

Statement by:

**H.E. Mr. Ismail Shafeeu**

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Government of the Republic of Maldives

Mr. President, Excellencies.

The Maldives fully associates itself with the statement made by Ambassador Slade of Samoa, a while ago speaking on behalf of the AOSIS. I would also like to express our gratitude to the people of Bonn and the Government of Germany for their hospitality.

Mr. President

Already the world is facing the consequences of global climate change. Many scientists believe that the last El-Nino was the strongest to be witnessed this century. Ecosystems, economies and peoples were harshly affected by the impacts of the El Nino. The coral bleaching incidence of last year affected all the reef systems in the tropics. In many places entire reef systems died, threatening the livelihood of people. Extreme weather events wreaked havoc in many countries. Millions of people were affected and the cost of damage ran into billions of dollars. And as I speak here, millions of our friendly people in our neighbour India are suffering in the wake of a powerful cyclone.

Twelve years ago, when the Maldives began addressing international community about the threats of global warming and sea-level rise, by and large, the responses received were of doubt and disbelief. Many developed countries have recently begun to take a positive stance to this issue. The Climate Convention gave us some hope. The Kyoto Protocol is yet another modest step forward. However we cannot conceal our disappointment at the snail's pace of progress. Twelve years down the track, the threat to our country from climate change remains ever more ominous and increasingly imminent. If the international community does not address global warming with a sense of urgency, the Maldives and many low-lying regions will have to face a dismal and alarming future.

In April 1987, unusually high waves inundated Male', as well as our International Airport and a number of other islands. Again in 1991 our island chain was assaulted by a storm leaving many islands flooded. Since these disasters, we have built artificial breakwaters around Male', offering some protection.

Our coral reefs have protected us from the ferocious waves of the Indian Ocean for centuries. They represent the most reliable form of coastal defence against sea-level rise. We have taken a number of measures to protect and preserve our reefs. However, our vulnerability is evident from the damage caused by the coral bleaching incidence of last year.

The Maldives is confronted with severe beach erosion. Nearly half of the inhabited islands are suffering from beach erosion with varying degrees of gravity. The government is at present considering moving people from three of the worst affected islands.

Mr. President,

We are making good progress with the Climate Change Enabling Activity project of Maldives. And I seize this opportunity to express our intent to have the National Communication of the Maldives ready by early 2001.

Mr. President

Even if the world cuts back on greenhouse gas emissions today, there will be a time-lag before any significant improvements can be achieved. The longer we delay action, the less effective our decisions will be. And no doubt that leaves the welfare of the entire world at jeopardy. What we do or do not do here is only our business but the future of our peoples and the only home available for them to live depends on it.

Thank you.