

**Statement delivered by
The Honourable Zaha Waheed
Minister for Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture of the Republic of Maldives
on the occasion of the
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26 June 2019**

Distinguished Chairperson,
Honorable Ministers,
Ambassadors,
Your Excellencies and Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to join other delegations by offering my congratulations to the ninth FAO Director-General Elect, Dr Qu Dongyu. It is my sincere wish that you will have a successful tenure as the Director General. To Mr Graziano da Silva, we have all witnessed your strong commitment to foster the fisheries and agricultural sectors in member countries and to tackle issues of global food security governance. I am sure that I am not alone in conveying gratitude for your outstanding leadership and dedication.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

FAO and the Republic of Maldives have enjoyed a close and beneficial relationship for the past 3 decades and it gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak a few words at the 41st Session of the FAO Conference.

The Maldives is a small island developing nation with a vast ocean area and therefore we are dependent on the ocean for sustainable development, food security, and livelihoods. Additionally, our economy and the well-being of our nation and the people are tied to the health and wealth of our natural environment. Due to our unique geography and natural environment, we face many challenges in both the fisheries and agriculture sectors.

Maldives is a country with long history and tradition of fishing for tunas. For Maldivians, tuna fishing is not only a commercial activity, it is also our livelihood. Our pole- and-line method of harvesting is considered one of the most sustainable methods of tuna fishing; the method is highly selective and people-centric, supporting livelihoods in our island communities. In Maldives more than 20% of the total labor force is employed in the fisheries sector and Maldivians at present are the highest per capita consumers of fish at a global level. This no doubt describes the importance of the fisheries sector in the Maldives.

Distinguished delegates,

We are currently embarked on a policy of strengthening fisheries management; improving data capture, both (oceanic and small scale fisheries), combating IUU through improved VMS and vessel licensing and over-hauling regulatory framework (through new fisheries bill). A key area Maldives is working on is value addition; to minimize export of raw materials and increase post-harvest processing through

facilitating local investments. Our new policy directive is truly based on the broader vision of blue economy and maintaining the traditional island lifestyle of the Maldives. Our vision is a Maldives that thrives despite of its vulnerabilities and threats on the backbone of a blue economy. Additionally, we are addressing the need for diversification by establishing a mariculture sector. Under the assistance from World Bank, the Sustainable Fisheries Development Program which will produce fingerlings of key fisheries species.

Our coastal fisheries, or what we call reef fisheries face unique challenges; degradation of coral reef habitats, global warming and consequent coral bleaching; overfishing of highly valued species are some of these. Managing these resources will be critical for meeting our SDG14 targets.

In regards to agriculture, we are fragmented by nature, as a small island atoll nation; there are huge challenges in transportation of agricultural produce, and limited availability of reasonable farming land for agricultural activities. Although these are the major agro-ecological constraints that the sector evolves and revolves around with, modern day farming in Maldives is sought to require technical precision, smart and focused capital investment galvanized with highly passionate and skilled workers in the sector.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking on to the theme of this year's conference – Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development, I note that Maldivian Agriculture employs international migrant labor, mainly from Bangladesh. The Maldivian government is keen to regulate this influx of expatriate labor, and works closely with local governments at grassroots level to provide a safe and secure working environment for foreign workers. I wish to humbly thank the Food and Agriculture Organization, for their immense contribution – technical and financial, the organization has played in shaping our agriculture. FAO has helped develop our first Agriculture Development 10 year Master Plan which ends in 2020. A lot of investments in farming capacity enhancement, technical delivery and infrastructural development had branched through the first Agriculture Development Plan. As the first Agriculture Development Master Plan of Maldives is nearing its end, we have started work for another 10 year Policy Document, also with the kind assistance from FAO. I would also like to thank the prompt post-tsunami efforts by FAO in increasing the resilience of Maldivian agriculture.

Maldives is the poster-child of the world, when it comes to Global Warming and Sea Level Rise. I have no doubt that, everybody in this conference knows how fragile a vulnerable we are as a nation. Climate Change is one of the biggest threats to the national development and food security for all the countries present and is experienced by all today. Climate Resilience Smart Agricultural Initiatives are being explored in Maldives. Combined assistance of various development partners including FAO, for formulating projects and in identifying areas of development, is highly appreciated and applauded by the people of Maldives.

On behalf of my Government and President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, allow me to thank FAO for the assistance and the opportunities provided to develop our Fisheries and Agriculture sector, and assure you that Maldives will stand firm with FAO to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
Thank you