

Forty-fourth Session of the IFAD Governing Council

President of IFAD, Mr. Gilbert Hougbo, Hon Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Maldives, please allow me to extend my sincerest gratitude to IFAD for the opportunity to address the Forty-Fourth Session of the IFAD Governing Council. I am extremely pleased with the efficient virtual arrangements made to convene the meeting during these very challenging times. I applaud the IFAD team for their efforts to make this important meeting a success.

Maldives, like many other countries in the world, is battling the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The virus reached shores on 27th March of 2020 and we are currently combating the third wave of case increment. We thank our health sector, friendly nations and organizations for the continuous support and hard work rendered towards managing the crisis.

With the announcement of the first case in the Maldives, fears of collapse of our largest economic engine, the tourism sector, was greatly felt within the Government. The public also felt this fear equally as our livelihood is in some way or another entwined with the tourism sector. A sudden shift from a middle-income country to a no income country was the scenario that the country was drawn into and it became startlingly clear that Maldives is in need to diversify its economy and invest into the fisheries and agriculture sector in order to provide any food security to our communities.

With a harsh lockdown, the Government had to take drastic measures to ensure food security, and equal access to food and services in the urban centers where dependency on imported food is the highest. Our Government was swift in its action and rolled out an incentive scheme to strengthen the fisheries and agriculture sector and to minimize the impact of the pandemic on the food supply chain. Measures were also taken to facilitate fish export and increase local agriculture production. Seventeen crops essential for food security was identified to enhance local production and import substitution. Commercial farmers were tasked to increase production of the crops and islands dedicated to agriculture received waivers on the rent. State owned enterprise ‘Agro-National Corporation Ltd’ (Agro-Nat) was formed to address the food supply chain matters.

As an immediate task Agro-Nat platform enabled the farmers to sell their produce and provide input for farming activities. This was an important step taken by the government towards ensuring food security during difficult and unprecedented times.

Simultaneously, the government with the support of FAO and UNDP initiated programs in urban gardening within populated centers, to build capacity of the farming communities and reviving production of traditional crops.

Efforts were made by the government to continue the food supply chain without disruption and avoid food shortages within the country. Special food import arrangements, with the support of the regional partners, were established. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to the countries that lent us a helping hand during this very strenuous period.

Similar to the agriculture sector, the fisheries industry also suffered the impacts of the pandemic. While fish and fishery products are the number one export of the country, the travel ban hindered the fish export to the main markets in the European Union. In order to address

this issue, the government allocated MVR 100 million loan facility, targeting the fish exporting businesses to meet working capital requirements. Many similar relief packages were initiated by the government to mitigate the impacts to different sectors.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

During May 2020, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih established the “National Task Force on Resilience Building and Economic Recovery” to address the short to medium term challenges posed by the COVID19 impacts. The taskforce was categorized into 3 Working Groups; Working Group on Finance; Working Group on Economic Recovery; and Working Group on Social Sector. With collaborative efforts from all relevant stakeholders, the task force has formulated the National Resilience and Recovery plan for 2020 – 2022. This national level mechanism allows for multiagency and multi-sectoral coordination with budget re-prioritization and to address the most pressing issues facing the country at this time.

Mr. President,

Amidst these troubling times we should not forget the impacts of climate change on the development of fisheries and agriculture sector. Climate change is a major challenge to food security as it contributes to poverty, environmental degradation and decreasing food quantity and quality. As a country that is most vulnerable to climate change, we aim to enhance agriculture productivity through developing climate smart agriculture practices in the Maldives. Our recent projects and activities focus on integrating modern technology that promotes sustainability. Our priorities lie in strengthening adaptation and mitigation to climate change.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

We are grateful to IFAD for the continuous support throughout the years to develop and enhance the fisheries, mariculture and agriculture sectors in the Maldives. Through the recently concluded ‘Mariculture Enterprises and Development Project’, pilot projects were conducted to develop a mariculture industry in the Maldives. Based on the experiences and lessons garnered from this project; we are now working towards developing major infrastructure and support services for a mariculture industry.

The Fisheries and Agriculture Diversification Programme and Post Tsunami Agriculture and Fisheries Rehabilitation Programme Project also played a vital role in effectively addressing the rural development needs in the Maldives. As you may know, these projects played a crucial role in increasing employment and poverty alleviation through revitalization of fisheries and agriculture sector and overcame the devastating impacts of the 2004 Asian Tsunami.

To reduce our heavy dependence on imported foods and also to ensure food and nutrition security, we have relied on IFAD and are pleased with the support to enhance the fisheries and agriculture sector. It is with gratitude that I acknowledge the swift support of IFAD to new project ‘Maldives Agribusiness Programme’ that will play a key role in the development and sustainability of the agriculture sector moving beyond the pandemic. I would like to convey my gratitude to IFAD team in the region and Rome who tirelessly worked to bring this project to life.

The project aims to enable small farmers in the program area to sustainably enhance their production levels, increase income, secure food and nutrition for their household demands and

deliver produce to connected markets. **Mr. President**, I would like to reassure that Government of Maldives would provide full support on implementing the program efficiently in the country.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to once again to reiterate my gratitude to IFAD and member countries for the support that they have provided over the years. I wish you all health, safety, and strength during these tumultuous times.

Before I conclude, I would like to impart these wise words from IFAD;

We must rethink the future of our environment and tackle climate change and environmental degradation with ambition and urgency. Only then can we protect the health, livelihoods, food security and nutrition of all people, and ensure that our 'new normal' is a better one.

Thank you