Statement by:

His Excellency Mr Ahmed Sareer, Permanent Representative to the United Nations

Agenda Item 69 (b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms and (c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives

New York, 31 October 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

At the outset, let me express the appreciation of my delegation to the Secretary General and Special Rapporteurs for their reports under this Agenda item.

The promotion and protection of human rights is an important pillar of Maldives’ domestic and foreign policy. The Constitution adopted in 2008, included a comprehensive bill of rights and with it came a democratic governance structure built into it. However, the enactment of formal and statutory measures is rarely enough to create and sustain an environment that delivers fully the fundamental human rights as envisioned. Rather, the Maldives believes that promoting human rights and improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms could be attained only through cultivating values and building resilience within the Maldivian society. Hence the Maldives has continued to advocate at the national and international levels, for cultivating the value of respect for human rights to complement formal and statutory measures in promoting human rights.

Mr. Chairman,

Three years ago, when the Maldives was elected to the Human Rights Council as the smallest country to occupy that seat, it stood for the voiceless and the marginalized. Today, the Maldives is proud to have created a voice for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) within the Council. Moreover, the Maldives has continuously advocated for global efforts at increasing the resilience of SIDS, as well and new and emerging democracies, in bringing their national human rights mechanisms to international standards. In this regard, the Maldives has led and supported a number of important initiatives at the Council among which is the initiative to establish a Voluntary Fund at the Council to support participation of Least Developed Countries and SIDS at the work of the Council. In particular, the Maldives has advocated to providing a platform for supporting countries that do not have a representation in Geneva to continue with their Universal Periodic Review (UPR) presentation.

At the Council, the Maldives has continued to forge a strong partnership with all relevant international stakeholders, towards attaining an effective and results-oriented global human rights protection system in
line with the five key principles we wholeheartedly believe in – (a) that human rights are inviolable and universal, that the promotion and protection of human rights across the globe must be done in a non-selective, equitable and non-politicised manner; (b) the centrality of human rights at domestic and international level; (c) dialogue and partnership between countries and other actors; (d) inclusivity of human rights for all peoples, regardless of their nationality, religion or ethnicity; and finally, (e) pursuing an objective assessment to improve human rights standards around the world in a balanced, fair and independent manner.

Mr. Chairman,

Like all other countries, the Maldives is going through serious challenges in the protection and promotion of human rights. What is of importance, however, is that the country has consistently taken much effort towards overcoming them. Since the beginning of the country’s democratic transition in 2004, we have come a long way. The Maldives has done more in the phase of 8 years than most countries have achieved in many decades. That is in part because of the country’s engagement with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, Special Rapporteurs and all thematic mandate holders, its partnership with other countries and relevant civil society organizations.

While the Maldives has welcomed all the country reports on the Maldives by the Special Procedures, the country does sometimes find it difficult to fully implement all the recommendations at once. Given the country’s small size and population, technical expertise and capacity is not readily available all the time. Given our environmental and associated economic vulnerabilities, our limited financial resources are overstretched.

My delegation believes, meaningful change does not come with fulfilling a checklist of recommendations. It comes in time, with cultivating values; the value of respect for human rights. Values are what builds resilience and robustness within a system and makes a change sustainable in the long run. The Maldives is now engaged in this endeavour; to consolidate our democracy and to cultivate respect for human rights. We firmly believe that our membership in the Human Rights Council greatly enhances and accelerates that effort. Our membership of the Council has enabled the Maldives to take some bold steps at the national level, such as enacting important pieces of legislation such as the Disabilities Act and the Domestic Violence Act, along with ratification of international human rights instruments such as all core conventions of the International Labour Organisation, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and acceding to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime. The Maldives hopes to continue in this international outreach to accelerate its national programme of cultivating respect for human rights.

Mr. Chairman,

The Maldives believes that the way forward in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms is through a complementary process of creating a domestic environment that respects human rights while engaging with the international community through constructive dialogue on issues of human rights. In this regard, the Maldives urges the international community to assist each other as partners, in creating a world that respects human rights and puts it at the forefront of human development.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.