



Welcome Statement

by

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and

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**Inaugural Session
Ministerial Meeting**

**Male', Republic of Maldives
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Your Excellency President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom,

Sir Shridath Ramphal,

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Maldives and to this Conference of Small States on Sea Level Rise.

We welcome you to the warmth of the tropics to contemplate about global warming. We invite you to explore the unbelievable beauties and mysteries of the oceans of the world. We invite you to the mysteries of the Maldives and to get to know the Maldives in addition to your serious deliberations.

I hope that you have all had an opportunity to get some rest after a long journey, across the ocean, to gather on this tiny island, to discuss and confer on a very important issue for our group of nations. I also hope that you have had the opportunity to stroll around the beach or sit back in a chair facing the beach and contemplate about the many paradoxes of life.

You might have noticed then the sea becalmed to glass, the breeze ruffled as silk and only ripples in the lagoon forebode a sense of unease about a change of mood; a change in climate. It evokes the image of a gale in force and a sea in white rage which thunders and rolls a mass of waves. Some seek shelter from the storm. Some are drowned and some are forgotten. Momentarily after this brief interlude in silent contemplation and as we try to come to terms with reality and walk up to this Conference hall, the image changes once again.

It is a serious world before us. It is a world of science and politics brought together for a purpose - to halt a ravaging similar to that of an intelligent robot out of control, to stop mankind's over-exploitation of the resources of the world to create and create, until nothing exists and to regain the supremacy over the environment which can be done only by preserving the environment. Naturally we will address the most pressing problems in their order of priority.

It is not our belief that we have arrived at an impasse and that we should prepare for doomsday. No. This is not the purpose of this conference. Our stand on this issue is pragmatic. Our hope is that this Conference will direct us through the maze of the prevailing chaos in a course, towards a brighter future.

Tourist brochures and travel advertisements on the Maldives depict us as the last paradise. Sun drenched islands with pristine white beaches, unspoilt coral gardens underneath a clear blue sea and gentle waves caressing idly on the islands. It is said that in Maldives you learn the art of doing nothing - peaceful, serene and far removed from the hurly burly of the industrial societies. While I would not want to detract too much from this beautiful scene, I think I should warn you - with apologies to Shakespeare, that all is not quite well in the state of the Maldives, nor indeed in all similar states. Truly, if some environmental experts are to be believed, the last paradise is in danger of becoming the lost paradise. Therefore the importance of this Conference for the small states of the world and the Maldives cannot be overestimated.

The sea level rise is the most disturbing issue facing us today. We cannot sway between extremes and remain doing nothing. We have to remember that there are no absolutes in life which is in itself a contradiction. Therefore we should not just tire ourselves over debates or scare ourselves with scenarios but rather think about what we could practically do therefore. His Excellency President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who has graced the meeting today, has raised the issue in various international fora to draw the attention of world leaders to this important issue. I would also mention the Commonwealth Secretary-General Sir Shridath Ramphal who has honored this meeting. Sir Shridath holds a special place in our hearts for his efforts in the interests of the small states of the world.

Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The large number of delegates, experts and observers at this Conference help us dare dream that the future may not be so bleak for the small low lying states such as the Maldives. It is a day of hope for us. It is a beautiful day in the Maldives - made more so by your presence here. Hopefully, the media representatives here will ensure that our voice is heard here and elsewhere. We extend you, once again, a warm welcome to the Maldives.

Thank you.