



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eightieth session

Summary record of the 1815th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 20 October 2021, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Acosta Vargas

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention

Sixth periodic report of Maldives ([CEDAW/C/MDV/6](#); [CEDAW/C/MDV/Q/6](#); [CEDAW/C/MDV/RQ/6](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Maldives took places at the Committee table.*

2. **The Chair** said that, at the invitation of the Committee, other members of the delegation would be speaking via video link.

3. **Mr. Ahmed** (Maldives) said that, owing to the restrictions imposed by the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, his Government would make use of the option for remote participation.

4. **Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi** (Maldives), speaking via video link and introducing the sixth periodic report of Maldives ([CEDAW/C/MDV/6](#)), said that, thanks to the possibility of remote participation in the meeting, the delegation of Maldives included 30 high-level representatives from all three branches of the State. Her Government remained committed to achieving gender parity and making efforts to advance women's development in all walks of life. The vision for women's rights was set out in the Strategic Action Plan, which guided the overall direction of development. Implementation of that action plan had been hindered, however, by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Urgent measures had been taken to address the economic situation, including the development of a new strategy for implementation of the Strategic Action Plan – the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2020–2022. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan acknowledged the need to address gender inequality in order to achieve sustainable development and incorporated gender equality and women's empowerment, with the aim of mainstreaming gender perspectives in policies and strategies. The Public Health Emergency Act, adopted in 2020 to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, mandated the provision of food, shelter and income support for vulnerable groups, including women.

5. As a result of the enactment of laws and regulations on marriage, children's rights and family relations, the reservations to paragraph 1 subsections (b), (e), (g) and (h) and paragraph 2 of article 16 of the Convention had become obsolete and had been withdrawn. Legislation relating to women's rights that had been enacted since submission of the sixth periodic report included laws on children's rights, water and sewerage, and statistics. Amendments had also been made to laws on employment, terrorism and trafficking in persons, and the legislative framework for human rights had been strengthened. The family law reform that had been launched in 2020 focused on protecting the rights of women and children, removing the barriers women faced in access to the family law system, and identifying gaps in the system. The lifting of the remaining reservation to article 16 of the Convention would also be considered as part of the reform.

6. By September 2021, 75 institutions had established a complaints mechanism for gender-based discrimination in employment under the Gender Equality Act. No cases had yet been reported, however. Since gaps in the implementation of the Gender Equality Act were a key focus of national development, the adoption and implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan was being expedited. It would be implemented at the grass-roots level through local councils, Women's Development Committees and civil society organizations, while progress would be monitored by a high-level steering committee. The Child Rights Protection Act had entered into force in February 2020 and recognized the rights of children to protection from discrimination, exploitation, all forms of abuse, and traditional and cultural practices that affected their well-being. The Act prohibited the use of the death penalty against minors and fixed the age of criminal responsibility at 15 years.

7. The number of local council seats held by women exceeded the 33 per cent quota set by the Decentralization Act, and Women's Development Committees had been granted a specific budget, responsibilities and powers. Social service sector targets from the Strategic Action Plan, including on gender mainstreaming and women's rights, were reflected in Island

Development Plans. Members of local councils and Women's Development Committees would receive training on gender-sensitive planning, implementation and monitoring. As part of the measures to prevent girls and women from being subjected to gender stereotypes and harmful practices, all forms of female genital mutilation would be criminalized, even in the event of the consent of the victim; the necessary amendments to the Penal Code were being finalized for submission to the People's Majlis (Parliament).

8. Measures taken to tackle the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls included strengthening reporting mechanisms for domestic and gender-based violence and boosting social support. Front-line officers had been given training in psychological first aid, and temporary shelters had been set up for survivors of violence against women, homeless persons, and evicted and stranded families. In collaboration with partners, hot meals and grocery packs had been provided during the month of Ramadan. Those who had been stranded had been helped to return to their islands. Persons with disabilities and bedridden older persons had received special assistance.

9. An analysis of the reported surge in cases of domestic violence, supported by the United Nations Population Fund, would help shape recovery and long-term prevention and response plans. A consultative forum had led to the provision of services for victims of violence against women and children. Despite delays in the entry into operation of domestic violence shelters, five such shelters had opened, one of which was reserved for children under 18 years old. Social media platforms had been used during the lockdown period to launch a national campaign to raise awareness and reduce the rate of domestic and gender-based violence. A helpline had been launched in May 2020 and special efforts had been made to engage men in that campaign. The Family Protection Authority had developed data-collection and management standards, and had trained case workers and law enforcement officers. In 2022, the Authority would contribute to a nationwide survey of the prevalence of domestic violence. Barriers to mental health support for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence had been addressed through a change in policy. A gender-based violence prevention centre was being set up to provide psychosocial support for survivors and a rehabilitation programme for perpetrators.

10. The provision of free health care had had a positive impact on access to reproductive health services. Sexual and reproductive health had been prioritized in national health plans and strategies, and the national family planning guideline facilitated access to services. A national centre and regional programme for mental health had been established, with training for health professionals to follow. With regard to gender-based violence, capacity-building for health-care providers presented a challenge, owing to high staff turnover. Efforts to combat trafficking in persons included the establishment of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office and the allocation of funds to set up a shelter for victims. An amendment to the Anti-Human Trafficking Act had brought it into alignment with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

11. The current Government included, for the first time, female cabinet members with non-stereotypical portfolios, such as transport, agriculture and defence. More than 20 per cent of appointed State ministers were women and 63 per cent of civil servants were women, almost 40 per cent of whom held managerial positions. In the Foreign Service, gender parity had been achieved among the heads of diplomatic missions. Gender representation in the judiciary was a priority of judicial reform: the first female justices to the Supreme Court had been appointed in 2019, and the first female judge of the Criminal Court had been appointed in 2020. Women had been at the forefront of the battle against COVID-19 and, through their high-level government positions, had played a major role in decision-making during the pandemic. Her Government intended to tackle the low representation of women in Parliament, including through targeted campaign finances and a gender orientation programme for members elected to office that would promote women's involvement in politics.

12. The legal framework governing associations had been overhauled in a bill submitted to the Parliament in 2019. The right to freedom of expression and association was a contentious issue in the context of domestic legislation; caution was exercised in relation to factors that could disrupt social harmony. Rights should be exercised responsibly, within the

law and in a respectful manner. Her Government would not tolerate any form of reprisals against civil society organizations or individuals advocating human rights and it remained committed to preventing and investigating harm against such persons, whether in person or online.

13. Existing efforts to integrate digital learning in education had helped to minimize disruption to schooling during the pandemic. Although sociocultural challenges impeded the direct employment of women at tourist resorts, efforts were being made to emphasize the income-generating opportunities for atoll communities of integrating tourism in existing livelihoods. A minimum wage had been suggested by the Salary and Wage Advisory Board and was under review.

14. Overall, 40 per cent of those who had sought income support during the lockdown period were women – 75 per cent of whom were self-employed, mostly in farming or manufacturing activities. To further support women, the eligibility criteria set by the job centre had been revised and stakeholders had been engaged to facilitate communication. Special financing programmes had been approved for businesses led by women. A voluntary relocation programme had also been introduced – focused on single women, single mothers and mothers with children with disabilities – that helped families in Male' affected by unemployment to return to their islands.

15. A comprehensive assessment of the state of gender statistics had led to the integration of a gender statistics strategy in the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics. Despite ongoing challenges, including inadequate human capital and infrastructure and budget restraints, which had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, her Government continued to allocate greater resources to social protection and the protection of vulnerable groups.

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16. **Ms. Rana** said that, while she commended the withdrawal of the Maldivian Government's reservation to paragraph 1 subsections (b), (e), (g) and (h) and paragraph 2 of article 16 of the Convention, concerns remained about the retained reservation to paragraph 1 subsections (a), (c), (d) and (f). Efforts to harmonize laws, policies and programmes with the Convention were appreciated, particularly with regard to the Gender Equality Act, the Sexual Harassment Act and Sexual Offence Act, the new Penal Code, the Second Amendment to the Family Act, the establishment of the Family Protection Authority and the two National Domestic Violence Prevention Strategic Plans. Their implementation and impact on substantive equality were what counted, however.

17. Referring to disparate interpretations of sharia law, she said that the Committee was seriously concerned about the disproportionate penalization of women for sex-related offences. A significantly larger number of women were sentenced to death and convicted of adultery and extramarital relations, primarily owing to discriminatory investigative and evidentiary policies. She wished to know what measures were envisaged to eliminate such discrimination and alleviate the unrealistic burden of evidence.

18. Referring to article 10 (b) of the Constitution, which prohibited the enactment of legislation that contravened any tenet of Islam, and article 16 (a), which guaranteed rights and freedoms provided that they did not contravene any tenet of Islam, she asked what measures were envisaged to harmonize such provisions and customary practices with the principle of equality and non-discrimination.

19. Although the Constitution and domestic legislation prohibited discrimination on the basis of gender, laws concerning rape and other forms of sexual violence denied effective access to justice for survivors. Perpetrators of sexual violence usually evaded criminal liability owing to burdensome evidentiary requirements. The Committee had been informed that most ministries lacked the committees or policies prescribed by law and rarely conducted investigations or dismissed cases owing to lack of evidence. She therefore asked what measures were envisaged to promote more effective action and amendments to the Sexual Offences Act.

20. Welcoming the draft amendments to the Penal Code to criminalize female genital mutilation, she asked when they were likely to be enacted and what efforts were being made to raise awareness of the existence and effects of female genital mutilation.

21. Although the COVID-19 pandemic had led to an increase in domestic violence, the prosecution rate remained very low. She therefore asked whether the State party intended to criminalize domestic violence as a separate offence. She also wished to know when it planned to enact the Witness Protection Bill and the Evidence Bill, and what measures were envisaged to ensure that services were provided to victims in a cost-effective and timely manner.

22. She asked whether there were plans to establish complaint mechanisms under the Gender Equality Act in all relevant institutions. She would also appreciate data on reported cases, investigations undertaken and remedial action on behalf of victims.

23. Noting that the current comprehensive review of the family law system would seek to remove barriers faced by women in obtaining access to justice, she wished to learn more about the methodology of the review, the involvement of relevant stakeholders and the expected date of completion.

24. **Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the Government was determined to delete some provisions of article 16 (a) of the Constitution and to complete the review of the family law system by the end of 2022. The Family Protection Authority was collaborating with stakeholders to ensure more effective implementation of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act.

25. **Mr. Shameem** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that only two women were currently facing the death penalty and their cases were still pending before the Supreme Court. The strict provisions of the Penal Code rendered it virtually impossible to sentence any person to flogging. Alternative penalties had been prescribed in the Code. Furthermore, pursuant to recent amendments to the Penal Code, both males and females were now prosecuted for adultery.

26. Domestic violence was not criminalized under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act but victims could seek remedies through civil proceedings. In addition, protection orders were issued by the Family Court. However, if a criminal offence was committed in a domestic setting, the criminal justice system would intervene and prosecute the perpetrator.

27. The evidentiary burden under the Sexual Offences Act had been interpreted by the Supreme Court, which had found it highly effective in ensuring the conviction of perpetrators of sexual offences.

28. **Mr. Riffath** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the Evidence Bill specified the comprehensive evidentiary rules applicable in the courts. The Parliament was currently considering the Bill and it would hopefully be promulgated in 2022. With regard to the protection of victims and witnesses, amendments to the Criminal Procedure Act were currently being drafted and would probably be submitted to Parliament during its current session.

29. **Mr. Thayyib** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the Family Protection Authority was currently focusing on non-punitive measures for perpetrators of domestic violence, since family members were frequently dependent on the persons concerned in financial and other terms. It was planned to establish a service centre that would run a comprehensive perpetrator rehabilitation programme.

30. **Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that 75 institutions had already established complaint mechanisms. Steps were being taken to raise awareness of their importance, but it was a sensitive and challenging matter, especially on islands with a very small population. She hoped that the comprehensive review of the family law system would be concluded in due course and that a bill would be submitted to Parliament by late 2022.

31. **Ms. Rana** noted that radicalized religious groups were opposed to action aimed at promoting gender equality and women's rights. She would therefore be interested in hearing about awareness-raising programmes on women's rights in Islam, steps to monitor the dissemination of unlawful information on such rights and measures to prevent such acts. She

also asked whether training courses were organized for the police, prosecutors and judges, to ensure that they used gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory methodology in investigating and prosecuting sexual violence.

32. **Ms. Rizna** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that action was being taken with international partners to develop, by the end of 2022, training modules and programmes for the judiciary regarding the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and the Sexual Offences Act. “Training of trainers” programmes had been implemented in the previous two years with relevant governmental stakeholders, the judiciary and administrative staff.

33. **Mr. Thaufeeq** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the National Counter Terrorism Centre had drafted a national action plan aimed at addressing religious disinformation and misinterpretation. It would provide for stricter monitoring, primarily by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, of what was taught in the country’s mosques, especially by foreign preachers whose extremist messages contravened the principles of Islam. In addition, religious scholars sought to oppose inaccurate interpretations of gender perspectives in Islam.

34. **Mr. Yoosuf** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the police were conducting awareness-raising programmes for front-line police officers and investigators of sexual offences, including a programme supported by the United Nations Children’s Fund and other stakeholders. More than 400 police officers had been trained during the previous 18 months.

35. **Mr. Shameem** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that a prosecution guideline had also been established and was regularly reviewed. In addition, the police, assisted by international agencies, were reviewing all investigation policies under the new Maldives Police Service Act in order to ensure that they were in line with international best practices.

36. **Ms. Mahmood** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the Parliament was currently reviewing the Sexual Offences Act with a view to alleviating the evidentiary burden. It hoped to adopt the necessary amendments by the end of 2021.

37. **Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the vetting process by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs had been reviewed and would probably lead to positive developments. The Ministry collaborated with the social sector, especially in selecting themes for Friday prayers, since it provided an opportunity to address sensitive issues.

38. **Ms. Reddock** said that she wished to hear about the status of the National Gender Equality Action Plan that had been adopted in 2019. According to the delegation, the Government was hoping to expedite the adoption and implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan (2021–2025).

39. She would appreciate information regarding plans to improve the financial and human resources and technical capacity of the National Women’s Machinery or the Gender Desk, as well as data concerning existing staff, technical capacity in the area of gender analysis, and measures to improve the availability of gender-disaggregated data for planning and monitoring purposes.

40. She was impressed by the fact that Women Development Committees had been established in all atolls and that their role had been enhanced by the Decentralization Act. She would be interested in hearing about any plans for capacity-building and empowerment programmes for the Women Development Committees, the Family and Children Service Centres and the Island Councils.

41. **Ms. Akizuki** noted that efforts to establish temporary special measures among political parties to increase women’s leadership had proved unsuccessful. The Committee had also been informed that people’s perception of the establishment of a quota for women on local councils was predominantly negative. She wished to know what were the reasons for the failure of those temporary special measures and whether any awareness-building activities had been carried out to familiarize people with the concept of women’s leadership. She asked whether the Strategic Action Plan contained specific time-bound goals and quotas for temporary special measures.

42. Noting that 40 per cent of the SME Development Finance Corporation loan portfolio would be allocated to women, young people and persons with disabilities, she asked whether

any data were available on the quantitative or qualitative impact of the measure. She would also appreciate detailed information on the impact of the quotas aimed at increasing women's access to loans established by the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture.

43. As the purpose of temporary special measures was to achieve de facto or substantive equality, she considered that the State party might need temporary special measures in almost all areas, including political and public life, education, health, employment and the economic empowerment of women.

44. **Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that, notwithstanding the financial challenges faced by the Government, the staff of Family and Children Service Centres had been increased to 82 members in four atolls since early 2020. Their work included the provision of temporary protective State care for children and women. Most staff members had experience in areas such as psychology, social work, gender equality and human rights.

45. It was planned to restructure the Gender Department, which had been established under the Gender Equality Act, by the end of 2021.

46. The Gender Equality Action Plan was not yet finalized because additional targets had been added to the earlier version, with achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in mind. The new version was being reviewed by the Cabinet of Ministers and she hoped that implementation would start by the end of 2021. Adequate funds had been set aside for the Plan in the 2022 budget, including enough for the Island Women's Development Committees to implement it at the island level.

47. A quota of 33 per cent female members of the Island Women's Development Committees had been set through the Decentralization Act. In the elections of 2021, 39.4 per cent of those elected had been women.

48. An answer to the questions on temporary special measures would be provided in writing, as would data on the quantitative or qualitative impacts of the SME Development Finance Corporation loan portfolio.

49. **Ms. Reddock** asked whether the new Gender Equality Action Plan, once adopted, would allow for enhanced gender-sensitivity training for men working in the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, the Women's Development Committees and the Island Councils.

50. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she wondered whether the delegation thought that introducing temporary special measures for political parties' internal primaries would work. It would be useful to know what the problem with political parties was.

51. **Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the issue of quotas for political parties had been a difficult discussion. The current plan was for parties to use quotas in their internal elections, but discussions with the Elections Commission were ongoing. Under the Gender Equality Action Plan, gender-sensitivity training would be provided for staff at all levels of Government. Funds for that purpose had been set aside in the 2022 budget.

52. **Ms. Yumna** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the Government had established gender focal points in 16 institutions and was working continuously on raising awareness of the importance of a gender component in Island Development Plans. Some temporary economic measures had been taken; for instance, work was ongoing on establishing day-care services, in order to reduce the burden on women and encourage them to engage actively in development.

53. **Ms. Imad** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that, in the three years since the SME Development Finance Corporation had been established, numerous credit facilities had been provided to women workers. No significant impact had yet been observed, since the Corporation had been founded recently, but business clinics were planned to assess the impact on women's livelihoods.

54. **Mr. Thayyib** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the Government, having identified areas all over the country where case workers' capacities needed strengthening,

had scheduled the first annual “training of trainers” programme for December 2022. The intention was to ensure that staff would always be able to deliver their services to communities effectively, despite the high turnover of social workers on the country’s atolls.

55. **Ms. Riyaza** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS 21) had helped to conduct a gender statistics assessment in 2019 and 2020, resulting in recommendations on improving the collection of gender statistics. In line with those recommendations, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Gender Statistics had been formed; it would be the main instrument for monitoring the Gender Equality Action Plan. One organizational reform to the Maldives Bureau of Statistics resulting from enactment of the Statistics Act in July 2021 would be the creation of a section dedicated to gender and social statistics, as also recommended in the gender statistics assessment. PARIS 21 and the Asian Development Bank were helping to build capacity relating to gender statistics in government bodies such as the Maldives Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services.

56. The Government, alongside the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, had conducted a gender assessment on the impact of COVID-19; the pandemic had caused 26 per cent of women to lose their income. A census would be conducted in 2022, in which the data collected would be viewed through a gender lens.

57. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would be interested to hear the delegation’s assessment of the efforts made to eliminate content reinforcing gender stereotypes from the school curriculum. She wondered what were the major indicators for reviewing the results of those efforts. In view of the new situation, it would be useful to know when resources would be allocated for another systematic revision of the curriculum. She would appreciate receiving details of academic programmes and professional training sessions – in formal and informal settings – intended to raise awareness of gender equality, domestic violence and gender-based violence among teachers and other educators.

58. She would welcome the delegation’s assessment of the Domestic Violence Prevention Strategic Plan 2017–2021 and wondered what indicators were used for monitoring its results. She wished to know what were the main indicators and benchmarks of the next Strategic Plan, what resources had been allocated to it and how it would relate to the Gender Equality Action Plan.

59. She would also like to have details of the steps and envisaged timeline for adopting a categorical definition of marital rape in the legislation, criminalizing it and ensuring enforcement. It would be useful to hear about the Government’s current efforts to reduce and eliminate impunity in cases of domestic violence, child sexual violence and gender-based violence. She wondered what measures were planned to encourage women to lodge complaints and to have them treated in a gender-sensitive manner in all procedures and at all stages of assistance. She hoped to hear the delegation’s assessment of the work of the Witness and Victim Support Unit and the Family and Child Unit within the Prosecutor General’s Office. Information about the availability and effectiveness of legal assistance and legal aid – both permanent and temporary special measures – granted to women victims of domestic violence and other gender-based violence would be helpful.

60. She wished to know how the Government would ensure effective assistance to and rehabilitation of all women throughout the country in family and protection service centres and safe houses, including while the pandemic was ongoing. It would be helpful to hear about any plans to increase resources for such services.

61. She wondered what steps were being taken to ensure effective implementation of the Health Sector Response to Gender-based Violence and other guidelines, in order to train health-care practitioners more consistently. She would appreciate information on how the Government would enhance the awareness of and skills in tackling gender-based violence in the professional training of other key stakeholders, such as the police and judiciary.

62. Lastly, she wished to know how women would be made more aware of their rights and bargaining power in family and society, and how women’s economic empowerment would be secured as part of the strategy for preventing gender-based violence.

63. **Ms. Rana**, noting the statement in paragraph 105 of the State party's replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/MDV/RQ/6) that the National Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan 2020–2022 would be fully implemented once the public health measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had been lifted, said that she wished to know whether those measures had been lifted and when funds would be allocated to enable the Plan's full implementation. Which entity had primary responsibility for implementing the Plan and what implementation monitoring mechanisms were in place? Details of the steering committee would be useful: its membership, the frequency of meetings and future plans for it, in particular once the pandemic was over. A temporary shelter, providing only basic services, had been established for victims of trafficking in persons; she wished to know exactly when the permanent shelter envisaged in the Plan would be established.

64. She would appreciate information on how the State party would protect migrant and undocumented women and girls who were victims of trafficking. She wondered what measures were taken to address the root causes and risk factors that made persons more vulnerable to trafficking, and whether steps were being taken to reduce demand for sexual services and raise clients' awareness of the situation of persons providing such services. She hoped for information on efforts to identify victims; to adopt a standard operating procedure for proactive identification of victims and train officials in its use; and to refer the most vulnerable groups to services and raise their awareness of trafficking.

65. **Ms. Azza** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the new school curriculum rolled out in 2015 included topics such as relationships, sexuality and respect. However, the Government recognized the need to cover gender-based violence, sexual abuse, exploitation, harmful practices and unwanted pregnancies. The bulk of training on those issues happened while teachers were in service; the Government was in dialogue with teacher training institutions on how to incorporate them into pre-service training.

66. **Mr. Thayyib** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, implementation of the Domestic Violence Prevention Strategic Plan 2017–2021 had been extended to the end of 2022. Work on the next Plan would take place in 2022 and the budget had been allocated, although the Government was still seeking resources from international donors, in particular for monitoring of the Plan and capacity-building for the implementing agencies. A written reply would be provided on the indicators used for monitoring the Plan's results.

67. **Mr. Shameem** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the first ever conviction in the country for marital rape, handed down by the High Court in October 2020, was a progressive step in the State's effort to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The Attorney General's ongoing harmonization work would resolve any differences in legal interpretations surrounding marital rape between the Penal Code and the Sexual Offences Act; completion was expected by the end of 2022.

68. The Witness and Victim Support Unit within the Prosecutor General's Office was staffed by three social workers, who regularly met victims of serious crime to help them access other services and to provide information on the status of the offender and case in question. The Maldives Police Service had a unit providing similar services at the investigation stage.

69. **Mr. Mahir** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that health-care professionals were being trained to identify and advise on cases of gender-based and domestic violence. Since many medical professionals came from abroad and only stayed in Maldives for a short period, training and knowledge retention represented a challenge. The health sector had also enhanced regulation of health-care professionals. The planned introduction of general practitioners would result in trained individuals being present in smaller communities, able to identify persons vulnerable to gender-based and domestic violence.

70. **Mr. Mannan** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the Maldives Police Service had recently established a department dedicated to investigating trafficking in persons; victims always had access to a lawyer and a translator. Agencies including the Police and the Labour Relations Authority were working to raise awareness of the assistance available to victims.

71. **Ms. Rizna** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that, in line with the Criminal Procedure Act, court cases involving victims of trafficking only went ahead when translation and interpretation services were available.

72. **Mr. Amir** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the budget for implementing the Gender Equality Action Plan in 2020 had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The newly established Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office, under the Ministry of Defence, had primary responsibility for implementing the Action Plan. The steering committee was responsible for monitoring the Action Plan. It was chaired by a representative of the Ministry of Defence and included representatives of several other agencies, including Maldives Immigration and the Ministry of Home Affairs, and a non-governmental organization called Advocating the Rights of Children.

73. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, a temporary shelter had been established. While its location on the island of Gulhifalhu had caused some concern, that was the best location available. It had not accommodated any victims in 2021. The Government was currently formulating the Victim Assistance and Shelter Service Regulation, in consultation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in order to ensure that services were in line with international best practice. Prior to the existence of the temporary shelter, victims had been provided with legal support and medical services, in addition to accommodation and food.

74. The Women Development Committees in the islands were no longer run by the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services. The members were now elected pursuant to the Decentralization Act and the Committees' budgets were allocated by the Island Councils. The members' salaries would be increased from January 2022. The Ministry nonetheless continued to play a key role in member training and capacity-building, and it provided additional funds for projects and programmes, primarily under the Gender Equality Action Plan.

75. **Mr. Amir** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that efforts to overcome language barriers included work with IOM to design a programme that targeted languages commonly used by migrant workers. A baseline study on victims of trafficking in persons had been planned and financial resources allocated, but it had not yet been undertaken owing to the travel restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Guidelines on assistance and shelters for victims were being drafted, and the World Day against Trafficking in Persons had been marked for the first time in 2020.

76. **Ms. Rizna** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that a training programme on trafficking in persons for judges, prosecutors and defence lawyers that was being developed with IOM would address aspects of trafficking that were relevant to Maldives, national legislation and practitioners' insights.

Articles 7–9

77. **Ms. Akizuki** asked what steps were planned to adopt and implement temporary special measures or quotas to increase women's representation in Parliament and their participation in politics and at the highest level of public services; whether programmes or strategies existed to raise the awareness of political leaders and the public of the importance of women's participation in political and public life on an equal footing with men; and what measures were being taken to increase the number of women in the executive and the judiciary.

78. She wished to know how capacity-building and training on political leadership, negotiation and campaigning were provided to women and girls. She asked whether legal, administrative or monitoring measures were in place to increase the number of women contesting elections and assuming leadership roles in political parties, including earmarked funding for parties to ensure equal and equitable opportunities for women. She would welcome information on legal mechanisms to protect women human rights defenders, including those advocating for rural women's rights, and to promote their participation in civil society. Lastly, she would appreciate data on women's representation among the Government's international representatives.

79. **Ms. Gbedemah** asked how the State party's nationality laws would be revised to remove provisions that discriminated against women, including the requirement for those applying for Maldivian citizenship to renounce their existing nationality, thus rendering them stateless. She wished to know whether there was a timeline for those revisions, and what progress had been made towards accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the adoption of legislation to prevent and reduce statelessness.

80. **Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that while amending the Constitution would be challenging, her Government would endeavour to introduce targeted campaign funding, encourage political parties to establish quotas in their internal elections and increase the number of programmes on gender for elected officials. The National Gender Equality Action Plan set out four strategies in the area of equal participation and equitable representation in leadership positions and governance. The first was awareness-raising among the community, stakeholders and political parties to increase women's participation in the electoral process and their representation in political institutions. The second related to promoting shared work and parental responsibilities between men and women, while the third strategy involved a review of electoral laws to ensure women's access to political leadership, notably by addressing cultural, institutional and financial barriers; her Government would welcome support in that regard. The final strategy involved affirmative action and supportive national measures.

81. **Ms. Naseer** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that several initiatives, including capacity-building and awareness-raising sessions, had been taken to encourage women to assume leadership positions at the island level in cooperation with a number of organizations, including the United Nations Development Programme. They had resulted in an increased number of women standing for election to Island Councils.

82. **Mr. Ahmed** (Maldives) said that around 47 per cent of Maldivian heads of mission were women, who also held a large number of leadership positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

83. **Mr. Riffath** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that the entries in the National Registration Database of children born out of wedlock did not include information on to their fathers. The Government's efforts to address statelessness included a nationwide regularization programme to enable undocumented workers to return to their countries of origin. The matter represented a significant challenge for the Government, which was not in a position to assume obligations in relation to stateless persons, refugees or asylum seekers owing to resource implications and legal limitations.

84. **Ms. Gbedemah** asked whether a child born out of wedlock to a foreign mother and a Maldivian father was entitled to Maldivian citizenship, given that the father's information would not be included in the child's National Registration Database entry.

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85. **Ms. Manalo** asked how awareness had been raised of gender and women's rights in relation to education. She would welcome the implementation of a programme targeting young men to bring about fairness in education, particularly given that more women than men were enrolled in tertiary education. She wished to know to what extent efforts to raise awareness of the sexual and reproductive health curriculum among teachers and principals had been successful, and how the influence of conservative leaders in rural areas was overcome so that boys and girls enjoyed equal access to education. She asked what measures had been adopted to encourage women to enter fields of higher education that were dominated by men, and how social norms that discouraged families from allowing girls to leave home to receive an education were addressed.

86. **Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that there had never been any discrimination against girls in terms of access to education in Maldives; there were therefore no specific special programmes to address such discrimination.

87. **Ms. Azza** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that while there was gender parity in access to education, girls did outperform boys in some areas of education. Women's rights

were addressed in the new curriculum, and any gaps were covered by awareness-raising activities organized in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and Government institutions. All activities conducted at schools and education institutions took gender equality into account. There were several provisions involving families, children and communities that addressed children not in formal education. Parents could face prosecution for violating their children's right to education, and children's attendance at school was monitored on a daily basis and followed up if necessary. If schools were unsuccessful in securing a child's return to school, a referral could be made to the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services or the police.

88. **Ms. Ibrahim** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that awareness-raising programmes existed for girls and boys entering university and vocational training programmes. Most technical vocational training programmes were dominated by male students, although women could now receive vocational qualifications in areas including pharmacy, beauty and baking. The majority of the beneficiaries of her Government's bachelor's degree grant scheme were women.

89. **Ms. Yumna** (Maldives), speaking via video link, said that one of the strategies of the National Gender Equality Action Plan involved targeted programmes to increase men's representation in occupations where they were underrepresented, for example teaching, nursing and social work. Efforts were being made to provide affordable childcare, so that women could participate meaningfully in economic development and parents could pursue higher education. With the support of the Asian Development Bank, efforts were also being made to ensure that a holistic approach was taken to temporary measures.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.