



STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT OF THE MALDIVES  
DR. HUSSAIN RASHEED HASSAN TO THE 32<sup>ND</sup> SESSION OF THE  
UNESCO INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL OF THE MAN  
AND THE BIOSPHERE RESERVE PROGRAMME

Mr. Chair and members of the Council,

First of all, I wish to thank and congratulate the secretariat of the Man and Biosphere International Coordination Council for the excellent arrangements made in organizing this session. The Maldives would also like to congratulate all the newly designated biosphere reserves in 2020. Especially, I would like to congratulate the people of Fuvahmulah and Addu for their atolls being designated as UNESCO Biosphere Reserves today.

For the Maldives, this is a long-awaited milestone. The newly designated biosphere reserves of Fuvahmulah Island and Addu Atoll in the southern Maldives are without a doubt unique wonders of nature. The protection of these renowned coral reef systems, rich habitats and species, coupled with their sustainable management is a step towards not only environmental conservation but also sustainable development. The attainment of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status for Fuvahmulah and Addu is especially important not only for the people of the two cities, but



today is also a historic day for the whole Maldives, a nation of coral atolls and reefs that depends heavily on these wonders of nature for their livelihoods and sustenance, which at the same time is threatened by climate change and unsustainable use of natural resources.

The newly designated Maldives biosphere reserves boasts luscious mangroves, natural zoo of tiger sharks and manta rays that inhabit multicolored reefs filled with rich marine life. The protection of these areas has been a collective effort of the island communities of these two Atolls, their City Councils and the Environment Protection Agency and Ministry of Environment.

Mr. Chair.

The concept of biosphere reserves is not new to the Maldives. In fact, the UNESCO Baa Atoll biosphere reserve in the Maldives has been a story of success that clearly demonstrates how this model of conservation and protection can decouple development with environmental damages. The Baa Atoll biosphere reserve in the Maldives has shown the contribution a biosphere reserve can make to the livelihoods of the people, how it can contribute to the economy, and how it can promote research and education. The sustainable practices of the Baa Atoll are what we hope to



replicate in Fuvahmulah and Addu Biosphere Reserves and in other parts of the Maldives.

Fuvahmulah is a large oceanic coral island in the southern Maldives with a population of 12,000 islanders. It is the country's only single island administrative atoll. It is home to two mangroves and wetlands that has dominated the lifestyle patterns of its inhabitants. Fuvahmulah is an exemplary demonstration of the three functions of a biosphere reserve including, conservation, sustainable development and logistical support.

Addu Atoll is the southern-most atoll in the Maldives. This heart-shaped atoll is home to more than 32,000 Maldivians. The unique geography of this atoll, the scenic beauty, rich habitat and abundant biodiversity make it one of the most diverse atoll ecosystems of the country.

Mr. Chair.

We live in unprecedented times. If there is anything that the current pandemic has taught us, it is how much we depend on the natural resources and environmental services that we derive from them. The pandemic has also highlighted how disconnected we have been with our environment and how essential it is to live in harmony with nature.



Before I conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge, once again, with much appreciation, the efforts of the Man and Biosphere coordination council, especially in these challenging times. At the same time, I wish to urge the Council to continue the efforts and work towards the finalization of the Technical Guideline for Biosphere Reserves. Maldives reaffirms its support to the Man and the Biosphere Programme and we remain committed to the protection and conservation of the environment and biodiversity /for our common sustainable future.

I wish us all good health in these trying times.

I thank you.

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28 October 2020