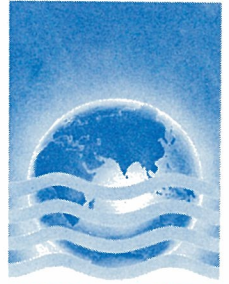


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**SMALL STATES
CONFERENCE ON
SEA LEVEL RISE**
MALE, 14 - 18 NOVEMBER 1989

Statement

by

Mr. Hussein Shihab, Conference Co-ordinator

at the

Opening Session of the Senior Officials Meeting

14 November 1989

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Government and the people of the Maldives, I extend you a warm welcome to the Maldives, to the Small States Conference on Sea Level Rise.

The Government of Maldives is very concerned about the state of the environment today, and about the issue of sea level rise in particular. Even imperceptible fluctuations of sea level which may be inconsequential for larger countries may have drastic implications for the Maldives and similar low lying countries. Predicted changes of sea level due to global warming, climate change, melting of glaciers, polar ice-melt and thermal expansion of the oceans are far from imperceptible.

However, given the complex nature of the issue and the numerous variables involved, all scenarios of sea level rise remain open to debate and discussion. The controversy is on the net outcome of an entire process of change lasting for many decades.

Based on empirical evidence, it is accepted by a majority of experts in related areas of study and research that the atmosphere is excessively polluted by the so-called greenhouse gases. Therefore, it is more probable that the sea level will rise significantly within just a few decades. We the low lying nations of the world are the most vulnerable and indeed the least responsible for this state of affairs.

Such grave concerns have been expressed by the President of the Maldives H.E. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom when he raised the issues of atmospheric pollution, global warming, climate change and sea level rise in international fora, following destructive wave action on the Maldives in 1987.

Undoubtedly, there has been some progress in the efforts of governments and international organizations in addressing some of the questions related to sustainable development and the management of the global environment. But there has been no adequate response to the urgent calls of the small states of the world. There are some problems which cannot be overcome without an initiative of our own.

It is for these reasons that the Government of the Maldives decided to hold a Conference of the Small States on Sea Level Rise.

In this session of the senior officials meeting we will try to elaborate on the technical and scientific aspects of the issues leading towards a draft declaration which will be finalized only after the deliberations of the ministerial meeting to follow.

We are confident that this conference will be a major step towards formulating anticipatory and preventive measures, where the issue of sea level rise is concerned. We are encouraged by the very positive response and support extended to the Government of Maldives in hosting this Conference, by both individuals and organizations.

Before I conclude I would like to convey the sincere gratitude and appreciation of the Government of the Maldives to the Commonwealth Secretariat for their valuable contributions, both technically and financially. I also wish to thank the Government of Australia for their generous financial assistance towards the conference.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you, one and all, for your support and participation in this Conference and helping to make it a success.