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**SMALL STATES
CONFERENCE ON
SEA LEVEL RISE
MALE, 14 - 18 NOVEMBER 1989**

MALDIVES

COUNTRY STATEMENT

Delivered by

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UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

CENTRE FOR TROPICAL COASTAL
MANAGEMENT STUDIES

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

May I, on behalf of the Maldives delegation extend to you all a warm welcome, in particular to our guests from the far corners of the world. I hope you all take back happy memories of this meeting and the Maldives.

As you know, we are all gathered here because of our common concerns and because we have now come to realize, more than ever, the importance of our environment and the threats and consequences of the changing global climate. The environment recognizes no boundaries; one's misuse or abuse of the environment is everyone's concern. The transnational transfer of pollutants clearly indicate that all living things can be affected by the actions of a few. It is true that some countries have neglected the environment in pursuit of economic growth and development and the consequences of their actions are today affecting countries that did not contribute at all to this degradation.

Countries such as the small island states gathered here have become the innocent victims of the actions of industrialized nations, actions which threaten the very existence of these small, low-lying and fragile countries. His Excellency Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has described the Republic of Maldives as an endangered nation whilst His Excellency President Iremiah Tabai of Kiribati has expressed similar concern when in September 1988 he stated: "If what the scientists say now is going to come true, in 50 or 60 years my country will not be there."

Mr. Chairman, I do not think that we should continue to merely point fingers at those responsible or demand that they take action on our behalf. We the countries most directly concerned must co-operate in collectively addressing the problem. Although few of us are presently able to mobilise the necessary financial and manpower resources to address the potential impacts of global

climatic change, we must collectively voice our concern and seek the collaboration and assistance of International Agencies in developing a capability for mitigating potentially adverse impacts of climate change in our own countries. This conference was convened to launch such a joint initiative to save our countries from the adverse consequence of climate change and sea level rise.

Mr. Chairman, as we are all aware, the question of global warming was relatively low on the international agenda until quite recently, and it would not be wrong to say that one reason for this was the lack of a scientific consensus concerning this problem.

There is now general agreement among the scientific community that the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is increasing, that global mean temperature is increasing, and that global sea level may be rising. What is presently uncertain is the magnitude of these changes, but we cannot allow such uncertainties to stop us from taking action now. A failure to take action now, may mean that we will leave an uncertain future for our children and their children.

No one nation, developed or developing, can muster on its own the necessary intellectual, financial, and technical resources to address this problem. The world community must pool its resources, and act in unison if we are to mitigate the potential adverse impacts of climatic change and take effective measures to mitigate the adverse consequences of global warming, climate change and sea level rise.

I am particularly pleased to say that, we in the Maldives have done our share by bringing this issue to the attention of world leaders and that the Government is fully committed to this cause and will do all within its capability to enhance International action. This may reverse the trends and allow small countries to cope with the predicted change. May I reassure you, distinguished

colleagues, that we are not merely talking about this, but are also taking appropriate action at the national level, within our limited capabilities. A National Environmental Plan of Action has already been drawn up by the Maldivian Government with the assistance of UNDP and UNEP to maintain and improve the environment of the country for the collective benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

We need to adequately study the expected changes in our ecosystems, and how we can prevent their deterioration. For we can, at this stage find solutions to only some of the problems while most are beyond our means. Consider for instance the problem of defending our 200 inhabited islands; the financial implications, engineering design problems and coastal management problems.

For the purpose of planning, we must undertake data collection and information gathering on the status of our environment. To do this we require international co-operation as we cannot, if left alone, undertake such a task.

Mr. Chairman, I sincerely hope that this forum will serve as an example for the rest of the world, in that the small states have assembled here to determine a common stand on the issue of global climate change and our position in this regard.

It is our belief that the potential impacts of global climate change and sea level rise pose a severe threat to small island states, and that we are likely to be among the first countries to suffer adverse impacts. This is all the more tragic since the countries represented here have hardly contributed to a problem which threaten to overwhelm us. Many nations now recognise the threat which faces small countries such as ours and stand ready to assist in mitigating the potential impacts. However, in order to assist us we must provide such countries with a clear indication of what form this assistance should take. We are very hopeful that we will be able to adopt an appropriate declaration which will provide a framework for the provision of such assistance.

On our part we must collaborate as full and active partners in all phases of investigating this problem. Let me reiterate that the Maldives is ready to assist and to do all within its capabilities and to contribute to global programmes concerning climatic change and sea level rise.

I am confident that the distinguished members of the small states represented here would keep up the momentum generated at this conference to work towards achieving the objectives of the conference.

Thank you.