

**Statement by
Her Excellency Ms Dunya Maumoon,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives
At the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the International
Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014 (ICPD)
New York, 22 September 2014**

Mr. President, Secretary-General, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the States represented here today, who believed in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Today we can look back on our work with pride, and know that we have contributed to improving the lives of our people, and of our global community of nations. I wish to commend the President of the General Assembly for convening this historic Special Session on Population and Development. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary General for his efforts and leadership and welcome his report, on the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the ICPD Beyond 2014.

Mr. President,

The Maldives is a development success story. In the 1980s, the Maldives ranked among the world's 20 poorest nations. Now, it is a middle-income country, the third country to graduate from the UN List of Least Developed Countries, with a GDP per capita of over USD 6000 in 2013. Maternal mortality rates that stood at 500 per 100,000 live births in 1990 came down to 13 per 100,000 live births in 2012, while infant mortality rate has dropped from 34 per 1000 live births to 9 per 1000 live births in the same period. Consistently, the literacy in the Maldives has maintained at over 98% for the last 30 years. Under the 2008 Employment Act, we have guaranteed maternity leave for working mothers with 3-months full pay. The Maldives has always provided equal pay for equal work. We have fully achieved five out of the eight Millennium Development Goals and is on track for achieving the remaining three goals; yet, the Maldives story is far from complete. Major challenges remain.

While emerging issues are becoming more prominent, old challenges remain persistent. Equal income distribution has always remained a constant challenge. While Maldivian women are amongst the most emancipated in South Asia, with unhindered access to employment, education, healthcare and social mobility, they have limited opportunity for economic empowerment and gender based violence remains a challenge. The Government has adopted a zero-tolerance policy on violence against women. The Government is also in the process of enacting Gender Equality Law, which will be establishing a legal framework that addresses all forms of discrimination against women. A comprehensive National Reproductive Health Strategy has been formulated to provide access to timely, adequate and quality reproductive health care. Furthermore, knowledge of HIV and STI needs to be strengthened and healthy and responsible behaviours encouraged.

Mr. President,

Catering to the youth of the country is a major policy priority of the Government. Children and youth account for 44 % of the population of the Maldives. Unemployment, which gives rise to a wide ranging set of challenges such as drug abuse and delinquency, are grave concerns for the

public and the government. Major projects such as building a “Youth City”, which is set to become a major hub for employment and innovation, have been announced and practical work is underway for its realization.

The Maldives has a track record of formulating policies based on statistical evidence. Two days ago, a new national census was launched, despite a lapse of eight years since the last census was held in 2006. Once again, the national census will play a central role in understanding the real and current picture of the national population, its trends and other parameters. Setting a new precedent, data and statistics on the migrant population will be collected in the new census, enabling the Government to take further measures to protect and serve the interests of migrant workers which some estimates show as more than one-third of the local population.

The Maldives believes that for sustainable development to be realized, a global population that can be sustained within the ecological limits of the planet, that enjoys basic human rights and dignity, and experiences socio-economic wellbeing, is essential. In this regard, we call for the inclusion of the Secretary-General's report and the regional review outcomes in the discussions on the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

Mr. President,

A nation's most precious resource is its human resource, its citizens, especially for a country as small as the Maldives, with limited natural assets. Without human development, sustainable development is entirely beyond reach. As we begin to write the next era of the Maldivian story, we remain fully committed to the further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. We remain committed to our people, especially our youth and women, and to the full realisation of their potential.

Thank you