud nation, our congratulations and felicitations to His Excellency Abdulla Shahid on his election as President of the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly. I also wish to extend to you, Mr. Secretary-General our hearty congratulations on your reappointment.

**Mr. President;**

2. 56 years ago, right after our independence, we made haste to seek membership at the United Nations. But our entry was not guaranteed. It was the age of decolonization. The age of self-determination when numerous new nations came

into existence. It was an age when humanity shook off the shackles of the past for the sake of civilisation and progress. The story goes that the matter of allowing entry to small states such as ourselves was furiously debated - whether a small island would qualify to meaningfully contribute to world affairs. Today, 56 years since then, as President of the Republic of Maldives, I address the presidency of this General Assembly in our mother tongue. Our mother tongue, Dhivehi, the language we take pride in and is close to our hearts. A language that is most familiar for the Presidency of this General Assembly. The Maldives may be small in size. Maldivians, however, are big in their rich culture and heritage. This is indeed a great honour for our nation.

**Mr. President;**

3. It is highly apropos that your tenure at the helm of this great assembly is entitled the “Presidency of Hope.” Because, for certain, hope is a highly desirable commodity in these difficult times, and surely what led to the formation of the United Nations. It was hope for a world devoid of the ugliness of wars and famine; hope for equality of all peoples to prevail; hope for justice, human rights,

self-determination and democracy to reign supreme; hope of a world where people oppressed under the yoke of colonial rule and other forms of oppression were rendered free; hope that we preserve our planet, its resources, ecosystems and wonders for generations yet to be born.

**Mr. President;**

4. For the past 76 years, every year, we gather in this great hall and give speeches that inspire us to scale seemingly insurmountable odds to resolve the various problems that afflict our global community. Yet, for all our achievements and success, the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed our progress back years. The adverse impacts of climate change are increasing. The steady growth of the world's population is also increasing the presence of famine. And the menace of terrorism remains one of the biggest challenges we face today. This is an ever-present blemish on our common humanity.
  
5. Which is why, my first and foremost duty this morning would be to call on the world community to give our hope resoluteness by backing them up

with effort. I believe the five rays of hope offered in your PGA manifesto presents great hope in itself.

**Mr. President,**

6. From our small island nations to the powers spanning continents, the consequences of Covid-19 have been the same.

7. It has laid bare, in the starkest of terms, what we have all already known. Namely, that in today's world, we are bound together. We must work together, in solidarity, in unity, to achieve our ambitions together.

**Mr. President;**

8. For the Maldives, as was the case the world over, the Covid-19 pandemic was a challenge without precedent. Our economy relies on welcoming tourists to these shores. We import nearly everything from food to medicine to the materials we build our shelters with.

9. Having shut down our borders, we were faced with catastrophic outcomes. Tourists stopped arriving. Foreign currency receipts dropped. Businesses went under.
  
10. The lockdown hindered social wellbeing. It set back years of schooling for our beloved children.
  
11. Our task at hand back then was to determine the best course of action. The decision to close our borders was neither desired nor welcome. Left without choice, we had to close our borders. We acquired all the resources required to upgrade our healthcare system from scratch. At the time, a vaccine was a distant dream. Throughout this plight we firmly abided by strict standards. We successfully managed the pandemic by determinedly following the instructions set by our healthcare professionals. Employees, agencies and volunteers willingly lined up. Food, medical supplies and other necessities were stocked up. As a result, we were able to tackle the pandemic. We have vaccinated 95% of all school children, and 85% of all residents in the Maldives. Schools have resumed. Businesses have restarted. Our borders have been reopened, opening the doors to our resorts. The Maldives is ready to welcome

the world. The Maldives has once again become the sunny side of life. Come visit us.

**Mr. President;**

12. Covid-19 will persist as long as it is not defeated everywhere. The key is vaccines! Vaccinating the world as soon as possible is the way we overcome. Vaccine equity is of paramount importance in this regard.
13. Eventually, in time, as the world recovers from the Covid-19 menace, we must all, collectively resolve to make sure that such a catastrophe is not repeated again. Our citizens are banking their hopes on all present here to ensure that we pool our resources, efforts, knowledge, skills and discoveries to prevent the next world pandemic.

**Mr. President;**

14. Managing the virus is one aspect of recovery from Covid-19. Equally important is the task of rebuilding our economy, restoring livelihoods and a return to normal life.

## Mr President;

15. Covid-19 is an urgent call to action. There is overwhelming scientific evidence that the climate emergency would be catastrophic to humanity. The report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published mere weeks ago was a shocking reiteration of what we have known for long. It was shocking because of the starkness of its pronouncements. That we have merely brushed off the reality of climate change for far too long. I wish to highlight one important aspect in this report. That the past five years have been the hottest on record since records started in the mid-nineteenth century. The rate of sea-level rise has tripled in comparison to the period, 1901 to 1970. We have already caused a 1.1 degree Celsius increase in warming of the planet. The recommendations are alarming given their urgency - how global emissions need to be reduced by 45% by 2030, and reach net-zero by 2050, to limit warming to 1.5 degrees. “Existential threat”, “cease to exist”, “climate vulnerable”, “risk of disappearing”, “loss of identity”, “ecological refugees” are all phrases commonly tossed around to describe the plight of Maldivians, and other island states like us would face if the current trends continue unabated. The

difference between 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees is a death sentence for the Maldives. One overarching fact remains. The state of environmental ruin small island states endure now, will without a doubt catch up with bigger nations sooner than later. There is no guarantee of survival for any one nation in a world where the Maldives cease to exist.

16. I come here today with messages that resonate closer to the heart, than the cold facts presented by science.

(Show letters)

17. I carry in my hand, the words of young Maldivian children who have written to me asking me to share their pleas for our world's climate, with this assembly.
18. These are pleas to protect the vulnerable environment that they call home. The home where they will grow up in. The home where they hope to achieve their dreams. This is the collective calling of generations to come. We must listen.



19. Yet we remain hopeful that the day is not lost. Addressing the climate emergency requires a break from the lacklustre business as usual practices that currently dominate the global climate change regime. It requires countries to adopt more stringent measures to halt their emissions. It needs the world's wealthy nations to help smaller nations receive the support in the form of capacity building, technology transfers and financial resources to ramp up their defences in the climate fight. It also requires us to give up our addiction to fossil fuels and adopt cleaner, smarter technologies for our energy use.
  
20. We are determined to not passively wait on the climate front. We aspire to be more than another cautionary tale of what happens when nature and the destructive forces she can unleash are not respected. We have put forward an ambitious plan to reach net-zero by 2030, which we hope to achieve with international support.

**Mr. President;**

21. When we speak of pressing global issues, addressing terrorism and violent extremism

remain on the agenda. We cannot be complacent to the growing threat posed by extremist interpretations of religious texts. The Maldives has always prided itself on being a moderate Muslim country in which a pluralistic and rationalist Islam prevailed. But we are not immune from the threat posed by radicalized extremists. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of May this year we suffered one of the worst terrorist attacks to have ever occurred on our soil. The targeted assassination attempt on our Speaker of Parliament, former President Mohamed Nasheed. We will not stand idly by while more such cowardly attacks are planned and while more young minds are poisoned by false and violent interpretations of religion.

22. We condemn terrorism in all its forms everywhere and reiterate our steadfast commitment to work with the international community to address terrorism in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

**Mr. President;**

23. Our Government and the people of the Maldives stand firmly and resolutely with the Palestinian

people. Despite decades of United Nations' efforts, the Palestinian people have yet to see justice. We continue to bear witness to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people being so wantonly violated, in ever-escalating ways, by Israel. Generations of educated youth around the world are standing up for the rights of the Palestinian people. They are standing up in protest against the unjust and inhumane treatment of the Palestinian people. Despite the many resolutions of both the General Assembly and the Security Council, the rights of Palestine are minimal or non-existent. As the Head of State of a small country, I am able to stand here and speak to you all today because my country is recognised as a State. What has the world got to lose by fully recognising Palestine as an independent State? On behalf of the Maldivian people, I want the privilege extended to millions of my Palestinian brothers and sisters - for them to be fully recognised by the United Nations and their individual liberties protected. I want to see a fully recognized Palestinian State with all the benefits and opportunities that membership confers. Maldivians will continue to fight for the full recognition of Palestine as an independent State.

**Mr. President;**

24. As a neighbour in the wider South Asia region, we are also concerned about the long-term peace and stability of Afghanistan. We want to ensure the safety of the people, the protection and realization of the rights of women and girls. And that steps are taken to form an inclusive and representative government for the people. Through these steps Afghanistan can demonstrate its commitment to building a peaceful, durable and thriving country.

**Mr. President;**

25. I believe that the United Nations still offers the best hope for humanity. This organization still represents the pinnacle of what concerted diplomacy can achieve and continues to embody the hopes of all, irrespective of status, class or gender, who believe in peaceful dialogue to solve global problems. From famine to pandemics to terrorism, the United Nations is the most important global platform for deliberation and decision-making to solve the world's most important challenges.

26. I thank the international community for their support to the Maldives' candidature for the Presidency of the General Assembly. I wish every success for this Assembly's work.

Thank you.