Maldives

The Maldives Effort on Education for International Understanding

Mr. Ahmed Anwar
Director-General
Schools Systems
Ministry of Education

Country Background

These are groups of tiny coral islands forming an archipelago in the middle of the Indian Ocean some 670 kilometers south west of Sri Lanka. These islands are grouped into 24 natural atolls. However they are reduced to 20 for the purpose of administration and providing of basic needs.

This country has a relatively young population which has grown quite fast until well thought out measures were brought into place to check the trend. However the increasing density in the capital Male' where approximately 25 % of the people live, is a matter of grave concern to the Maldives. According to the latest census the total population stands at 269,010.

Over the last 15 or so years, the Maldives has undergone a period of rapid economic growth based on tourism and the service industries related to tourism.

Towards a common policy

Globalization is at our doorsteps. Space has shrunk, borders have disappeared and time has become immaterial. The global market, new technology, foreign investment, advancing media and internet usage have all forged a new and fascinating relationship amongst the people of the world which has also made life more rewarding and even more meaningful.
We have however been cautioned about the influence of the market on the social and political fabrics of society. The opportunities and rewards of the market will fall short of reaching all corners of the world. Inequity and inequality will prevail as selected groups of people gain power and wealth over the others. When profit becomes the order of the day, market players will get out of hand. Moral values and respect for justice and human rights can be at risk.

This calls for shared values and commitment for the development of the people. The great potential people have, needs to be tapped and fully utilized for their overall development, which has to be on a global context and not in isolation. We must believe in the fact that no country can prosper economically, culturally or intellectually in isolation from the rest of the world. The free flow of knowledge and ideas need to be harnessed to foster and enhance international understanding for the mutual benefit of everyone. World leaders, scholars, artists, scientists and entrepreneurs need to draw their abilities to achieve common goals such as the following:

- Foster mutual understanding
- Build global problem solving capabilities
- Create human resources needed to build democratic and stable societies
- Strengthen the international competence of citizens

(From the International Institute of Education at a Glance)

The goals may be translated into various activities as outlined by a White House memorandum on April 19, 2000.

- Promoting study abroad so that the students develop a better understanding of the people and cultures beyond their borders
- Encouraging students from other countries to study here and enrich us with their cultures by removing obstacles such as high fees, strict entry requirements, and long and difficult procedures for obtaining resident visas
- Supporting exchange of teachers, scholars and students
- Promoting international awareness and skills in the classroom and on campuses that will include the strengthening of foreign language teaching at all levels
- Helping teachers to acquire the skills needed to understand and interpret other countries and cultures for their students

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- Providing training for international students to maximize existing resources and enhance international understanding
- Giving access to comparative information such as benchmarks on education performances and practices
- Building cross-national partnerships among educational institutions with common interests and objectives

The Maldives Position

The Maldives is placed in a unique position regarding education and international understanding. The uniqueness of our position is summarized below.

Curriculum

The contents of secondary school syllabi are based on the Ordinary Level and Advanced Level Examinations conducted by Edexcel (UK) and IGCSE conducted by the Cambridge University except for Islamic Studies and Dhivehi Language.

Medium of Instruction

English Language is the medium of instruction in secondary schools. Very few schools use Arabic as the medium.

Examination

All secondary school students take examinations offered by an external board. For example Edexel, University of Cambridge IGCSE and the examination board of the University of Azhar, Egypt.

Secondary School Teachers

Over 90% of secondary school teachers are expatriates recruited from neighboring countries forming the largest single professional group of foreigners in the country.

Skilled Labour

Skill shortage in the Maldives is filled by a high number of expatriate employees.
Conclusion

The people of the Maldives rely heavily on other countries in key areas such as education and industry. This position can be critical and it can put a lot of pressure on the nation’s economy.

The surge of skilled, semi skilled and unskilled labour is useful for developing education and industry. The workers enter the country with their skills and culture, providing an opportunity to enrich our economy.

The government has sponsored thousands of students to study abroad at post secondary level and this is likely to continue for some years to come. At the same time the number of donor-sponsored scholarships has steadily declined over the years.

The challenge for the people of the Maldives is overwhelming. We need to understand the richness of other cultures and develop a life long appreciation for our own culture and values. The Maldives will have to preserve its identity to exist as a nation.