



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Maldives
to the United Nations Office at Geneva

H.E. Ambassador Iruthisham Adam's Statement
Seminar on Climate Change & Human Rights
24 February 2012

Thank for Mr Moderator

I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to speak on this important panel. I am pleased to speak on the subject of forging closer cooperation between the human rights and climate change communities. I believe this is perhaps the most important issue being considered by this two-day seminar, because the success or otherwise of efforts to forge such a closer relationship will determine the ultimate success of the human rights and climate change agenda.

When the Maldives launched the international human rights and climate change agenda a few years ago, building on the work of Mary Robinson and others, there was widespread opposition to the idea that there were any linkages whatsoever between human rights law and climate change law.

However, through the leadership of Small Island States at the Male Conference on the Human Dimension of Climate Change, followed by efforts here in Geneva by Maldives, Bangladesh, Philippines, Switzerland, Costa Rica and others to secure the adoption of resolutions 7/23 and 10/4, we were able to overcome this opposition. We were also able to secure a high level of consensus on the nature and potential operationalization of the linkage between human rights and climate change.

The Maldives and Switzerland, together with friends in civil society, then lead efforts to transmit that consensus to international climate change talks in Copenhagen and then Cancun. The result of this effort was that human rights was included in the UNFCCC negotiating text in Copenhagen, and then included in the Cancun Agreements. Those Agreements refer to relevant Human Rights Council resolutions, and also make clear that climate change policies must respect and protect human rights.

This was a major achievement and I would like to thank all those countries and members of civil society which supported us.

Mr. Moderator,

With human rights concepts embedded in the Cancun Agreements, the Maldives felt that a key objective of the future climate change and human rights agenda was to operationalize those concepts. To translate the words contained in the Cancun Agreements into real action on the ground that would use human rights obligations and commitments to drive solutions to climate change.

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For that to happen, our view was that we in the human rights community must reach out to the climate change community to help foster understanding about how human rights principles and commitments can help improve climate change responses.

The simple fact of the matter is that climate change negotiators, people in environment ministries implementing climate change policies, and people working on climate change projects in development agencies are **not** human rights experts.

Thus both communities need to work together to learn from each other and drive forward our common agenda.

Unfortunately, since Cancun, our sense is that this has not happened. The agenda has treaded water.

We thus congratulate Philippines and Bangladesh for organising this meeting, which is a step in the right direction. The Maldives will continue to support Philippines and Bangladesh in their efforts.

We hope this meeting will be a spring-board for far more work by States and NGOs in climate change talks, at the UNFCCC, at meetings involving international development agencies, at regional meetings on climate change impacts, and national workshops on climate change.

Only by spreading the message in this way will the human rights language in the Cancun agreements be transformed into real improvements in the lives of people affected by climate change.

As one concrete proposal before I conclude, I would suggest that a similar seminar to this one, with such a rich collection of experts, can be organised during COP18 in Doha.

Thank you.

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