

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



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.



-2-

We have now embarked on the daunting tasks of providing emergency relief, rebuilding our lives and livelihoods and reconstructing our nation. The assistance from our friends at this time of great need has been prompt and generous. It has indeed lessened our burden. I express our deep appreciation for the quick response of neighbouring and other friendly countries and the international community.

I am happy to note that a special session of the Conference will focus on promotion of tsunami disaster mitigation in the Indian Ocean by sharing the experiences in the Pacific Ocean. I am certain that this session will provide us valuable information on tackling such disasters in the future.

Over the last ten years, natural and technological disasters have taken more than 400,000 lives. More than 2.5 billion people have been affected. The economic cost of these calamities has been estimated at US\$ 690 billion. This is before 26 December 2004. Such loss of life and high economic cost at a time when humanity is making great advances in science and technology is indeed tragic and unacceptable.

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction provides us an important opportunity to address disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation. It is a valuable opportunity for us to share our collective experiences, knowledge and know-how to make our world a safer place for us and the generations to come. I wish the participants of the Conference success in their deliberations.

---