

PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme



International CONFAB Profiles Underfunded Maldives Post-Tsunami Needs

17 March, Manila, Philippines -- A special high-level international meeting on post-tsunami recovery and reconstruction for the Maldives concluded here tonight with a firm commitment of support for a short and medium-term post-tsunami recovery plan for the Maldives. This select meeting was held to give an extra boost to Maldives' post-tsunami recovery efforts that were largely overshadowed by the plight of the other tsunami-hit countries.

Participants at the Maldives development partners' meeting expressed assurances of support for specific areas of recovery and reconstruction for the country, including providing shelter, reviving livelihoods, rebuilding infrastructure, and mitigating future disasters.

Mohamed Jaleel, Minister of Finance and Treasury for the Maldives, expressed appreciation in his opening remarks to the international community for the quick relief efforts that "staved off potential serious consequences such as widespread hunger or disease" immediately after the 26 December tsunami. He noted, however, that specific types of relief still remain not fully met. He said that "providing shelter urgently and ensuring the availability of clean water and other basic needs are a big challenge."

Mr. Jaleel also cited transport and infrastructure as two other important needs, especially due to the huge logistical difficulties in getting goods and services to the hundreds of small islands of the Maldives dispersed over such a large expanse of the Indian Ocean.

The joint needs assessment by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the UN estimates that total losses from the tsunami in the Maldives were \$470 million, or 62 percent of GDP. One-third of the populations of the Maldives, or roughly 100,000 people, were severely affected by the tsunami. The islands hardest hit were where the poorest of the poor lived. Fifteen thousand people were left homeless and four thousand families lost their livelihoods and homes. Housing, schools and health facilities were reduced to rubble. Plantations are fallow due to heavily salinated soil.

"We are at a crossroad at which we must transit from the provision of immediate relief to longer-term recovery and human development," said Patrice Coeur-Bizot, UN Resident Coordinator and the UNDP Resident Representative in the Maldives. Mr. Coeur-Bizot urged that the next phase of picking up the pieces in the Maldives should strive for 'Recovery Plus'. "This means not just bringing the Maldives back to pre-tsunami

development levels, but more importantly taking the country forward,” said Mr. Coeur-Bizot.

He said that for housing, “recovery plus” translates into “better and more resilient shelter and related infrastructure.” He explained that it means offering social service delivery more attuned to geographic conditions, developing comprehensive plans to replace social services that were devastated, and getting local communities fully involved in reviving livelihoods, particularly in the fishery and agriculture sectors.

To safeguard the environment, recovery plus means “working with island communities to ensure that environmental issues are fully taken into account in planning, especially regarding water, sanitation, sewage and waste management,” said Mr. Coeur-Bizot.

He noted that the UN system is acting jointly with the Government in the area of disaster preparedness and early warning systems. He said that the plan for ‘recovery plus’ requires “setting up a nationwide system to inform people of potential and impending dangers.”

This special meeting for Maldives was held on the eve of a larger regional tsunami conference also in Manila. The day-long confab on the Maldives was chaired by the Government of the Maldives, and co-sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Asia Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, and the World Bank. Participants included 50 high-level representatives from donor countries, non-governmental organizations, and UN agencies.

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