



Energy and Global Warming Solutions for Vulnerable Communities

Testimony from the Republic of Maldives to US House of
representatives Select Committee on Energy Independence and
Global Warming

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Mr Chairman, Distinguished Representatives,

May I begin this morning by thanking you for the invitation to offer testimony to this important gathering.

I am honored to share the floor today with the noted human rights activist Mr Martin Luther King III.

In 1963 his father, the Reverend Martin Luther King Junior, stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial and delivered one of the most powerful speeches of the twentieth century. Addressing the need for social and political justice he said and I quote “We have come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now!”

Today Mr Chairman I come before you to speak about the immediate and far-reaching impacts of global climate change. I come to explain that for the Maldives this global phenomena represents a crisis that threatens our very existence. For us, and for other vulnerable communities around the world, failure to address this threat will have devastating consequences for human rights, homes, livelihoods, and ultimately human lives.

I have come to this hallowed spot to ask you for your political, economic and moral leadership to address climate change. I have come to tell you that if you overlook the urgency of this moment it will result in the death of the Maldives and the loss of vulnerable communities around the world.

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Representatives,

Climate Change is the defining issue of our time and the fundamental challenge of the 21st century. Moreover, it is not just an environmental challenge nor a scientific thesis; it is first and foremost a human issue. It is already adversely impacting individuals around the planet, due to alterations in ecosystems, and increased incidence of natural disasters. These impacts have been observed to be intensifying in frequency and magnitude.

The reports by the International Panel on Climate Change have established a clear scientific consensus and left us in no doubt of challenge we face. Global warming is real, accelerating and human induced.

Moreover, the publication of the Stern Review by the eminent former World Bank economist Sir Nicholas Stern, has demonstrated that unchecked climate change would trigger a global recession of enormous proportions, turn 200 million people into refugees, and precipitate the largest migration in modern history, as their homes succumbed to drought or flood.

As a small island states we in the Maldives are immediately and particularly vulnerable to even small changes to the global climate. In recent months we in the Maldives experienced tidal surges on an unprecedented scale. Never in our documented history has so many islands been flooded over simultaneously and to such an extent. These surges were a grim reminder of the devastating tsunami of 2004 and a dangerous warning of future impacts.

Even today rising ocean temperatures, coupled with the acidification caused by greenhouse gases, threaten our prized coral reefs. These reefs are the mainstay of the tourism and fisheries industries and the heart of our economic development.

Our highest point is little more than 2 meters or 6 feet above sea level. As we look to the horizon we fear that rising sea-levels threaten to inundate our land and submerge the entire nation.

We are rising to meet this challenge as best we can. Our work focuses on adaptation; international negotiation; public diplomacy; and the human dimension of global climate change.

On adaptation we have moved to protect our vital infrastructure including our airports. We have invested in securing our utilities and fresh water supplies. Efforts have continued to strengthen flood defenses, particularly with the development of the innovative tetrapods in Male. We have worked to raise

public awareness and promote behavioral change, both with Maldivians as well as with the large numbers of tourists who visit the country every year. And finally, the “*safe island zone*” concept aims to identify particularly vulnerable communities and relocate them to places where their security will be less threatened and where they can build their livelihoods.

With regard to mitigation our own carbon footprint is minimal, however we are a vocal advocate for a comprehensive framework to replace the Kyoto Treaty.

Internationally, we are leading an initiative in cooperation with other small island states entitled “The Human Dimension of Global Climate Change”. This initiative is designed to put people back at the heart of this issue and highlight the threat climate change poses to human rights and human lives. We will convene a conference in the Maldives on 13 November and I would be pleased to elaborate on this further during your questions.

Mr Chairman,

Although the impact of climate change is going to be felt first in vulnerable countries such as the Maldives and other low-lying states, it does not end with us. The immediate and far-reaching threats reach into every nation, every community, and every neighborhood on the planet.

If we are to avoid the devastating impacts of climate change the major economies must take the lead.

Action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions presents the greatest opportunity to preserve the prospects for future prosperity, and further delay risks irreparable harm to sustainable development.

We therefore urge the Congress to take the lead on reducing emissions and stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations at levels that would restore the balance of the Earth's climate system.

Technological innovation throughout our economic system from energy and transport to construction will be pivotal. Our political system needs to encourage greater incentives for investment in clean technologies and public regulations to support innovation.

We therefore urge the Congress to provide an appropriate framework to support an energy revolution in the United States.

Mr Chairman,

During the past two decades we have looked for signs of progress, but too often we have seen a lack of leadership at the international level. We believe this trend is changing. In 2007 we see the signs of renewed dynamism and determination.

Speaking in London in July, the President of the Maldives, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, more than two decades of climate change advocacy. He said there has been a great deal of expectation but ultimately too many missed opportunities. In concluding his speech he said and I quote “Let us say enough of expectation and promises – it is time to deliver. Enough of hesitation, it is now time for bold leadership”.

We thank the Committee for your invitation today, and we encourage you strengthen your leadership and maintain your current momentum.

Thank you