Thank you Mr Chairman,

The Maldives would like to thank the Secretary General, and his Special Representatives, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, for their reports under this agenda item. My delegation welcomes the recommendations made thereof.

Let me also take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation and support for the work of the Special Representatives of the UN Secretary General and Special Rapporteurs, for their dedication and commitment to protecting the welfare of children and for their guidance and assistance in strengthening domestic child protection systems. The Maldives is grateful to have benefited from the discussions and recommendations provided during the visit to the country in May this year, by Ms Marta Santos-Pais, the Secretary General’s Special Representative for Violence Against Children.

Mr Chairman,

The promotion and the protection of the rights of the child continue to be a top priority for the Maldives. My delegation is pleased to note that an inter-ministerial committee established by the President in April this year, has completed its work reviewing and proposing holistic reform of the existing child protection system and mechanisms in the country. Based on the report of this committee, the Government is in the process of accelerating efforts to fill existing gaps and strengthen the child protection system.

As a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Government remains committed to international human rights standards and has been working towards harmonizing domestic legislation in line with Maldives’ international treaty obligations, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its two Optional Protocols. A Child Rights, Child Care and Child Protection Bill is being drafted which will, once enacted, ensure that Maldivian law is brought into full compliance with the Convention and its optional protocols. The Maldives was also a lead negotiator of the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure, and was among one of the first signatories of this Optional Protocol in February 2012. The Government is currently undergoing its legislative process to facilitate
ratification of the Optional Protocol, and we call on all Member States to accede to the Protocol at the earliest possible.

Mr Chairman,

With the recognition that children are our future and that they deserve special attention, care and protection, several initiatives have been undertaken in the Maldives towards advancing their rights. The Maldives has achieved near universality of primary education both in terms of literacy and enrolment. The Government remains committed to improve and sustain these achievements, and also boost higher education opportunities and beyond. The Disability Act passed in 2010 has also been an important milestone towards achieving an inclusive education, as it makes it mandatory for the Government to provide children with special needs, access to education. The Maldives has also made great strides in improving child health, particularly in reducing infant and child mortality rates. 2011 estimates suggest that Under Five Mortality Rate is close to 11 per 1,000 live births suggesting that Maldives has the highest reduction rates in the world at an average reduction rate of nearly 11% per year. The Government has been working towards sustaining the progress achieved in this field over the years and also remains committed to preventing child malnutrition.

Mr Chairman,

While considerable progress has been achieved on improving the welfare of children across the world, there is much more that still needs to be done. Greater efforts are needed to reduce the growing number of children being exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation every day. Strengthened measures are necessary to bring an end to the millions of children being trafficked or forced into child marriage every year, robbed of their childhood and denied their rights to health, education and security. A more coordinated response is required to substantially eliminate children in armed conflicts, who are particularly vulnerable and often exposed to multiple risks. Particular attention also needs to be placed on the empowerment of the girl child, as girls themselves will be key actors in achieving gender equality and advancing the progress of their nations.

A holistic and integrated approach and redoubling of efforts is therefore vital to address the many challenges faced worldwide, in promoting, protecting and advancing the rights of children. It is also of paramount importance that child protection systems are strengthened and that all policies taken at national, regional and international levels by all parties involved, take into account the basic principle of the best interests of the child. In the Maldives, the Regulations on Child Fostering and State Custody which has now been finalized, require the best interests of the child to be the primary concern when making decisions or when action is taken under the regulations, and the same is reinforced in the proposed Child Rights, Child Care and Child Protection Bill and prevailing Family Act. The Maldives also believes that it is of fundamental importance that children are included in the decision making processes and that their voices are heard on matters which directly affect them.
Mr Chairman,

In conclusion, let me reiterate the Government of Maldives’ firm commitment to eliminating all forms of violence against children, and to ensuring that our child protection system is strengthened through the enactment of relevant legislation and stronger relationships with UN agencies, human rights mechanisms, regional organizations, national institutions, and civil society. As the world turns now towards a post 2015 development agenda, the Maldives reaffirms that children’s rights should be an integral part of it. And as a nation, the Maldives looks forward to capitalizing on the gains the country has achieved in the past; towards securing a brighter future for all.

Thank you.