



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

MALTA
COUNTRY STATEMENT

16 November 1989

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentleman,

Please allow me first to express Malta's appreciation for the efforts of the Republic of Maldives in hosting this Conference. Let me further add my personal congratulations on your choice of this idyllic venue, and my gratitude for your warm welcome.

Mr. Chairman,

If the sea level rises according to certain scientific expectations, as a result of climate change and global warming, it could effect the lives of thousands of millions of people. This important Conference focuses on the precarious situation of the small States, especially small and low-lying islands, that are faced with this serious threat.

Climate change is an urgent, vital and global problem, and Malta is a small island that, like the Maldives, has taken a keen interest in this grave issue. An initiative taken by Malta in the United Nations last year led to Resolution 43/53 entitled "Protection of Global Climate for Present and Future Generations of Mankind", co-sponsored by a widely-representative group of States, and adopted unanimously by the General Assembly

on 6 December, 1988...

Resolution 43/53 characterized climate change as a Common Concern of Mankind, potentially a conceptual basis for the development of new international legal principles - as reflected in the declaration of The Hague, signed by 24 States of 11 March 1989 - which may be necessary to provide effective legal mechanisms in the strategy to deal with climate change.

Resolution 43/53 provided the political direction, and outlined the strategy, for the work that is being carried out by the WMO/UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which it recognized as the main forum for the international community to deal with the problem of climate change. Malta occupies the position of a Vice-Chairman of the IPCC's Response Strategies Working Group, and within this group has been appointed, together with Canada and the United Kingdom, as a topic co-ordinator of States' views on Legal Measures and Processes. The IPCC's interim report is expected in the latter part of next year.

Mr. Chairman,

There is a rapidly growing consensus among nations that urgent action is needed to deal with the problem of climate change. In particular, a very broad consensus is emerging in favour of a framework convention on climate change - specifically referred to

in the Maldives Declaration - on the lines Malta had first proposed in the United Nations General Assembly just over a year ago. On 27th October 1988, Malta had stated in the General Assembly that an international convention on climate "would crystallize the current efforts being undertaken world-wide; it would also provide a global framework within which national, regional and international measures to conserve climate can be harmonized and co-ordinated.....Such an instrument should primarily be a framework convention, which enumerates the general principles with respect to the conservation of climate".

A framework convention on climate change was one of the many topics which were debated at the Ministerial Conference on Atmospheric Pollution and Climate Change in Noordwijk earlier this month. The issue had been discussed at length in the preparatory work for the Conference where Canada and Malta had produced a background paper on Elements for an International Convention on Climate.

Earlier this year the UNEP Governing Council in its decision No. 15/36 inter alia requested the Executive Director, in co-operation with the Secretary General of WMO, to begin preparation for negotiation on a framework convention on climate, taking into account the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as well as the outcome of recent and forthcoming

international meetings on the subject and recommended that such negotiation should be initiated as soon as possible immediately after the adoption of the interim report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Permit me to take this opportunity, Mr. Chairman, to urge all countries to contribute to the on-going work within the IPCC, in respect of the compilation of elements for a framework convention on climate change. Malta believes that final agreement on the Convention can be obtained by 1991. We envisage that the Convention will be supplemented by a number of Protocols which would provide effective measures to tackle the problem of climate change.

Mr. Chairman,

By virtue of their size, the small States have not made a significant contribution, in terms of global emissions, to the existing levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, nor are they likely to do so in the future. Nevertheless, they are more than likely to be among the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, in particular sea-level rise. It is therefore entirely reasonable for these small States to expect that the industrialized countries take the lead to implement urgent effective measures to limit, reduce, and as far as possible, prevent adverse climate change. Even so, current scientific evidence indicates that we are already committed to some adverse climate change, and therefore the industrialized

countries bear an additional responsibility to assist the small States, where necessary, to protect themselves.

Significant sea-level rise could threaten the very survival of some of the small States, but has serious implications for all of us. For example, an important element in Malta's economy is its Tourist Industry in coastal areas, which can hardly move further inland on account of land-area restrictions, quite apart from the enormous cost factor; and some of Malta's low-lying coastal areas are quite densely populated. These areas would be at risk particularly from storm-surges.

Effective measures for the protection of small States from sea-level rise are likely to be very costly, and it would seem unreasonable for these States to commit a high proportion of their limited resources for this purpose in the absence of conclusive scientific assessment. Any action to be taken should normally be based on sound scientific evidence, and throughout this conference, the scientist have, in a responsible manner, only too clearly emphasized the uncertainties that exist, and will probably remain for a considerable period of time to come. On the other hand, the small States cannot afford to wait until all uncertainties have been removed, as by then it may well be too late to take effective action. In these circumstances, the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, namely the

scientific and the impacts assessments and the formulation of response strategies, assumes a high degree of urgency. We therefore urge all governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and scientific institutions to collaborate in this vital work. I also wish to stress the importance of effective participation by the small and developing countries in the work of the IPCC, not least in order to ensure that their special needs and circumstances are fully taken into account at all stages.

Mr. Chairman,

To conclude, we have had the benefit of a series of valuable presentations by the eminent group of experts. This morning, we were privileged to listen to the illuminating statements by Their Excellencies President Gayoom, Sir Shridath Ramphal, and yourself, Minister Ibrahim, casting the problems of the small States into alarmingly sharp perspective. We have drawn up a common declaration which highlights the plight of the small States and opens a new chapter of collaboration in the process of facing up to these problems. Our gratitude must surely go to the Government of the Maldives for making this possible.