

# PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme

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## Asia Quake brings new impetus to rebuilding better and stronger in the Maldives

**Male, Maldives, 29 March 2005** – As the country woke up from an early warning after a massive quake struck the Tsunami zone, an urgent plan for rehabilitation was signed this morning by the Government of the Maldives in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The aim is to start rebuilding critical sea-transport and other public infrastructure to revitalize the economy.

For Patrice Coeur-Bizot, UNDP Resident Representative in the Maldives, “The challenge is now to regain the momentum and progress in the development of the Maldives that was taking place prior to the tsunami. It is essential that we engage in a ‘recovery plus’ where local communities receive adequate equipment and training to build safer homes and public infrastructure and are fully engaged in the planning and reconstruction process”.

These public works will provide short term employment to the affected population while communities will be involved in the reconstruction efforts. It will give people access to schools and hospitals by repairing the jetties and restoring the transportation networks. It will help revitalise local businesses and restore normality in people’s life by reconnecting the electricity system and replacing damaged electricity cables in some islands. The infrastructures should be restored within one year to remove bottlenecks and inefficiencies in the transport chain, which would have a direct impact on commodity prices and living standards.

The US\$5 million project, funded by Japan, the European Union, and the UN Foundation, will facilitate the efficient and timely distribution of relief and building material, and help restore the electrical distribution systems in tsunami affected areas.

“With a population spread over 200 islands, quick delivery of relief aid is a real challenge. Restoring and improving essential public infrastructures, such as hospitals, transportation and telecommunication systems become an urgent priority”, said Hon. Mr. Ahmed Abdulla, Acting Minister of Foreign Affaires.

One fourth of the islands suffered major damages to essential infrastructure, such as jetties and harbours, hampering access to affected communities. In some of the most devastated islands, schools, municipalities, sea walls and navigation infrastructures were completely destroyed. In 95 islands, the tsunami damaged the electric power supply system, hindering over 20 powerhouses and 100 generators, and smashing up hundreds of streetlights and kilometres of cables.

The overall damage to the infrastructure sector amounts to US\$68 million. A steering committee including representatives from relevant Ministries, private sector companies, community based organisations, donors and UNDP, has been established last February to ensure proper planning, prioritisation and oversight of the reconstruction effort. Twenty seven priority sites have been selected for the immediate phase. Building material is being shipped to the Island of Muli to start ground work on the quay wall and the reconstruction of the regional hospital.

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