

Introductory Statement
by
Hon. Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi
Minister of Gender and Family, Republic of Maldives

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Honourable Chairperson, distinguished members of the Committee, Assalaam Alaikum.

Let me first of all thank the esteemed Committee for giving me the opportunity to give a brief update of the progress the Government of Maldives has made in its work towards realizing the rights of women as envisaged in the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women. In this respect I would also like to thank the esteemed Committee for their invaluable guidance provided in the Concluding Observations to the Initial Report of the Maldives. It is indeed my pleasure to engage in a constructive discussion with the Committee, as I perceive the Committee as a steadfast source of support and guidance. I would also like to express the fact that I am eager to learn from the comments of the Committee, and utilise the same to further strengthen gender equality in my country.

Similarly I would like to acknowledge the recommendations made by the Maldives NGO Shadow Report on CEDAW, and appreciate the constructive spirit of the report. We view it as a source of motivation to accelerate State obligations under CEDAW.

Madame Chairperson,

Allow me introduce my delegation;

- 1) His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Latheef, Pe

- 3) Ms. Mazeena Jameel, Director, Child and Family Protection Authority, Ministry of Gender and Family.
- 4) Mr. Mohamed Anil, Director, Attorney General's Office.
- 5) Ms. Aisha Shujune Muhammad, Deputy Director

It is my pleasure to inform you that th

The Child and Family Protection Authority assessment of persons wishing to enter a matrimonial contract before either one or both parties attain the age of 18 attempts to determine the best interest of the child or children in question. The decision of the Authority is subject to approval of the National Council on the Protection of the Rights of the Child, which consist of 17 senior officials of relevant government agencies. Since the enforcement of the regulation in February 2006, 32 cases have been referred by the Family Court for assessment and the Council has approved 5 cases, all of which were of children above 17 years in exceptionally challenging situations. Debates around the concept of “puberty”, “consent of children” and “appropriate age of marriage in Shariah Law” makes the issue hard to fully resolve.

The National Gender Policy has given impetus to government agencies to uphold gender equality. The Policy also facilitates gender mainstreaming, and an increasing number of government departments are in

bureaucratic procedures, influences or unfavourable practices in a still largely male-dominated law enforcement system.

All the recent legislations submitted to the Parliament, the People's Majlis, provide for non-discrimination on the grounds of sex, and attempts to remove existing legal and social barriers to achieving equality. For example, the Labour Bill and the Civil Service Bill lay down provisions for equal pay for equal work, equal rights and privileges for men and women, paid parental leave, prevention of occupational hazards including the creation of conducive working environments for pregnant women, and the formation of a Labour Tribunal to look into grievances and violatio

tool of monitoring and implementation. Further, I believe that it is worthy to note that the development of the 7th NDP emphasised on human-rights based planning.

Madam Chairperson,

Special measures were attempted in the last five years in particular, to accelerate gender equality. It is with great sadness that I must state that efforts in the form of affirmative action to bring women into Parliament through the constitutional reform process has been rejected on grounds that such actions result in discrimination against men.

However, it is worthwhile to note that the advocacy workshops conducted on the participation of women in politics throughout the country during the period is generally seen as a break-through attempt to increase women's participation in politics. On a more positive note, I would like to mention that more women contested in the last parliamentary elections, perhaps a direct or indirect result of the increased gender sensitisation conducted through out the years.

As we all know, the role and status of women and the position of women in societies are to a large extent created and reinforced by gendered prejudices and stereotypes. A lot of challenges that we face in removing the shackles that confine women to domestic spheres and bringing them into a world of choices results from this. Unfortunately, as we all are aware, behaviour change takes time, and change is thus slow.

As mentioned in the State Report and the Responses to the List of Issues and Questions, sensitisation and advocacy work on gender equality has been carried out to a great extent since 2001. Posters, bulletins, leaflets on educational and vocational trainings

received a positive response that the recommendation is being considered and I am hopeful that the outcome will enable a more equal representation.

Gender stereotyping and prejudices very much influences women's role in political and public life. The strong commitment of the Government to bring women into the political life is evident in its efforts to remove the existing bars to allow women to contest for the highest political office. As mentioned earlier, the President has proposed to the Constitutional Assembly to remove the gender bar from Article 34 of the Constitution, although the matter is yet to be adopted by the Constitutional Assembly. However it is with deep regret that I note that the proposal to secure a quota for women in the legislature failed in the Constitutional Assembly. However, I am not deterred, and my ministry plans to propose for the provision of a specified percentage of seats for women candidates in the Political Party's Bill that is currently being drafted. To facilitate this, the Ministry has planned a seminar for all political parties on women in politics, scheduled for March 2007. The Ministry also plans to increase advocacy programs on political participation of women, targeting political parties, women and the general public in preparation for the next elections.

Strategies proposed in the Roadmap on the Reform Agenda and the 7th National Development Plan aims to achieve the goals of good governance, which include strengthening local governance by decentralising government through establishing local councils and empowering local communities through transfer of responsibilities, capabilities and resources to the atoll and island level. Current traditions and practices present barriers for women wishing to stand as candidates for elections in these councils, especially as women usually have a poor financial standing in relation to men. In order to ensure that women are able to participate meaningfully in local governance and development, it has been proposed in the new local governance model to reserve a number of council seats for women, to allow all stakeholders, including women to share in decision making, and to provide opportunities for women to participate in leadership and managerial training and skills development programs.

I am also proud to state that NGO's who are actively taking up issues relating to women's

against her. Altogether, 1 in 3 women aged 15-49 years repo

Conducting gender sensitisation trainings for the judiciary and the law enforcement officials,

Establishment of safe houses for victims of violence,

Institutionalising family protection services in all hospitals in the country,

Establishing legal aid and psycho-social support services for victims of domestic violence,

Strengthening civil society participation in combating violence against women and children, and