

## ***Maldives: climate change threatens right to housing, says UN expert***



Raquel Rolnik, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing

26 February 2009 – Rising sea levels and coastal erosion, both wrought by climate change, threaten the viability of Maldives, but overcrowding and other impacts are already felt by the island nation's 300,000 people, a United Nations independent expert **cautioned** today.

After an eight-day visit to country, Raquel Rolnik, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, said that "Maldives and its Atolls, because of their unique geological and topographic aspects and their fragile and delicate environmental system, are already experiencing the impacts of climate change."

This jeopardizes the survival of the nation, which could be inundated by water, but more immediately, it jeopardizes the right to housing due to the scarcity of land.

Ms. Rolnik stressed the responsibility of the international community to urgently support adaptation strategies, noting that "the post-2004 Indian Ocean tsunami reconstruction process in Maldives can be a source of precious lessons."

Over the past four years, donors and agencies have mobilized over \$400 million in aid, but the Rapporteur voiced concern over the allocation of the resources and their management by Maldivian authorities.

"In the new resettlement sites that I visited, I detected a lack of participation in the decision-making process concerning relocation, the design of new houses and the infrastructure, which resulted in new structures that were not always compatible with the livelihood of the communities," she said.

Additionally, the expert noted that the tsunami may have been used by authorities as an opportunity to relocate communities, which has provoked serious conflicts. Today, there are still 3,500 people uprooted by the 2004 disaster who are still living in temporary shelters.

The reconstruction process has also resulted in a surge in the price of construction materials, putting upward pressure on rental prices and aggravating overcrowding.

Over 80,000 migrants from Bangladesh and other South Asian countries live in Maldives, with half of them working in the construction sector, and the Rapporteur said she was concerned over their housing and living conditions.

She called for a "human rights-based approach" to address the housing situation in the country, calling for the Government and international organizations to promote public participation in making key decisions.

Ms. Rolnik, who reports to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, took up her post last May and serves in an independent and unpaid capacity, as do all Special Rapporteurs.