

**Media Statement by**  
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World Health Organization congratulates Maldives for elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem.

Maldives is the first country in WHO South-East Asia Region to achieve this target.

Sustained high-level vision and commitment coupled with the tireless efforts of generations of health workers has made elimination of lymphatic filariasis a reality in Maldives.

It is my pleasure to be here today to celebrate this success, especially because it was for lymphatic filariasis campaigns that WHO and Maldives started working together for the first time in 1951.

At the start of our efforts the focus was on intense vector control measures and identification and treatment of people with the disease. Later, the current strategy of mass drug administration for the entire at-risk population was adopted.

After years of effort, not only has the disease been eliminated, the government also has a strong plan in place for more than 200 chronically infected people who require lifelong care. A robust surveillance system and surveys since 2008 have monitored the situation closely.

Maldives has demonstrated to the world that elimination of lymphatic filariasis is possible, and its sustained efforts over the years are commendable. Globally, 1.1 billion people in 55 countries continue to be at risk of lymphatic filariasis and require preventive chemotherapy to stop the spread of infection. Over 120 million people are estimated to be suffering from chronic forms of the disease, with about 40 million of them disfigured and incapacitated as a result. Lymphatic filariasis is endemic to seven of WHO South-East Asia's 11 Member Countries.

Elimination of lymphatic filariasis is the latest in a series of health sector achievements in Maldives, including last year becoming the first country in WHO South-East Asia Region to achieve malaria-free status.

Going forward, as we enter the era of sustainable development goals and focus on universal health coverage to address the existing and emerging diseases, I wish Maldives many more public health successes.

WHO will continue to extend its firmest support to Maldives to improve health and save lives.