

The Maldives reprimanded by the international community at the UN Human Rights Council

(Geneva, 08 March 2018) Today, at the UN Human Rights Council, over 40 States expressed concern over the situation in the Maldives. Speaking jointly, they called on the government of the Maldives to immediately address the deteriorating human rights situation in the country and peacefully end the state of emergency.¹ They further called on the Maldives to restore all articles of the Constitution and free all political prisoners and their family members. They were responding to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who yesterday referred to emergency measures in the Maldives and called for “the complete reversal of these recent measures”.² He had further expressed deep concern that the rule of law is being undermined, while warning that the crisis could have a drastic effect on the country’s tourism sector.

The joint statement, by states at the Council today, also expressed concern at the arrest and imprisonment of judges of the Supreme Court and members of Parliament. They also called on the Maldivian government to allow the Supreme Court and the judiciary to function independently; and allow the Parliament to function freely and properly with the reinstatement of twelve members of the Parliament, as ordered by the Supreme Court.

“This joint statement shows that the international community is closely following the breakdown of rule of law in the Maldives” said John Samuel, Executive Director of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA). “If the government fails to quickly restore fundamental freedoms and release political prisoners, the international community may not be patient for long,” he said.

The Maldives faced unprecedented censure in June last year when over 30 states expressed concern at the UN Human Rights Council following the murder of prominent human rights defender Yameen Rasheed – a well-known dissenter who was brutally killed in the backdrop of a steadily deteriorating human rights situation.³

Despite this unprecedented condemnation, the human rights situation in the country continued to decline. On 1 February 2018, the situation sharply deteriorated when the government refused to implement a Supreme Court order to release political prisoners and decided to impose a 15 day state of emergency from 5 February, which has since been illegally extended and continues to remain in force.⁴ Restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms imposed as part of the state of emergency overstep constitutionally permissible limitations during states of emergency. Following this, the government has taken extra-Constitutional measures such as the arbitrary arrest and detention of the Chief Justice and a judge of the Supreme Court, opposition leaders and members of the parliament; excessive use of force

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/human-rights-council-37-joint-statement-on-human-rights-situation-in-the-maldives>

2 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=22772&LangID=E>

3 <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=24173>

4 <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25595>

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against peaceful protestors; and attacks and harassment against human rights defenders, journalists and media.

A team from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is expected to visit the Maldives soon. If the government fails to take meaningful steps, further international action is expected. Responding to a question from FORUM-ASIA at today's UN debate,⁵ the High Commissioner for Human Rights said that his office will continue to monitor the situation in the country.

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About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratization.

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⁵<https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25811>

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