SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

STATEMENT BY H.E. MOHAMED SAEED, MINISTER OF TRANSPORT
AND COMMUNICATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

Your Excellency the Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege for me to have this opportunity to address at this Second Phase of the World Summit on Information Society being held here in Tunis.

May I use this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Excellency Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of Republic of Tunisia and the people of this historic country for the wonderful hospitality extended to me and my delegation here in Tunis. I also wish to extend my appreciation to the United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of International Telecommunication Union Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, President of the PrepCom Ambassador Janis Karklins. Allow me also to congratulate the President and other officials elected for this Summit.

The significant participation of the countries, and at such distinguished level, is a clear evidence of the increasing importance of Information and Communication Technology and its role in our society. We consider WSIS to be a very major step in the process towards a more equitable and sustainable global society. It is also a clear indication that we are committed to turning our collective vision of an inclusive, development-oriented Information Society into a reality.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants

We, in the Republic of Maldives, have addressed the subject of Information Communication Technology with much attention and care. Our progress to date has been encouraging. We formulated a National Information Technology Policy and a Telecommunication Policy that will steer us along the correct path in the coming years. Maldives, being a geographically dispersed island nation, have numerous development challenges ahead of us. We are equipping ourselves with Information Technology as an enabler to overcome these challenges and thereby reducing the digital divide and to have an all-inclusive society.

However, we understand that Information technology by itself will not be of significant value unless citizens and businesses acquire knowledge and resources that would allow them to access such services. Equally, the citizens and businesses aspire for availability of the telecommunications infrastructure and the electronic transactions supporting ICT environment.

Mr. Chairman
According to the Action Plan of the Geneva Phase, all countries should strive to ensure development of national e-strategies, including the human capacity. Since then we have worked
with our citizens to make this a reality. We have successfully rolled-out our Telecommunication Services to reach the whole country. The increase in the penetration of telecommunication services to cover more than 50% of the population is a clear evidence of our efforts to promote ICT for our development. Soon, we will be extending government services online to the citizens and the business community of Maldives through Electronic Service Delivery. e-Government and e-Governance are very much at the top of our priorities for making Maldives a citizen-centric country. We have indeed strived to make ICT infrastructure an essential foundation for the creation of the information society in Maldives.

Mr. Chairman
Maldives is also a country recovering from the tragedy which hit the Asia last year. Numerous development efforts have been hampered by the devastation caused by the 2004 December Tsunami. A year on and we are still working very hard to attain normalcy in our day-to-day lives in the islands worst hit by this tragedy. However, we are overwhelmed by the support and concern shown by the international community in this very crucial time for us. We have seen a very fine example of how multi lateral cooperation can benefit a country in need.

We hope the international community will continue its support for all of us affected by such tragedies. It is in a time like this that the basic role of developed countries, relevant international development organizations and financial institutions becomes crucial.

While we are well aware of the fact that enhancing investment and technical know-how in the information technology sector alone is not sufficient to solve the problems of poverty-reduction and realizing social and economic growth in the developing countries, we want to reinstate our commitment to prioritize our ICT activities in empowering the people of our country to gain access to knowledge and information, so as to bridge the disparities that exist.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants

In closing, allow me to reiterate congratulations on the political leadership and commitment evident by this distinguished gathering. We hope that this Summit will further facilitate the creation of new opportunities that would allow better standards of living, quality of life and sustainable development in years to come. In conclusion, let us make this Tunis Phase of the WSIS, indeed a Summit of Solutions, to translate the our Commitment of the Summit into tangible reality that manifests all the principles and values of joint work so that our world becomes more accessible and more equitable.

Thank you