

**Address by His Excellency President Nasheed at the High Level Conference on  
Climate Change: Technology Development and Transfer**

**New Delhi**

**Thursday 22 October 2009**

*(20 minutes)*

***Your excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,***

In every battle, you have front lines.

Today, I report from the Maldives, a front line state in the fight against climate change.

The Maldives is just 1.5 meters above sea level.

So we are extremely vulnerable to rising and warming seas, that threaten to submerge our country and kill our coral reefs.

For the Maldives, climate change is no vague or abstract irritation, but a clear and present danger to our very existence.

Maldivians have lived in their islands for over 2,000 years; and we don't want to trade paradise for an environmental refugee camp.

But climate change not only threatens the Maldives, it threatens us all.

The message from the Maldivian front line is that what happens to us today, happens to the rest of the world tomorrow.

Nowhere is this warning more apt than in India.

For this country is home to some of the world's most dangerous climate tipping points: the Indian monsoon and the Himalayan glaciers.

The ebb and flow of the monsoon feeds a quarter of all human beings on the planet.

A warming world interferes with the energy balance between land and sea that drives the monsoon.

In future, the monsoon will become more irregular, with disastrous implications for farming.

The Himalayas are one of the fastest-warming areas on Earth.

The glaciers that sustain dry-season river flows are shrinking by metres every year.

Scientists predict that Himalayan glaciers could disappear within 26 years, causing great rivers such as the Ganges to run dry every hot season.

At a time when your country has been plagued by extreme drought, followed by extreme flooding...

... I don't need to tell you about the dangers climate change poses to India's development.

***Ladies and gentlemen,***

The developing world did not cause the climate crisis.

We are not responsible for the hundreds of years of carbon dioxide emissions, which are now cooking the planet.

But the dangers climate change poses to *our* countries, means that this crisis can no longer be considered somebody *else's* problem.

Whether we like it or not, we are all in this fight together.

So, what can we do about it?

To my mind, whatever course of action we take must be based on the latest advice of climate scientists.

As Copenhagen looms, and negotiators frantically search for a solution, it is easy to think that climate change is like any other international issue.

It is easy to assume that it can be solved by a compromise between China and the United States; or a deal between India and the European Union.

But the fact of the matter is, you cannot negotiate with the laws of physics.

We cannot cut a deal with Mother Nature.

We have to learn to live within the planetary boundaries that nature has set.

And it is increasingly clear that we are living way beyond those planetary means.

We are living in a manner that the planet cannot sustain.

I am not suggesting that people cut consumption and give up the good life.

I am suggesting that we cut out carbon, and consume renewables instead.

The world has warmed by less than one degree Celsius since the Industrial Revolution, but the effects of this modest temperature rise have been dramatic.

Ice caps are melting at alarming speed; rainforests are threatened; and the world's coral reefs are in danger of collapse.

The Global Humanitarian Forum estimates that climate change is killing 300,000 people every year.

If temperatures continue to soar, this death toll will rise exponentially.

And let's be frank about this: when millions start to suffer because of climate change, it is people in the developing world - in countries like India and the Maldives - who will die first.

Members of the G8 rich countries, meeting in Italy earlier this year, pledged to halt temperature rises to two degrees Celsius.

But with so much damage being caused by less than one degree of warming, why on earth would we aim for two degrees?

The world's top climate scientists say the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere must be reduced to 350 parts per million.

The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere currently stands at around 387 parts per million, and is rising every year.

On the issue of climate change, there is no room for compromise, fudged deals or half-measures.

Radical change is required.

Humanity must embrace new technologies to bring down atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide to 350 parts per million.

350 ppm prevents irreversible, catastrophic climate change.

350 keeps the rainforests alive, the glaciers frozen and the coral reefs intact.

***Ladies and gentlemen,***

To bring emissions down to 350 ppm requires the sort of action few politicians are prepared to talk about.

Here is the inconvenient truth: we need to peak global emissions, not in 10, 20 or 50 years, but now.

And then we need to work out ways to remove the pollution we've already dumped into the sky.

How can we achieve this?

How can we forge a deal that protects the planet and is just, equitable and politically acceptable?

The Maldives, like India, believes that such a deal must start with the international framework already in place.

We must start with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, set out under the Kyoto Protocol.

From this principle we can build a new green deal.

The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is the only way to strike a fair deal that can solve the climate crisis.

When we look at the pollution statistics, it is obvious that Western nations must make dramatic changes.

The average Indian produces 1.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year.

The average American, however, produces a whopping 23 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.

However, the math of per capita emissions does not mean the developing world is off the climate hook.

We, in the developing world, say we are innocent of the climate crime.

Compared to rich, heavily polluting countries, we are innocent.

But with each passing day, as our emissions soar, we become more complicit in the climate crisis.

With the so-called economically advanced countries all addicted to the carbon drug, why should we start building the energy equivalent of opium dens?

Each new coal-fired power station prolongs our own dirty addiction by decades.

We can choose a different path.

We can develop but we can also stay clean.

***Ladies and gentlemen,***

The climate problem is grave.

To save the planet, developing countries must forego the ways of the West and embrace renewable technology.

And if we think about it, this makes sense.

Why would we want to choose dirty, rather than smart, development?

And why would we want to bequeath future generations with a devastated planet?

Scientists suggest annual per capita emissions of 2 tonnes give us a good chance of saving the world.

That requires big changes from the West.

For developing countries, it means our future growth must be green growth.

***Ladies and gentlemen,***

I believe in humanity.

I believe in human ingenuity.

I believe that with the right frame of mind, we can solve this crisis.

If I have one problem with the Kyoto process it's that it is primarily a prohibition list of things you shouldn't do.

You shouldn't let emissions rise. You shouldn't open new power stations.

But it is impossible to tell a politician that you can't cut the ribbon on new power station.

There is nothing we politicians enjoy more than cutting ribbons.

We believe a positive agenda, focusing on what we *can* do, might provide a better alternative.

The Association of Small Island States has called for the UNFCCC process to be augmented.

The process should be augmented by a global commitment, to produce enough clean energy to attain the 350 ppm target.

If the world made such a commitment to renewable energy, then we would attract the huge investments needed to make green energy cheaper than fossil fuels.

In the Maldives, we want to focus less on our plight; and more on our potential.

We want to do what is best for the planet. And what is best for our economic self-interest.

This is why, earlier this year, we announced plans to become carbon neutral in a decade.

We will offset aviation pollution. And we will switch from oil to 100% renewable energy production.

I mentioned that India's per capita emissions stand at around 1.7 tonnes per year.

The Maldives' emissions stand at 2.4 tonnes per person per year.

Our carbon neutral plan aims to bring these emissions down to almost zero.

To my mind, countries that have the foresight to green their economies today, will be the winners of tomorrow.

These pioneering countries will free themselves from the unpredictable price of foreign oil.

They will capitalize on the new, green economy of the future.

And they will enhance their moral standing, giving them greater political influence on the world stage.

In this regard, it is both exciting and inspiring to hear about India's proposed \$20 billion solar plan.

And we are extremely keen to work with Indian companies to develop renewable energy projects in the Maldives.

***Ladies and gentlemen,***

Like India, the Maldives did nothing to cause the climate crisis.

But we stand to lose the most as temperatures soar and sea levels rise.

I don't exaggerate when I say that climate change is the Maldives' greatest security threat.

The Maldives and India have always enjoyed a very special relationship.

It was India who always came to our rescue.

It was India who provided us with much needed financial help, when the new democratic government was sworn in a year ago.

And it is India who is helping us secure our coastal waters today.

And so it is to India, that we make this climate appeal.

India led the world in the agricultural, green revolution of the 1970s.

I believe it is in India's national interest to lead the world again, in the green power revolution.

You are a youthful, vibrant and entrepreneurial country.

You have the moral authority that comes with being the world's largest democracy.

And, as demonstrated by the bold solar power plan, you have a leadership that is unafraid to take on a challenge.

As India takes its rightful place as one of the world's great powers, it is my firm belief that you can lead other nations in renewable energy.

In doing so, India can become the great protector of our most precious common asset: planet Earth.

**ENDS**