

UNICEF Maldives Representative Dr. Edward Addai speaking:

Thank you very much your excellency and through you to the team. I am very pleased to be in the company of very familiar people. Indeed, your committee has been a great committee for this country and also for the children of this country. And on behalf of my team and UNICEF in general I would like to thank you. Your excellency, Maldives is a good country for children to grow and to be born in. And we are proud of the work that the People's Majlis continue to do. We appreciate your attention to children's issues and we thank you so much for ensuring that the priorities are related to children are reflected through legislation and through budgets and on behalf of the team, we like to acknowledge that. Last week we were in Shaviani and before that we are in Dhihufushi. And what is clear is that this country cares about its children and its people. So, we really thank you so much for the work that you are doing. We know that the progress you have made as a country turns out to be expensive for you to maintain. We understand their challenges with the economy at the movement, but what is clear at least from what we see in the media and through talking to our partners is that Majlis continues to prioritize the people, the disabled people, the children and Majlis is paying attention to the social protection interventions. So, from the UNICEF perspective we want to thank you for that. I want to acknowledge it. I want to encourage you. Please don't get tired. Continue to do that for us. We see you as our friends in Majlis. Because we are not there. You are the ones there. Please your decisions as you make them should always remember that the children are your children. They are present and they are future. And the way our for base are brought us here you would have to take us into the future. If you get it wrong, than children will suffer the most. And those are for the longest and affect our country. So, that's my first message. Mine is to thank you and to ask that to continue to remain friends of children and guardians of the good work you have done in health, education and social protection. The second issue, your excellencies, would like to raise with you is the excellent work you have done to create an enabling policy and legislative environment for Maldivian children. Your child rights protection act and your juvenile justice acts are some of the bests in the world. And wherever we have gone in our meetings we have said that this is the one of the best that we have. And within that it's something that you need to protect. We recognize your excellencies, that more recently young people are committing crimes. And we share that problem with you. We would not be agnostic of that problem. It's a real problem that your country is facing. And we need to deal with it. There are various approaches to dealing with that. We are of the view and evidence is on our side on this that crimes young people in serious crimes. They are young people committing petty crimes. Those are usually used issues of a dollars, and I know that as a country you have co-child systems for dealing with that. We were talking of serious crimes. Such as



drugs, rape and so on and so far. We know that a lot of these children have got problems. Big problems at home. And that is why we are working with your ministries to rollout a preventing program. Preventing is a very challenging issue here. There is specific case of drugs your excellencies, and other serious crimes. These children are victims. They are victims. They are victims of the systems. They are victims of broken homes. And some of them maybe have learned from others. They are victims. Our role as leaders of the country is to give these people a second chance. And put them back on the path of development. Changing the law, your excellency, from fifteen to twelve does not solve that problem. It will not solve it. We are aware of that. It is the easiest thing to do to change the law. It's the most difficult thing to implement the law. It will not solve that problem evidence bounce on that. We don't think that at of your old has their physical or mental capability to decide on some of these serious crimes. We believe that they have been exploited. Some of them are exploited. So, we think that the first priorities to make sure those who are exploiting children are actually prosecuted and children are rehabilitated and given a second chance. Every young person deserves a second chance. And some of us will not be where we are if we have not had a second chance. So, that's the first challenge we have. We know that some young people are committing crimes. We would like to work with your government and with you to put in effective mechanisms for rehabilitation of these young people. Your excellency, what we know is that putting young people in a castrating young people in a place where of this have been in castrated leads to repeat offences. Our institutions, the world, I don't know very much about Maldives. But I asked my colleague to come in. The world over what we know is that if you put young people in institutions, what happens is that they learn to become worse criminals rather than become corrective. Your current law, excellencies, allows you to do that for 15-year-olds. So, let us try and see whether the mechanisms that we have in place for that those children were 15-year-old are working before we come to drop in the law to 12-year-olds. Because if you bring a 12-year-old and put that 12-year-old in an institution the chances are that they will grow up to be a worst criminal. And that is what the world over we inherit. So, our simple ask to you is that, please, please reflect seriously on changing the law, dropping the law from 15 to 12. Our ask is that you keep it at 15. You invest in the rehabilitating the 15-year-olds, even before you come to the 12-year-olds. But you challenge us, UNICEF and the government institution, including the Ministry of Family and Social Development under your own oversight to put in programs to address children who are below 15 who are committing crimes, because all of us care about that. But the contacts with the criminal system is not the way to go. The contact is with the social protection system. So that's our message to you that please think about it but challenge us. Use your power to get us to protect your children. Let us all focus and prioritize it. And let us do what is good for these children, which is giving them a second chance. Because if they enter the criminal



justice system, they become destigmatized. If they enter the criminal justice system, they interact with other criminals and become a network of criminals. In the short term, we would think that we are solving something. In the long run when we are 60 to 80-year-olds, we would have created a bigger problem for ourselves. And the last point is that institutionalization is very expensive. It's extremely expensive. So, if you start it and you can't finish it, the implications on the budget is huge. And at the time when you do not have enough resources to go around, your challenge with resources we don't think this is the time to do that. So, with your permission, Madam and excellencies, maybe I would like to ask my colleagues to add a few words and will subject ourselves to any points of clarification that we have. Thank you very much for having us.

UNICEF Maldives, Child Protection Specialist Mohamed Naeem Speaking:

Thank you, Eddie, and thank you very much for the opportunity. I think our experience in institutionalizing, if we recall “Kudakudhinge Hiya” at some stage when we brought in the children who were in Maafushi into the Vilingili here at that stage, the initial when we mixed up on some of the problems that we faced at that time was also we saw it happening, the children who were in Maafushi reformatory and then bringing them into the home where we had very vulnerable children who were coming from very vulnerable situation with a lot of trauma. And the mix was not good, I mean, the experience we all saw in those institutions was not good. So, that's one experience that we went through how we were trying to manage those children in the institutions. Similarly, the experience from FeydhooFinolhu where we had the program for children who were exposed to crimes. Out of the children, if I'm not mistaken, we saw only two children who were able to rehabilitate back in too. When they were in the institution in FeydhooFinolhu, they were good. But then, when they came back to the same environment where they originally went the environment was not conducive for them to, I mean, it took them back to the situation. So, as Eddie said, I think we need to really look at the problem. The issues with the families, how we can support the family so that they get a chance to look after the children and see how they can actually help the children in those environments. And I think that's our experience as working with families. That's where the bigger issue lies. It's the families where we need to help, and where the support is needed. Eddie, if you don't mind, I would like to explain about what you're doing in Fuvahmulah. We have started a program recently in late April, we have started a program in Fuvahmulah, identified some of the children who are in conflict with law, those who are in crimes who had been exploited into crimes by the gangs in Fuvahmulah. We have identified those and the government institutions who are supposed to provide services for families and for the children we brought them together, Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social and Family Development, Department of Juvenile Justice, PG office, and the Court. So, we sit down and look at



Thank you. I just wanted to kind of retread what Eddi and Naeem was already said as that as already mentioned as well. We do have evidences, well if you look at the case statistics of children in conflict with the law who are referred to the department of Juvenile Justice that they do infect come from very vulnerable backgrounds. And so, for example, situations of poverty, previous experience of violence, witness to domestic violence or substance absences or forth. So, if you look at violence only, around 36% of the children refer to the department have previously being in contact with the system as victims. And that's a very large number if we consider the fact that only a handful of cases of violence are actually reported to the authorities. And global evidence also indicates that family and community base rehabilitation is what works best and like Naeem just now mentioned, from our Fuvahmulah program as well we have seen that, that is what infect works. And UNICEF did in 2013 I believe did an assessment of institutionalization and the country previously and we saw that Mohamed Naeem was mentioning in terms of Feydhoofinolhu and Maafushi. CTCC and NTCC the consequences of those programs we found that around 56% of children who were part of the CTCC program were actually re-arrested within 1 year. So, we do have some evidence to show that what can possibly work and what cannot work. So, I think it's important to build on that evidence going forward as well in terms of what direction are we going to be taking next, on this issue. Just wanted to mention that. Thank you.

UNICEF Maldives Representative Dr. Edward Addai Speaking:

Sorry, Excellencies and Madam Chairperson. The truth is that a 15-year-old is a child. And in this room, I imagine that some of us have got 15-year-olds as children or as grandchildren. 12-year-olds are even younger, they have a whole life ahead of them. So, the decisions you are making and the decisions that would affect children right into their future. But a 15-year-old is a child. Your law lasts the criminal system to deal with 15-year-olds. My ask to you is to challenge us to do a good job with a 15-year-olds, even before we drop the each to 12. Your problem doesn't go away, which is the problem of young people committing crimes. So, let's implement the law as you have it. And you challenge us to see, do things for the lower than 15-year-olds. And come back to me and you can oversee it for yourselves if that is appropriate with your mandate. My ask to you is if you want to change the law by all means then give us at least a year or two to demonstrate results. Give us time. You have the 15-year-olds. Let us get it right for them. Challenge us to see you have to do something. Because this country doesn't want these children going into the crime. That is your interest. And something



create an environment for children to rehabilitate them, naming as, yeah, naming it as Hope Island. So, what are your views on this? Now, we have heard a few statements regarding rehab, institutionalizing. So, this is not, you know, a criminal institutionalization center as such as the, as we hear. We haven't seen on paper yet. So, we don't know what exactly the government is proposing. But I suppose it's not a similar kind of setup as we have seen before. So, it would be great to hear your views on this. And also, in the legislative agenda of this government, there are, they are going to propose amendments to both of these acts, the CRP Act of 19 of 19 and Juvenile Justice Act of 1819. So, there will be changes and your views and considerations that you have given, we will definitely take this to the concerned authorities before they propose the amendments. So, those are my views, and I would like to open the floor to the honorable members if you have any suggestions, any questions, please, UNICEF is here for, here to answer your clarifications. And after their questions, I'll open the floor for you to, you know to.. Yeah. Yeah.

Dhaandhoo constituency member Mohamed Fazeel speaking:

Not a question. Just a view. I think we are all on the same page. And as you said that, instead, taking kids to institutions is not a very good idea. Even if you mix a normal person with criminals, they would become criminals. That's my experience.

UNICEF Maldives Representative Dr. Edward Addai speaking:

Thank you, Madam, Chairperson and thank you Honorable for your observation. My background is medicine. Originally, I'm a doctor. I can tell you that the wrong place to send anybody is the hospital. If you send people to hospital, they become sick. That's what happens in the case of children or even adults. Institutions are not correctional. They don't correct them. When they come, they re-offend. And for children, to take them throughout life and stigmatize them. The first is the Hope Island. Madam Chair, the Hope Island is an institution. It's an institution. So, you should recognize it as an institution. Should recognize that it's a very expensive endeavor. You should recognize that in an institution. If you are not careful, they are going to have the problem that, Honorable just said. There will be good boys who have faced offenders at risk or those be bad boys that is the starting point of the network. The challenge you face is that you start the institution very nicely in five years, in ten years, in twenty years, the children who go in will come out and become a part of the network. The other thing is how you sustain it. You need to have a sustainable strategy. So, if you have resources there are



things that your schools need. Your schools need a lot of help. Your health facilities needs a lot of help. It's a very expensive and therefore in the short term is beautiful. For the things that we all know in short term you might be able to change your law, you might be able to build an institution. But keeping them running is another problem. And the NRC is struggling. I don't know whether you know about the NRC. But Madam Chair, if the government wants to establish the institution our can ask a suggestion is that 15-year-olds children they should demonstrate to you that the institution is working for the 15-year-olds. And if they do they can't bring the 12-year-olds. But until they have to demonstrate it the other institution is working for 15-year-olds. I think open it after younger children is even more dangerous. Because then the 15-year-olds would groom that 12-year-olds. So, that's the challenge you are going to face. So, "Hope Island" is an institution. The next thing you have to think about is when they finish "Hope Island" and they are coming back in to the community we have to ask ourselves the conditions that put them in to the institutions have we delt with them. Because some conditions put them there and they come back to those conditions and the old networks it's going to be challenging for you. I'm not a prophet of doom. All I am saying is that great ideas but in the long run can be challenging. But the law allows you to do something for 15-year-olds. So do it. And then if it works we go to younger children. But until then it's a promise. And a lot of promises don't much realize. Some of them have negative side effects. And your Excellency, your words resolve with us. The side effect is something we have to always think about and need to get them. And I'm sure that so, in terms of changing the laws the good things about the law must be protected. And one good thing is that after long debate in this country decided to page the age of criminal responsibility at 15 years from 10 to 15 years. And you did that 5 years ago also. You have to implement it. So, you went 15 years. Some people even wanted 18 years. And, but I think you still tilled for 15 years. I think you must protect that. If you can't, if you can't don't drop the age of criminal responsibility. But I can't promise you is that even if you drop the UNICEF will still be here working with you. So, we are not going to leave because you have dropped. But it's not a good idea to just change. So, the good things about that criminal child rights protection act, the juvenile justice act that is the age of criminal responsibility and always let us remember our own children and our grandchildren. Putting your child who is 15-year-old, less than 14-year-old in prison even if it is called "Hope Island" might not work for that child. Social media. UNICEFs official position is that the internet is a place for good things. And the internet is also a place for bad things. So, the internet of good things is something we



see currently with children in conflict with law is that interpretation of one particular area, which is children below 15 is seen is mentioned in the law as children who needs protection. And for protection it's the Ministry of Social and Family Development, then the Gender Ministry who was mandated to provide protection, and then, DJJ (Department of Juvenile Justice), and the Ministry for Homeland Security to provide services for those children. So, the gap is when we don't have anyone to provide that protection, those who are to provide the services they don't come in. So that's the gap between or the challenge between 2 institutions working together. So, if we are working on the legislation I think that needs to be very clearly defined in terms of, like what do we mean by providing protection services and what do we mean by providing rehabilitation services for those children who have been exposed to crimes or who have behaviors that's not acceptable in the community. So, I think we need to look at those gaps. And that had been a discussion and a challenge that had been going on for the last 5 years. From the time the 2 laws came in that the fight had been like, no, there is children in conflict with law, so it's not my mandate. And then from the other side they said, but you are supposed to provide their protection services. We will provide the other rehabilitation services. Can you provide protection for those children. So that debate between who provides the protection and who provides these services had been the biggest challenge. And the current model that we are trying in Fuvahmulah is trying to bring them together and saying, yes. You have these are the things that you will do. These are the things that the other institutions are going to do. So, trying to break that wall between different institutions and looking at the child. So, our focus is on this child needs help. The child needs help because the family is in this situation, and they are being exploited by adults into crime. So, how do we protect them from being exploited by adults who want them to commit the crimes and support the family to keep them safe. And then provide that services for the child or rehabilitation programs for the child to change those behaviors. So, looking at those. So, I think we need to really have that picture and then write it down in a way so that everyone is clear of what they're supposed to do and do not have that debate of like it's not my mandate. It's your mandate. And while not looking at the child, the child grows from 9 years to 12 years to 13 years to 15 years and waits till they become 15 to label them as a criminal and then go into the criminal justice system. So, I think the early interventions are things that could have been done for a lot of these children who are now 15-year-olds and who are in the in the system. So, I just wanted to mention that as we are work, if you are working on the changes to those 2 legislations, those are the things that we need to look



at. There might be other areas but, as I said, I mentioned previously it's also we haven't actually implemented those legislations. So, we don't know what's not working. If we have just kept the law by the side and not implemented, we don't know what's doable and what's not doable and what are the gaps in the legislation. It's just that we don't have those services that's mandated by the 2 legislations. If we can get those services, I think they are quite strong. And we have been, I mean, as Eddie mentioned earlier internationally from different countries they have looked at the laws and said how what they would like to take from those the good things that there are so many good things in the laws. So, just wanted to mention that. Thank you.

Chairperson speaking:

Since the constituents of my constituency know that I'm meeting with the UNICEF today one of them has sent me a question to ask. And this is not regarding the UNICEF Maldives. But UNICEF as a whole and maybe a little controversial question. But maybe Dr. Eddie might not be able to answer it here and now. But something that is of interest and personal interest as well regarding the vulnerable children who are suffering in Gaza. As an institution as UNICEF as a whole what are the measures that UNICEF has taken in fighting the rights of children of Gaza? Could you please light on this?

UNICEF Maldives Representative Dr. Edward Addai speaking:

Anytime the issue of Gaza comes up, as a human being, I bow down my head in shame. First of all, I speak as a human being and as a father. So, with your permission I'll speak first as a human being. 44000, 45000 people should not die in 2024. So, many homes should not be destroyed. For me what we see on TV every day is a blood on our humanity. And anytime I see it I, sometimes I feel like shedding tears. And sometimes I shed tears. I think humanity has filled each and every one of those children. There's no question about that. And I thank your government for continuously raising that issue at the highest level. Because the government of Maldives has continuously raised this issue at the security council level. It's a filler of humanity. It's a filler of the institutions that we have set up. And like we did for the Second World War I hope one day we would all wake up and say never again. And I'm always very sad when I see it happening in my time. So, Excellency, thank you for allowing me to be emotional on this. It's a very emotive issue. UNICEF condemns it. UNICEF condemns everything that is happening in Gaza. And our view as an institution is that those children have



died needlessly. We need peace and we also need humanitarian access. And we also need, and this is my ask to the government we also need when we have peace to invest in rehabilitation and rebuilding. And we need investments in healing. Because these children and their families who survive would be in pain. The scars of Gaza who will live with us for a long, long, long time. So, that's the official position of UNICEF and that's my own personal position. I, as a human being I bow down my head in shame that this is happening at our time. And UNICEF will continue to do that. That's why I was asking my colleague, we make it a point every time. Even though our mandate, my responsibility is more towards Maldives, we are part of a global network. And even in our World Children's Day statement we acknowledged that we have a problem. And so, in some ways I am bringing it back to you, and through you to His Excellency the President to continue to make this case at the Assembly. To begin, to continue to help in reforming the institutions that decide and to move away from paralyzing the institution for the protection of humanity. So, I don't know whether I have answered your question, but I hope you have heard me on this.

UNICEF Maldives Child Protection Specialist Mohamed Naeem speaking:

In terms of UNICEF, UNICEF is on the ground in Palestine as we speak. There have been lot of a loss of human beings, staff in Gaza. They are working. They are also pushing for the humanitarian assistance to go in quickly. I think for the first time UNICEF was able to send some of the vehicles into Palestine yesterday. They have gone in with some staff and for providing humanitarian assistance. So, there is, we, UNICEF as an organization is also pushing for that because for us, we are also looking at how they can at the ground level provide support. So, we, I think I just wanted to mention that as well. Thank you.

Chairperson speaking:

It is indeed a very overwhelming issue and thank you so much for the information. I am sure this meeting is live, and they would be able to hear the person who sent the question. And also, yeah! We have a closure. Yes! But still the floor is open. If you have any comments or any questions to ask from UNICEF representatives, please do. Yeah! She is the Chair of our social committee here. So, yeah! They were having a meeting. Anyways, if honorable members don't have a further comment or question, I would like to conclude the meeting with your permission. Yeah! Yeah, yeah! Please do.



UNICEF Maldives Representative Dr. Edward Addai speaking:

So, Madam Chair and committee members. Today the dilemma you face as you review the laws, the legislations is whether a child who is less than 15 who has committed a crime is a victim or a criminal. That is your dilemma today. I promise you that UNICEF will stand by whatever the government decides. Whatever you decide, we will continue to work with you because for us we believe a child is a child. And we will continue to support the country on whatever decision it's made, it makes. But that is your dilemma. That's your decision. We are available to provide any information that you need, any support that you need as you decide. It's not an easy decision. But it is your decision. And that's why your people have put you in this space. So, please someone has call us. If you need any information we'll provide it. The next issue is please challenge us. Challenge us. Even if you change the law, which we hope you will not. But if you have to, challenge us to implement it. Challenge us. Challenge us to work together. Because that is the gov that we are seen working together for the children. Because you don't divide children. You don't divide people. Unfortunately, our children get divided into sectors. But you can never divide a child. You can never divide people. So, challenge us to work together. Because, where more these has reached, we have done a lot. The next frontier is about working together. So, thank you very much for having us. We appreciate the work you're doing. We appreciate the challenges. We appreciate your leadership. And we appreciate your wisdom. And we stunned by you whatever you decide. We are not fighting. We are together. Thank you.

Chairman Speaking:

Thank you so much. And we don't take as we are fighting but we always think UNICEF as an as a friend of ours. And then we have a common goal that we are working towards and would like to assure you that we will do a consultative process before bringing any major change and if it comes to another committee also it's the mandate of our committee to protect and to look into the rights of respective, whether it's children or adults. So, we will make sure that and will ensure that. Thank you so much for your time, for your contribution, for your wise words and look for further opportunities where we can work together. Thank you so much.

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