



Address by

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. MAUMOON ABDUL GAYOOM
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

to the

***Special Commemorative Meeting
of the General Assembly
on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary
of the United Nations***

New York

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General:

On this historic occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, I convey to you and all member states of the United Nations sincere greetings from the people of the Maldives.

Mr. President:

Given only five minutes to speak, one has to be brief and focus on only a few of the most crucial issues that have a direct bearing on one's own country. Therefore, what I have to say today may be at variance with what other speakers have said, or will say, on this occasion. Mr. President, the Maldives, being a small island nation, our priorities are our security, our independence, and the basic needs of our people.

Fifty years ago, the United Nations was created to serve all peoples - rich and poor alike; big and small on an equal footing - based on the principle of sovereign equality of all its members. My question is this: has the United Nations been successful in the even-handed application of this principle, and, more particularly, has the United Nations succeeded in ensuring the protection and security of small states?

Just a few weeks ago, a band of foreign mercenaries invaded another island nation, the Comoros, and toppled its legitimate government. I did not hear of any UN action.

In November 1988, heavily armed foreign terrorists attacked my own country and tried to do the same. We received no assistance from the United Nations to repel the attack.

Following that traumatic experience, the Maldives raised the issue of the vulnerability of small states to external threats and foreign intervention, which led to the adoption of the relevant UN resolutions. We do acknowledge what the UN had done in the Middle East in 1956 and 1967, and in Kuwait in 1991. We want the UN to react to the threats that

we small states are frequently exposed to with the same urgency, commitment and effectiveness. The security and protection of small states must be accepted as an integral part of international security and peace.

The coming into force of the International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries would contribute immensely to the strengthening of international security. Regrettably, however, though the Convention was adopted by the General Assembly in 1989, only nine member states have so far ratified it. I, therefore, urge all member states who have not done so, to ratify the Convention as a matter of priority.

Mr. President:

The latest scientific findings indicate that the global temperature may increase by as much as 6.3°F by the year 2100, and that, consequently, the oceans may rise as much as one metre or more during the next century. My people want to know what the United Nations will do to save the Maldives and other small island nations from being engulfed by the sea.

It is, indeed, the small island nations that are most susceptible to the dangers of environmental crises as well, specially those due to climate change and sea level rise. Unless the industrialised countries drastically cut down on the emission of greenhouse gases with immediate effect, the small island states and other low-lying areas will face an environmental catastrophe of unprecedented proportions.

Mr. President:

The achievements of the United Nations in the past fifty years have been many. Through its decolonisation efforts, more than one hundred independent nations have come into being. Apartheid has been

dismantled. Human rights and good governance have acquired high priority. The rights of women have gained ascendancy world-wide. Measures relating to youth development and child welfare have become key components of national, as well as international, social programmes.

Despite these gains, the issues of social and economic development of many countries have remained extremely critical. The evils of drug abuse and terrorism plague our lives. The unsustainable management of the world's natural resources and the rapid deterioration of the Earth's environment have become problems of global magnitude. It is imperative that the United Nations take timely action to save succeeding generations from the scourges of not only war, but of these new dangers as well.

Mr. President:

We are about to enter a new millennium in vastly changed circumstances from the times when the United Nations was born. Today, the world needs an organisation that will aim at a world of shared economic prosperity and national security; and one in which communities can live in harmony with one another and with the environment.

Mr. President:

The United Nations is here to stay. We owe it to the coming generations to keep the flame burning, and light up humanity's path for a brighter future in a more equitable world.

Thank you for your attention.