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Maldives has special vulnerability, says Annan

11 January, 2005 – Ahead of his address at the Small Island States' meeting in Mauritius on Wednesday 12 January, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan highlighted the need for addressing the serious challenges facing small island states in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami. Upon conclusion of his visit to the Maldives, Annan said: "I think there is no doubt that your country has a special vulnerability because of the environment."

"On 12 January there will be a meeting in Mauritius of small island states where one will be discussing their vulnerability due to climate change, due to other threats that are feared by these states."

On 26 December, the Tsunami inundated the entire Maldives and affected everyone. One third of the population was severely affected and the water swept away 10 percent of the country's housing stock leaving more than 12,000 homeless and displaced.

With a death toll of 82 and 26 persons reported missing, Maldives have miraculously been spared the heavy losses seen in other Tsunami affected countries. Dismissing concerns that this would affect the Maldives negatively with regards to donor assistance, Annan said: "I think the level of destruction obviously is much worse in some of the other countries. But given the size of your country, the extensive nature of the damage - because quite a lot of the islands have been affected and one third of the population also was affected and so, one cannot look at it in terms of numbers alone. So even though you didn't lose so many people, your social system has also been destabilized and you need help to get it back together."

"I don't think the fact that not too many people died here is a disadvantage. Obviously, a country like Indonesia has lots of sympathy from around the world because of the thousands of people who died. But on the reconstruction side, your country is very much part of the program."

During his visit to the Maldives, Annan, accompanied by his wife, Nane, flew over some of the worst affected areas in the Maldives and visited the island of Vilufushi on the Thaa Atoll and the island of Kelufushi of the Meemu Atoll situated in the south of the archipelago. On the islands, he saw the destruction caused by the Tsunami:

"I was also struck by the community spirit. People from other islands who have come to help clean up, who have come to support those who have lost much more than they did."