



MALDIVES

Eight Session of the General Assembly
Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals
Promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women's empowerment

Intervention by:
His Excellency Mr Ahmed Sareer, Permanent Representative to the United Nations,
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Distinguished Co-Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Maldives during this important segment of the Eighth Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

My Delegation wishes to express our appreciation to the members of this session's panel, for their useful presentations.

As we have heard, from previous speakers, there are few issues that can be more integral to the three dimensions of sustainable development than that of gender equality and women's empowerment. Ensuring equity, equality and empowerment for women is interwoven through the most important questions of our time. Poverty, education, health, nutrition, water, energy, economy and environment all present challenges that demand gender parity as the foundations upon which our answers are formed.

On the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment, the Maldives has worked steadily in its effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Though we have come further than most in achieving gender parity, we still have more to do in terms of addressing specific issues concerning gender equality and women's empowerment before 2015. For example, we have achieved the full enrolment of boys and girls in primary education,¹ with a higher ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education; but the story goes on as to the level of equality between women and men in social and economic engagements in the country. Equal employment, political participation and opportunity are still lacking. We still lack adequacy and ability to *holistically* resolve all crucial challenges faced by the country in achieving gender parity. There is need for us to incorporate in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mechanisms to address all issues contributing to the weaknesses encompassing our existing national systems. We need to set clear targets and processes through which those targets can be achieved at the national level.

In the Maldives, the rights and freedom of every person are guaranteed by the Constitution. The Constitution respects and promotes the principles of human rights, including principles of equality and non-discrimination. Under this legal

¹ Primary measure of achieving MDG 3. Without more ambitious targets and indicators, and a concrete plan for implementation, SDGs will face the same inadequacies that the MDGs did.

backdrop, the Government has formulated and implemented policies, at the national level, to ensure gender mainstreaming across all sectors; including strategies to put gender parity at the forefront of our national conscience. The Government has endorsed a number of bills in Parliament concerning the rights of women and continues to support bills on sexual harassment, people smuggling, and is ensuring that the revised penal code and criminal procedure code will incorporate gender sensitive perspectives and ensure equitable access to justice.

The Maldives strives to have this view reflected abroad as well as at home. The Maldives continues to advocate on gender equality and women's empowerment through its membership in the Human Rights Council and Executive Board of UN-Women as well as its participation in the UN General Assembly debates on the issue.

Co-Chair,

While equity, equality and empowerment for women is a cross cutting issue, the sad reality is that its realization is not guaranteed through development. No matter how closely we tie it to developmental issues, without a transformative change in social norms, institutions and policies, the goal of gender equality will remain unrealised. We have seen that democracy, stability, and prosperity, while harder to achieve, is still possible without true gender-equity. So we must ask ourselves this question: is gender parity purely a means to advancement or is it part of a broader context of holistic development?

The Maldives believes that it is part of a broader context for sustainable development. We believe that every goal for Sustainable Development should be interdependent, cohesive, and aspirational. The Maldives also believes that equity, equality and empowerment for women can only be achieved through a stand-alone goal on gender parity.

Co-Chair,

As a nation undergoing change towards both modernity and democracy, the Maldives acknowledges vigilance must be constant. Societal norms and institutional traditions change only over time, and while we have made great strides, obstacles are ever-present. In my country, to give an example from women's employment in our largest industry, tourism; young men and women are expected to spend months at a time on island resorts, away from home and family. Because such a lifestyle is not the most conducive to building families, and as it goes against traditional notions of propriety for young women, though demand is high, female employment in the field is lacking. Access to decent work with equal pay is necessary for us to make progress on this issue across the globe. However, access alone is not enough. We must break down the stereotypes that would hold our citizens back from gainful employment. Legal remedies alone are not enough.

Though our political spectrum is open and democratic participation universal, few women are willing to run for office, and fewer still are successful in attaining it. Such is the story around the world. Developing and developed countries alike face the same challenges. One of the key problems with MDGs is that it aligns a weak system/ mechanism to address the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment. We did not agree on a path towards implementation, with set markers to identify either progress or regression.

My Delegation is confident that through our close collaboration during this lively exchange of views, we should be able to formulate new and more effective solutions to overcome the problems previously confronted in the MDG implementation during our transition to an SDG framework.

Thank you!