



Concluding Remarks by His Excellency Abdulla Shahid, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Maldives Partnership Forum

18 June 2019

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentleman:

Good afternoon.

As we have come to the conclusion of this year's Partnership Forum, let me take this opportunity to thank you, for your meaningful contributions to the discussions, and for your valuable time with us.

After two days of intensive discussions on a number of substantive and pertinent issues to the Maldivian people, there is no doubt that the challenges are many. But with the presence, and the active engagement of all ranks of the Government, including the President, the Vice President, all our cabinet colleagues, technical experts, private sector representatives, I hope we have been able to convey that we have the will, and the courage to make a difference.

The purpose of this Forum was to inform you of our policy agenda, and invite you to partner with us, in achieving that ambitious developmental. This Forum has provided an excellent platform to reflect on the importance of international collaboration in our pursuit of a Jazeera Raajje, with restored values of democracy, provisions of basic services, and social justice for all.

During the plenary sessions, we heard presentations and discussions ranging from efforts to achieve governance reforms, to ongoing challenges facing the health sector. We heard about the primordial role of our oceans, to our plans to protect them. From making sustainable choices on development to reducing energy consumption, we learned about how achieving economic growth through sustainable means can be both workable and rewarding, and how decentralisation is meant to rectify the disparity between Male' and the other atolls.

Our moderators and distinguished panelists have introduced fresh ideas and innovative strategies to the table.

During the discussions on Macroeconomic and Fiscal Overview, we spoke about the key public finance management reforms, including on enhancing transparency and accountability. We stressed the need for capacity building including in the reforms of the State Owned Enterprises. The Minister of National Planning and Infrastructure, shared the progress on national development plan. Connectivity, both physical and digital is key to this plan. The NDP will be the guiding framework for ensuring socioeconomic development, in an inclusive and equitable manner.

On Blue Economy – a key theme of the Forum – we discussed the importance of economic diversification. We highlighted the importance of digital connectivity in addition to physical connectivity, as well as our commitment to driving our economy with renewable energy.

Inclusivity is a key principle of Jazeera Raaje: throughout this Forum we discussed the importance of empowering women, especially in decision making and in economic activities, ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities, and empowering communities.

The session on enhancing social outcomes was very diverse and multi-faceted. The Maldives has huge potential. Our population dividend – especially our youth population, needs to be capitalized through mental and physical wellbeing, training, higher education, and jobs. A healthy, educated, and empowered society is crucial to drive our economic agenda, and assuring quality of healthcare and education, is as important as accessibility. We were encouraged with the positive responses from delegates in supporting our housing sector.

In the governance session, our message was, that we acknowledge and accept the urgent need for reforms in our governance and judicial sector. We are encouraged that this message was well received by our partners. We are committed to building accountable state institutions, and effect judicial reform and develop a comprehensive legal framework. We assure you that we will continue to work hard, with your support, in achieving our agenda.

The main message of the partnering with private sector session was that the Government strongly welcomes private sector engagement in order to achieve the government's development agenda. There are many avenues in addition to the normal investment regime, including the newly announced Unsolicited Proposal policy.

In addition to the discussions here inside the main hall, many bilateral meetings took place in parallel to the Forum. We have signed 8 MoUs during this Forum, with the Governments of India, Japan, Georgia, the US, and with USAID, the ADB, and the EU. The Business Side Event hosted by our Ministry of Economic Development saw many interested stakeholders divulge their keen interest to seek further opportunities to invest in the Maldives commercially. At the same time, negotiations have already begun

for many of our proposed projects and I am confident that it is a clear indication that other projects pending in our pipeline would commence in the near future. The Finance Minister and I will also be reaching out to all our participants to follow-up on the Forum.

Today, we depart with a renewed conviction that major progress can be achieved through greater collaboration and dialogue. Public confidence in the Government depends on the delivery of our promised agenda. And we are confident of the support of our partners in achieving these goals.

The Partnership Forum is only a beginning. We count on our unified efforts to scale up support in the realisation of these partnerships.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and the Government of Maldives we are deeply humbled by your presence here in our country. The commitments you have shown and the support you have pledged for our small island state, will go a long way in realising the implementation of these projects and initiatives we heard about during this Forum. I thank you for your enthusiasm and readiness to make concrete commitments for action, and once again appreciate your interest and commitment towards building a resilient and sustainable Maldives.

Many of you have made the long journey to the Sunny Side of Life, and I hope that the welcome you have received in the Maldives is as warm as the weather outside. The Maldives is a vibrant country, full of colour and energy, vulnerable as the islands and the surrounding seas are, we are a hospitable people. Kind, gentle and welcoming. In order for the Maldives to grow sustainably, to become a beacon of good governance and to instill a culture of respect for human rights and the rule of law, we would need to our friendships and partnerships to endure and support us in the process. This is the reason why you have so kindly accepted our invitation to visit the Maldives. Your participation here is deeply appreciated by the President, the Government and the Maldivian people.

Thank you, and I wish you a safe journey back home.