

The Maldives: A year after the killing of Yameen Rasheed, justice remains elusive

(Bangkok, 23 April 2018) – Today marks one year since the brutal murder of human rights defender and prominent writer, Yameen Rasheed, in the Maldives. The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) calls on the Maldivian authorities to ensure his killers are brought to justice through a transparent and credible investigation and judicial process.

Yameen Rasheed was one of the most prominent bloggers and social media commentators in the Maldives. He was stabbed to death in the early hours of 23 April 2017 in the stairwell of his residence. Rasheed had been a vocal critic of militant Islamic extremism and religious intolerance, and a relentless campaigner for justice and human rights in the Maldives. He was the leading advocate calling for justice for his close friend, Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, a journalist who has been missing since August 2014.

Yameen Rasheed's killing is emblematic of the increasing threats to freedom of expression and human rights defenders in the Maldives. In addition to legal and procedural restrictions on freedom of expression imposed by the Government, human rights defenders, journalists, writers and political activists have faced attacks, threats and harassment from the Maldivian authorities, religious extremists and other non-state actors.

Yameen Rasheed's brutal murder follows systematic failures by the Maldivian authorities to investigate the numerous threats to his life over the past six years. Before his murder, Yameen Rasheed regularly reported numerous death threats with the police, which had come in response to his writings and his campaign to find Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla. According to his own social media posts prior to his murder, he received no response from the police. After he was murdered, his family filed a lawsuit against the Maldives Police Service for negligence for failure to protect him from these death threats.

The Maldivian authorities not only failed to protect Yameen Rasheed when he was alive, but have so far also failed to ensure justice is served for killing. In September 2017, the Prosecutor General charged six individuals with his murder, and another with aiding and abetting. Seven months into the trial, the Criminal Court has conducted only six preliminary hearings. All six hearings were conducted behind closed doors at the request of the Prosecutor with no substantive reasoning.

In an environment where the judiciary and the police lack trust and confidence of the public and are plagued by accusations of politicisation and bias, closed trials raise serious questions about the integrity and credibility of the investigation and court proceedings. Secretive trials give credence to allegations of complicity of authorities in his murder.

At the same time, demands for justice for Yameen Rasheed have been met with contempt and harassment by the Maldivian authorities. In May 2017, his father was reportedly harassed and interrogated by police after he delivered over 800 letters from public asking for a transparent investigation in to his murder. Human rights defenders, including his family, friends and civil society organisations campaigning for justice for Yameen Rasheed are being continuously harassed and threatened.

Regional Office: S.P.D Building 3rd Floor, 79/2 Krungthonburi Road, Khlongtong Sai, Khlongsan, Bangkok 10600, Thailand

International Office: Rue de Varembe 1, 2nd Floor, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0)22 740 2947 Fax: +41 (0)22 740 2948

Jakarta Office: c/o KontraS - Jalan Kramat 2 no.7, Senen, Jakarta Pusat

10420 Indonesia +62(0)213919006

Kathmandu Office: c/o INSEC – Syuchatar, Kalanki, Kathmandu, Nepal, +9779(0)14278770

FORUM-ASIA calls, once again, on the Maldivian authorities to ensure justice and accountability for Yameen Rasheed, in particular, by opening the trial of his murder to the public. The Government has an obligation to ensure all involved in his murder are brought to justice through a swift, transparent and independent investigation and trial.

His murder also exposed numerous systematic failures of the authorities to protect and properly respond to threats against human rights defenders, journalists and activists. The Government must take immediate steps to ensure all such threats are credibly investigated in a timely manner.

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 democratisation.

For further information, please contact:

- Communication and Media, FORUM-ASIA, communication@forum-asia.org