

**Statement by the Minister of Fisheries Agriculture, Hon. Ahmed Shafeeu,  
at the FAO Conference 2013, 38<sup>th</sup> Session, Rome, 17 June 2013**

Chairperson, Director General of FAO, Distinguished Heads of States of Governments, Delegates, and Ladies and Gentlemen!

First of all, let me begin by noting the efforts of the current Director General of FAO Mr. José Graziano da Silva to restructure FAO's working methods in order to achieve the maximum out of FAO's resources in combatting Hunger and Malnutrition. I believe, your forward and modern thinking towards achieving the objectives of FAO and its member states will bear the right fruits for all of us. Further, let me also thank the Director General and the Secretariat for the warm welcome, excellent preparation, organization and arrangements for this 38th Session of FAO Conference.

Chair, ladies and gentlemen,

The Maldives has been working with FAO since becoming a member in the early 1970's, to develop its' Agriculture and Fisheries Sectors. The timely technical inputs to guidance in developing Agriculture and Fisheries related laws and regulations is highly noted. This has enabled the sound development of both Agriculture and Fisheries as we see it now in the Maldives. Namely overcoming hurdles of Malnutrition and Food Insecurity for the people of Maldives could not have been easy without the help of development partners like FAO and various other international agencies and organizations. Thank you very much for your support.

FAO's assistance in formulating our 20 year Agriculture Master Plan is of essence if we need to continue with the upward curve of Agricultural Development in Maldives. In this line, FAO has recently developed the Country Programme Framework for the Maldives, which I believe is going to be essential to maintain the effective working relationship we have with FAO to develop our Agriculture and Fisheries Sectors.

The Maldives is a country highly dependent on imports for feeding its population. Further we should also take in account the high number of Tourists who visit the Maldives every year. This proposes big challenges for local food security as well as meeting market demands of our food production systems. Even such, we are moving steadily in eradicating extreme poverty and achieving food security in Maldives.

It has to be also noted that, more than 60 percent of the rural population of Maldives are farming and fishing families. And within this, more that 40 percent of people engaged in food production and value addition in fisheries and agriculture are women. The Maldivian government is keen in introduction and use of women focused technologies in Value Addition and Production in agriculture and fisheries. This will enable and strengthen our farming and fishing families to sustain their livelihood and expand their profits.

We in the Maldives have a very narrow base for economic development. Fisheries and agriculture continue to be the mainstay of the economy despite huge strides in tourism development. We are consolidating on our partnerships with the tourism industry, widening markets for produces from value chain cooperatives. We are convinced that such local partnerships will foster growth

- in the agriculture sector leading to food security, poverty alleviation and increased income levels for smallholder farmers and fishers.

The introduction and formation of Cooperatives with a focus on increasing production, marketing and establishing linkages with distributors and consumers have been an integral achievement of both projects. In addition, the training and capacity development - technical, managerial and entrepreneurship have strengthened community participation in agriculture and fishery production and development. This, in turn, have increased market confidence for agricultural and fishery products - both fresh and value added.

The employment opportunities provided through the Cooperatives to the marginalized farmers and fishermen - especially, fish processors and women groups in the islands have had a big overall impact on the island development. It is worthwhile to note new processed products such as up-to-standard local fishery products, traditional chili sauce and home-made eggs have made notable introduction to the retail market of Maldives.

It is with pride I note the developments in our Agriculture and Fisheries Sectors. But, pride alone is not enough to sustainably continue the growth in these sectors. We need to take a more dynamic and integrated approach in food production that has high value and higher profits. Some initiatives such as Climate Smart Agriculture, Integrated Pest and Disease Management, and Environmentally friendly fishing methods are what we promote in Maldives. Further, we are willing to work with FAO within the newly developed Country Programme Framework to sustainably develop our Agriculture and Fisheries.

Thank you.