

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



PRESIDENT  
REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

**Message from His Excellency President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom  
to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction**

**Kobe, Japan, 18-22 January 2005**

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction takes place at a time of global mourning. The death and destruction following the tsunami created by the Sumatra earthquake has severely affected all of us. The direct impact of the tsunami was seriously felt in thirteen countries on two continents, and a number of other nations lost their citizens in the disaster. The tragedy has humbled humanity by showing the precariousness of life on earth. It has also brought people together. As we embark on reconstructing and rehabilitating our lives and countries, it is important for us to find ways and means to be better prepared for such catastrophes in order to minimise losses.

The tsunami disaster of 26 December 2004 was the worst natural calamity and the first of its kind ever experienced in the Maldives. It took lives, devastated livelihoods and crippled our economy. The death toll from the disaster stands at 82, and 26 people are still missing. Thirteen out of 199 inhabited islands had to be completely evacuated. Over 15,000 people are left homeless. Our tourism and fishing industries have also been hit hard. 19 out of 87 tourist resorts had to be closed, and many inhabited islands lost their fishing boats ruining their primary livelihood asset.

The ecological damage from the disaster is unfathomable. Already, our island vegetation is gradually dying as a result of the flooding and intrusion of salt water into the groundwater. This loss of vegetation would further increase the environmental vulnerability of our tiny islands. Scientists believe that the fresh groundwater reservoirs of our small islands may require several years of rain for it to recover, replenish and become potable.

