Statement by:
Mr Hassan Hussin Shihab, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Maldives to the United Nations
Statement on Agenda Item 19: Sustainable development.
New York, 5 November 2013

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation wishes to associate itself with the statement delivered by Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Nauru on behalf of AOSIS. Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his reports under this agenda item.

Climate change and sustainable development are issues of particular importance to the Maldives. And thus, the Maldives has been a consistently strong advocate for taking action on climate change. Sea level rise is one of the most tangible and readily acknowledged consequences of climate change. By the year 2100, estimates put the global average sea-level rise at a level up to 1m with a more significant rise of 2-3 meters possible. As an archipelago of 1190 islands with over 80% per cent of its land area lying just above a meter from mean sea level, this threat is existential and imminent for my island nation.

Only a year ago we witnessed the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy destroying thousands of homes and severely damaging transportation infrastructure here in New York, causing an overall damage of 68 billion USD. Natural disasters such as this, particularly in Small Island developing States, often have the potential to undo the development achievements of years, even decades, within seconds. In the Maldives, a Strategic National Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction for 2010-2020 has been designed to promote collaboration among policy makers, experts and practitioners for the development of a comprehensive risk management approach, build resilience, and to raise public awareness.

Mr. Chairman,

As the international community works towards the formulation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 development agenda, we stress the importance of considering the lessons learnt. We believe that SDGs should be seen as a continuation of MDGs, whereby its achievements complement, and the gaps reflect the formulation of SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda. Sustainable development and climate change have to be addressed jointly and not viewed in isolation of each other but rather as a continuation of a global development project. For the Maldives sustainable development is only possible if
climate change adaptation is effectively integrated into broader national sustainable development plans, policies, projects, and programs.

The Maldives stands ready to fully implement the necessary changes. We have pledged to become carbon neutral by 2020, along with making the country a biosphere reserve and also phasing out ozone depleting substances and abiding by international convention requirements as best as we can. Our country along with other SIDS have been urging for aggressive mitigation actions by major historic emitters, while not forgetting critical climate adaptation requirements and at the same time calling upon emerging economies to adapt more sustainable growth strategies.

Financing of development remains a major challenge for small countries with small economies, like the Maldives. Moreover, those nations that have long lagged behind often face additional challenges such as high debt burdens, weak institutions, and a lack of capacity, which hinders the achievement of development goals. In this regard we call on all nations to fulfil their ODA commitments. It is also important to create SIDS specific funding mechanisms such as debt relief initiatives and debt conversion to encourage the conversion of official sector debt repayments into climate change adaptation resources that will undoubtedly enhance governments’ abilities to channel substantial amounts of domestic resources into climate change adaptation.

Mr. Chairman,

While poverty eradication remains the main concern, we want to see the inclusion of issues of importance to SIDS in the post-2015 development agenda. Growing water stresses are a major problem for the Maldives and other small island states. Salt water intrusion into ground water damages crops and causes damage to properties. In 2012 alone, the Government of Maldives had to supply desalinated water to about 87 out of 194 inhabited islands. Water and sanitation continue to be major challenges.

Another priority for the Maldives and SIDS is the oceans. The establishment of an SDG dedicated to oceans is critical to Maldives as the oceans are our source of life, livelihood and the identity of the people. Covering more than 70 per cent of our planet’s surface oceans play a key role in supporting life on earth. They regulate our climate, provide us with natural resources and are essential for international trade, recreation and cultural activities. We therefore strongly call for the creation of a Sustainable Development Goal for oceans, which covers the coasts, the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the high seas.

Mr. Chairman,

The Maldives’s largest economic sectors are tourism and fisheries, which contribute more than 80 percent to our GDP, and are both acutely vulnerable to external shocks. The Maldives has prioritized sustainable tourism development policies, establishing safeguards designed to minimize the environmental impacts of tourism. Maldivians also practises pole and line fishing, which has been identified as one of the most sustainable forms of fishing, as it discriminates between the immature and mature fish. Thus Maldives is well on its way to securing sustainable ways to rejuvenate, and sustain development.

Once again, I assure to you that the Maldives is your partner in securing a fair, sustainable and inclusive future for all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.