Agenda item 17

Public health emergencies: preparedness and response

Thank you chair,

Today, we live in a world immersed in a global Covid pandemic; a world that has been made acutely aware of just how inter-connected we are and how precarious those connections are. The whole world has been waging a war against this disease for more than a year now.

The South East Asian Region has been one of the regions that has been heavily hit by Covid with the number of cases above 19 million. We have seen wave after wave of resurgence. We have been through several lockdowns and taken numerous infection prevention measures. Our fight against this disease still continues in our region.

In Maldives since March of 2020, we have seen 4 Covid peaks. Our Covid numbers are above 45 thousand and we have had more than 100 deaths thus far. We put in place prevention and control measures starting from Jan 2020. With the detection of first confirmed cases in the country in March 2020, there measures were escalated, whereby our National Emergency Operations Center was established and a multi sectorial operation involving government and non-government organizations were set up. A united effort has been in place and continuing since then.

The current resurgence that we are experiencing as we go through our 4th peak has hit us particularly hard. Despite our valiant efforts and strict measures, we are still unable to bring down our daily number of cases. We learn and modify our interventions constantly as we battle with our adversary and the daily death toll at all-time high. The daily influx of Covid cases that we are experiencing nowadays is higher than at any time during our previous peaks; as a result of which, are now facing several new challenges. Chief among them is our dire shortage of human resources, especially the medical staff. Our country is heavily dependent on our expatriate workforce in almost all areas. Most of our medical staff are from our neighboring countries and the regional Covid situation makes it very difficult for us to recruit new foreign

staff or even retrieve back our existing staff. Even if we were to develop more medical facilities to cater to our patients, without the doctors, nurses and lab technicians to treat them, the efforts would be to no avail.

Since the Covid vaccinations have become available, a huge vaccination campaign has been underway. We have now vaccinated over 290,000 people accounting for 69.43% (1st dose) and 34.86% (2nd dose) of vaccine eligible population, which also includes more than 80% of the high-risk population. We have vaccinated a good proportion of our population with their first dose, but we still have to give them their second dose and as with all countries, we are having difficulties acquiring the vaccines.

Our exhaustive efforts at educating the public to adopt the proper preventive measures don't seem to work very well as our average contact bubbles still remain large. We have a huge proportion of our public either in isolation or quarantine, and our backlogs keep building up as we race against time to catch up. Our situation like in many of our neighboring countries, remains critical.

At a time like this, we must be steadfast in implementing our resolutions like WHA73.1 (2020) on COVID-19 response and WHA73.8 (2020) on strengthening preparedness for health emergencies as well as implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005).

On a global scale we have fallen and risen again, we have learnt from our shared experiences and scientific knowledge and we can unequivocally state that, it is only through a united front that we can be saved. Maldives stands firmly with the decisions made by the World Health Organization and we are ready to do our part in bringing this pandemic to an end.

Thank you Chair