

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

President and the members of the Elections Commission of the Maldives, members from the 'Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia' (FEMBoSA), distinguished delegates and guests.

Assalaam 'alaikum warahmathullahi wabarakaathuhu and good morning.

It is my foremost duty to congratulate the President of the Elections Commission and its members for hosting this event – the 7th Meeting of FEMBoSA, here in the Maldives. I believe it is a great privilege and an honor. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you all this morning.

Elections Commission plays an integral part in the democratic process of this country. Since it's conception in the 2008 constitution, it has been one of the most crucial component of the democratic system of governance envisaged in the constitution.

A free and fair election is the tipping point of a democracy. It is the bar which differentiates between a democracy and a dictatorship. Chapter 1, Article 4 of the Maldives Constitution states that all powers of the State of the Maldives are derived from, and remain with, the citizens. The most crucial manner in which we could witness the implementation of this constitutional guarantee is by way of providing the citizens with free and fair elections. Because elections, is the process which gives the opportunity to the people, to choose their leader – for them to choose who would govern them and to have their say – to exercise their rights as citizens and cast their vote without fear or intimidation, undue influence and with free will.

Maldives is yet in the adolescent years of its democracy. Since the new constitution came into effect in 2008, drastic changes have been put in the infrastructure of the governance of the nation. Majorly, powers have been separated – whereby, we now have a Supreme Court as the highest authority on judicial matters, we have mandated independent institutions among other changes.

For every such new change to reach its maturity, it needs time and patience. And very importantly, corporation from international partners. It is with international

corporation, we gain insight into other countries' best practices, learn from experience and knowledge, and essentially, do better. And what better partners could there be - than our regional counterparts. Time and again we have witnessed the benefits of such partnerships.

The theme for the 7th meeting is 'technology for credible elections'. We are living in the age of technology. Technology has found its way into all forms of our activities. Technology has basically taken over our lives and we have become dependent on it.

Elections Commission is working towards introducing e-voting in the Maldives. I am not one to say whether it is the best way forward or not. But since we are all creatures of habit to some extent and are wary of change, any change will take some getting used to – and may even face opposition to some extent. I am sure the Elections Commission will weigh in all aspects of that conversation while going forward.

I wish FEMBoSA members all the best and hope this 7th meeting is a fruitful one. I also wish the Elections Commission and its members all the best in their works. I conclude my speech, once again thanking the Elections Commission and wishing all the delegates a successful meeting and a wonderful stay here in the Maldives.

·Thank you and Wassalaam 'alaikum warahmathullahi wabarakaathuhu