
From The Times

July 6, 2009

Maldives president Mohammed Nasheed demands action on climate change



(Ed Wray/AP)

None of the 1,190 islands in the Maldives lies more than two metres above sea level

Mark Henderson, Science Editor

Global warming should be seen not as an environmental crisis but as a human rights issue that risks the lives, livelihoods and homes of millions of people, the President of one of the countries that is most vulnerable to climate change said yesterday.

Mohammed Nasheed, the President of the Maldives, told *The Times* that defending his island nation against rising sea levels was a humanitarian challenge as critical as defending Poland against Nazi Germany in 1939.

“We feel that climate change is not an environmental issue, it’s a security issue, it’s a human rights issue,” the country’s first democratically elected leader said at the launch of *The Times* World Forum on Enterprise and the Environment at the University of Oxford.

“If you thought that defending Poland was important, defending the Maldives is important. If you can’t save the Maldives today you can’t save yourself tomorrow.”

The Maldives is among the countries most endangered by climate change as none of its 1,190 islands in the Indian Ocean lies more than two metres above sea level. As scientists estimate that sea levels will rise globally by between 20cm and 60cm by 2100, many islands face complete inundation and even the more elevated ones will experience increased flooding.

The President was invited to address the conference by Sir David King, the former government chief scientist who is director of the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment at Oxford University.

President Nasheed announced in March that his country would spend \$110 million (£67 million) a year to become the first in the world with a zero-carbon economy by 2019.

The zero-carbon initiative, he said, would set an example to the rest of the world, but was also the best answer to the Maldives’ energy and development needs. “We know that the Maldives becoming carbon neutral is not going to decarbonise the world and stop us from annihilation. We know that. But at least we could die knowing we’ve done the right thing,” he said.

The President said that electricity costs accounted for up to 70 per cent of the budget of some small schools. “We cannot have an education system, we cannot have a health system, we cannot have a transport system on the carbon economy. If we want to develop we have to find some other source of energy.”

He accepted that zero-carbon status would not take into account the emissions from 500,000 tourists who fly to the islands each year — outnumbering the population of 385,000. However, they would use less carbon while in the Maldives than they would have done at home.

"If you spend this minute in England you are using more carbon than you would if you were spending it in the Maldives," President Nasheed said. "Therefore your travel will be offset by the time you spend in the Maldives."

He added that democracy and good governance would be critical to adapting his nation to a warmer world. "If someone asks us in the Maldives what kind of assistance we need for adaptation, we say yes, of course we need embankments and sea walls and so on."

Sir David agreed that climate change should be seen as a security and human rights issue as well as an environmental one. "We are facing this being the century of environmental migration driving terrorism at a level we haven't seen before, and geopolitical economic destabilisation of a sort we haven't seen before, unless we get smart," he said.

Other speakers at the three-day conference include Al Gore, the former US Vice-President and Nobel Peace Prize winner, President Kagame of Rwanda, and Ken Livingstone, the former Mayor of London.

The conference began as Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister, published a report saying that most of the technologies to tackle climate change already existed, but that they still needed to be integrated into the world economy.

The document, published with the Climate Group for distribution at this week's Major Economies Forum in Italy, highlights energy efficiency and measures to prevent deforestation as critical to reducing carbon emissions. These two areas can together deliver 70 per cent of the carbon cuts required by 2020, it said.

The report also called for major investment in greener energy technologies, such as carbon capture and storage, new approaches to nuclear and solar power, and public infrastructure such as smart electricity grids.

Mr Blair said: "Just as investing in electrification, railways and the internet led to economic growth in the past, investing in clean energy can help reignite the global economy now."

[Contact our advertising team](#) for advertising and sponsorship in Times Online, The Times and The Sunday Times, or place your [advertisement](#).

Times Online Services: [Dating](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Property Search](#) | [Used Cars](#) | [Holidays](#) | [Births, Marriages, Deaths](#) | [Subscriptions](#) | [E-paper](#)
News International associated websites: [Globrix Property Search](#) | [Property Finder](#) | [Milkround](#)

Copyright 2009 Times Newspapers Ltd.

This service is provided on Times Newspapers' [standard Terms and Conditions](#). Please read our [Privacy Policy](#). To inquire about a licence to reproduce material from Times Online, The Times or The Sunday Times, click [here](#). This website is published by a member of the News International Group. News International Limited, 1 Virginia St, London E98 1XY, is the holding company for the News International group and is registered in England No 81701. VAT number GB 243 8054 69.

