

*September 4<sup>th</sup> 2008*; The Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid has expressed that yesterday was a "historic day for democracy in the Maldives", commenting on last night's live debate of the six Presidential candidates.

Yesterday evening witnessed the first ever public debate between the Maldives Presidential candidates. The debate, which was broadcast live on TV Maldives and Voice of Maldives radio, and lasted for around two hours, is part of the Think Nation information campaign designed to increase interest in, knowledge about and participation in the country's historic first multiparty Presidential elections.

The debate saw the incumbent President, H.E. Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of the ruling Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP), talk alongside Mr. Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives Democratic Party (MDP), Mr. Qasim Ibrahim of the Republic Party, Mr. Ibrahim Ismail of the Social Liberal Party, Mr. Umar Naseer of the Islamic Democratic Party, and Dr. Hassan Saeed, an independent candidate.

Each candidate was allowed three minutes at the start to make an opening statement explaining why they want and deserve to be President. Each was then presented with three different questions on important policy matters. The candidates were not aware of what questions they were going to be asked before-hand. Each had a set amount of time to answer the questions posed. Finally, all were offered the opportunity to make a short concluding statement.

The debate drew a huge national audience and Minister Shahid highlighted the degree of professionalism and civility conducted by all concerned; noting that it represented a further example of the blossoming of democracy and democratic principles in the Maldives – a point recognized by all six candidates. The debate is also reflective of the Government's determination that this year's elections should be free and fair, with all candidates provided with equal opportunity to offer their views and present their policies to the people.

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