



Remarks by Akiko Fujii, UNDP Resident Representative, Maldives
Inception Workshop, UNDP – Reimagining Tourism Project
29 March 2021, 09:15 AM

Honourable Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom,
Deputy Minister of Tourism, Dr Naushad Mohamed,
Distinguished guests,

Asalaam Alaikum and Good Morning.

I am delighted to address all of you at the inception workshop of the joint project by the Government and UNDP Maldives on reimagining tourism in the Maldives.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the government of Maldives on its efforts to reduce the impact on the tourism industry brought forth by the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent global impacts.

Being a tourism dependent country, the COVID 19 pandemic has a devastating effect on the Maldivian economy. The Rapid Livelihood Assessment conducted by the Government and UNDP revealed that the halt and subsequent decline in tourism affected the lives of tourism industry workers and had a drastic spill over effect on construction, transport, wholesale and retail businesses. One of hardest hit segments within the industry was the guesthouse tourism segment, which in 2019 contributed an estimated 4% to the tertiary sector economic activity

As the country grapples with the recovery, we must also recognize that the pandemic as an opportunity, as it has exposed many vulnerabilities within the industry, and provided the space to re-imagine a different future for tourism. One that is more sustainable, inclusive and hopefully more resilient to shocks.

This future is what is being sought through this reimagining tourism project. With a focus on local tourism, the project aims to transform tourism in the Maldives with a focus on diversification of the tourism offer, actors involved and target market of the guesthouse segment. This involves leveraging of community-led conservation of natural ecosystems and cultural heritage as a novel tourism offer, facilitating a bigger role for local councils in tourism planning and enabling the establishment of cross sector value chain linkages and creating a more meaningful role for young people and women in the local tourism ecosystem.

On behalf of UNDP, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ministry of Tourism for your continued support and strong commitment to the project. I am happy to note that the project contributes to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The project is also directly in line with the Maldivian Government's Strategic Action Plan as well as the priorities for the National Resilience and Recovery.

Finally, I would like to say that this project is just the beginning – this project is envisioned to be both an experiment and catalyst for greater transformative changes. The successful implementation of the project will demonstrate sustainable models for enhancing the dividend to nature and local communities from tourism, that could potentially be grown across the country.

The conversation on reimagining a different future for tourism is a global one, and one especially relevant to Small Island Developing States (SIDs). The Maldives experience with this project, the successes, failures, challenges and lessons learnt will be of much value to other SIDs who also find themselves grappling with challenges similar to the Maldives.

I want to thank all stakeholders present at this meeting and beyond for your support and contributions to make this project a success.

Shukriya. Thank You.