



Statement for the General Policy Debate by the Head of the Delegation of the  
Republic of Maldives, *Her Excellency Dr Aishath Shiham*  
Minister of Education and Chair of the Maldives National Commission for  
UNESCO  
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Madam President, Ms Zohour Alaoui

UNESCO Director-General, Madam Irina Bokova

Chairperson of the Executive Board,

Honorable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

It is my pleasure and privilege in joining others in warmly congratulating you, Madam President, on your election as the president of the 39th General Conference of UNESCO. I wish you every success in your new role.

May I also take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the Director-General Madam Irina Bokova, for her unrelenting efforts to reform UNESCO towards the noble causes of peace and shared prosperity!

Madam President!

In 2015, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the world leaders at the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly has created a platform for building on our achievements

of the MDG goals and tackle new challenges. Maldives is committed to work with the rest of the world and international partners to take the bold and urgent steps needed to build on the six out of the eight MDGs that we achieved, and stand firmly resolved to fulfil the rest.

Due to the high value our Government places on investing in education and the fact that the Government now offers free education for all children in Maldives between the ages of 4 to 18, we have shown progress and remarkable improvements in our education indicators:

- Adult literacy rate is 98.4%.
- Two years of early childhood education has been made compulsory and available for free in all inhabited islands across the country. As a

result the net enrolment of early childhood education has made remarkable progress from 51.2% in 2001 to 99.6% in 2016.

- The Maldives has achieved gender parity in education, both to girls and boys from preschool to secondary level.
- Higher secondary enrolment has increased substantially over the period 2013-2016 after the successful implementation of the *No Child Left Behind* policy.
- Around 90 per cent of students complete their secondary education by taking the GCE O'Level and SSC examinations.
- Continued investment and hard work of the many dedicated staff in the education system has led to an increase in the students' pass

percentage in G.C.E. O'Level 5-subjects from 27% in 2009 to 70% in 2016.

The Maldives recognised education as a universal human right as far back as 1932 when its first written constitution was ratified. Now it has become the first nation in the region to provide 12 years of compulsory education and 14 years of free schooling for all students.

While we are proud of our achievements, sustaining them and improving the quality of education requires new innovative strategies.

The government has embarked upon fundamental educational reforms in order to align the policy

aspects to the national development agenda. Such reform initiatives include the implementation of new value based school curriculum with special focus on skills development; implementation of the school based management and monitoring systems, setting up a minimum qualification for teachers and upgrading them. Strategies to improve utilisation of enabling platforms such as e-learning in schools, and the initiatives for school children health screening and child protection are of equal importance.

Madam President,

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 are consolidated and further enhanced. That's 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.

Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

Meeting the environment goals is especially critical to the country, considering the heavy reliance of the Maldivian economy to its environmental resources.

Therefore, much work is being done towards meeting environmental sustainability although the country remains geographically vulnerable to

climate change and environmental issues. Together with other small island developing states, we are working, in good faith, to execute the Paris that we have signed in December 2015.

Madam President!

Protecting and safeguarding our natural heritage, especially under water heritage is a government priority. I appreciate UNESCO for having included in their priorities the focus on scientific issues of global impact such as the health of the oceans and climate change. I would like to make special mention that Baa Atoll of the Maldives has for the first time been placed on the World Biosphere Reserve List. And now we are working towards placing one of our heritage sites, The Friday Mosque, on the World Heritage List.



Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Half of the world's population is under the age of 25. It's the same trend that we have in Maldives. Our population is very young!

Many of the young Maldivians require knowledge and skills necessary for today's work. Hence, the government of Maldives has started an ambitious skills development programme to train many young Maldivians for jobs.

I acknowledge UNESCO's commitment to youth development supporting their participation in the national development, which will be quite crucial

for a small island developing state like the Maldives.

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 for your attention!