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## Maldives Policy Statement

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**38<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNESCO General Conference**  
**General Policy Debate**  
**Paris, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

Statement by:

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*Chairperson of Maldives National Commission for UNESCO*

Mr. President, Madame Director-General, Chairperson of the Executive Board, Excellencies; distinguished delegates; ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to represent the beautiful islands of the Maldives at the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference. I would like to join others in warmly congratulating you, Hon. Stanley Mutumba Simataa, on your election as the president of this memorable conference. May I also take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation to the Director-General, Madam Irina Bokova, for her remarkable leadership and unrelenting efforts to reform UNESCO towards the noble causes of peace and shared prosperity.

Mr. President, as we are completing one and a half decades into the new millennium, 2015 is a year of historical significance for both my country and the United Nation system in numerous ways. This year Maldives is proudly celebrating her golden jubilee of independence and along with which we are marking 50 years of our membership in the United Nations, which has turned 70 this year. 35 years ago we became a member of UNESCO and this organization will be celebrating the completion of 7 decades of its service to the world, in promoting, peace, justice, liberty, prosperity for all people and all nations. This mandate of UNESCO remains as valid now as it was 70 years ago when this organisation was founded. 2015 was set as the target year by the Millennium Declaration to achieve the eight important Millennium Development Goals. I feel proud to declare that Maldives fully achieved 6 out of the 8 MDGs, despite the challenges Maldives faces as a Small Island Developing State.

Perhaps 2015 will most notably be recognized in the years ahead for the historic adoption of the new Sustainable Development Goals by world leaders. These represent a universal, ambitious agenda “of the people, by the people and for the people,” which is expected to transform the world for a suitable future. Maldives is determined to join hands with the rest of the world and international partners to take the bold and urgent steps needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. In our plight to achieve these goals, we will be building on where we reached with the MDGs and complete what we did not achieve. In this collective journey we need to realize the human rights of all, to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and ensure that no one is left behind.

Sustainable development can only begin with education. I would like to quote the words of Madam Director-General in her opening address at the World Education Forum in Incheon in May this year. And *I quote* "We know the power of education to eradicate poverty, transform lives and make breakthrough on all the Sustainable Development Goals." *unquote*. With the stand-alone SDG goal 4 to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" and its related targets, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that education is essential for the success of all sustainable development goals.

We are encouraged by the significant improvements Maldives has made in universalizing educational access both to boys and girls from preschool to secondary level. We have undergone a process of reforming our school curriculum to place greater emphasis on socioeconomically relevant themes and issues, life skills, development of values and skill development, including providing job ready skills for school leavers. The reform upholds human rights, democracy and justice. We all know that quality education can only be provided for, by quality teachers. As such we are setting higher standards for teachers and the training of quality teachers is a given a high priority.

Investing in people, we believe, is the best way to promote human rights; best way, to guarantee a brighter future for the generations to come; and best way, to ensure that the democracy gains we have made in recent years are consolidated and further enhanced. That is why President Abdullah Yameen Abdul Gayoom's government has embarked on a national development agenda that is based on the "empowerment of people": empowerment of youth, empowerment of children, and the empowerment of women.

Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentleman. For us in the Maldives, climate change is a security threat. It damages our economy, deprives us of our rights, of our land, and our way of life. It is a threat to the very existence of our nation. The Maldives is ready to act. We have always been the first in line. Together with other small island developing states, we have taken urgent action to keep the rise of global temperature below 1.5 degrees Celsius. We are reducing our emissions. We are working, in good faith, towards a legally binding agreement in Paris this month.

Another such issue is oceans. Oceans are intimately linked with our lives and livelihoods. Oceans and their wealth are the drivers of our economy. They are the source of our food, and the backbone of our heritage and traditions. Without sustaining the wealth of oceans, we achieve nothing. This is why the Maldives banned turtle poaching in the early 80s; declared Baa Atoll as a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 2012 and made the entire Maldives a shark sanctuary. We understand the value of our oceans and all the treasures it contains. Our oceans are home to some of the most valuable marine habitats in the world. Building the resilience of our people remain at the centre of our efforts.

The small island developing states of the world are different from the large states. We face different kinds of challenges that require very different responses. This is a fact that everyone now recognises. However, we, the small states, don't want to be defined by only our vulnerabilities. We are ready to be part of the solution. In Samoa last year, the SIDS asked for building partnerships as the way forward. Alone, we might be weak: but united, we can move mountains.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the Maldives's commitment to the high ideals that UNESCO stands for and of creating a better world for all. Thank you.