



The Maldives: Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Grossly Inadequate without Justice for Yameen Rasheed

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 23 April 2020) – The murder of Maldivian human rights defender and writer, Yameen Rasheed, three years ago, remains a stain on the human rights record of the Maldives, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and its member Maldivian Democracy Network, said in a statement today.

Yameen Rasheed, a prominent writer and a staunch critic of growing religious extremism and intolerance, was stabbed to death on 23 April 2017 at his residence in Malé. He was the leading campaigner for justice for his close friend and journalist, Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, who was forcibly disappeared in August 2014.

‘We remain gravely concerned with the continued impunity in his murder, and call for expeditious and credible completion of the ongoing investigations and judicial processes to ensure justice for Yameen Rasheed,’ the organisations said.

To date, there have been no convictions.

In July 2017, six individuals were charged with Yameen Rasheed’s murder while a seventh was charged with aiding and abetting. The first six hearings of the trial that began in September 2017 were held behind closed doors on the pretence of national security concerns. Subsequent hearings were marred by delays and repeated cancellations – 14 out of the total 36 hearings scheduled in the trial so far were cancelled, often without clear explanation. In the course of the trial, several witnesses for the prosecution withdrew their statements or refused to testify citing threats and intimidation.¹ Unreasonable delays in the trial risk further compromising evidence and witnesses.

‘The absence of credibility in investigations, lack of transparency, persistent delays and allegations of irregularities including witness tampering in the ensuing judicial processes raise serious questions about the possibility of holding perpetrators of his murder to account,’ they said.

In September 2019, the Presidential Commission mandated to independently investigate unresolved murders and disappearances – including the murder of Yameen Rasheed and the disappearance of Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla – revealed that a local terrorist cell affiliated with al-Qaeda were responsible for planning, funding and carrying out Yameen Rasheed’s murder. However, the Commission stated that it was unable to pursue further investigations into the murder due to the ongoing trial.²

The families of Yameen Rasheed and Ahmed Rilwan, expressed concern with the slow progress of investigations by the Presidential Commission, and called on the Government to reveal the truth instead of giving false hope to the families.³

¹ <https://edition.mv/news/12879>

² <https://edition.mv/news/16121>

³ <https://edition.mv/news/14675>

The five-member Presidential Commission was severely impaired following the resignation of two of its members, including the Chairperson of the Commission, in December 2019, and has still failed to appoint replacements. Further, the Prosecutor General's refusal to press charges against two individuals in connection with three murders, including the murder of Yameen Rasheed, citing incomplete investigations by the Presidential Commission, has significantly eroded confidence in the credibility of the Commission's investigations.

Yameen Rasheed's murder is emblematic of threats by religious extremists against human rights defenders, journalists, women and children, apart from religious and sexual minorities in the Maldives. Impunity for his murder, and the Government's failure to counter – or its tacit endorsement of – violent extremist narratives further emboldens religious extremists seeking to silence human rights defenders and critics.

'Our organisations remind the Government of Maldives of its obligation to bring Yameen Rasheed's killers, and all involved in his murder, to justice through transparent, credible investigations and judicial processes.'

'The Government must take immediate steps to facilitate the Presidential Commission in conducting investigations into his murder in a credible manner. Furthermore, we call on the Maldivian Parliament to discharge its duty in holding the judiciary and other independent institutions accountable for their consistent failure to provide justice for Yameen Rasheed and his family. The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law in the Maldives will remain wholly inadequate without justice for Yameen Rasheed.'

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. Its regional secretariat is in Bangkok, and it has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

About Maldivian Democracy Network:

Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) is a non-partisan NGO promoting human rights and democracy in the Maldives. <http://mvdemocracy.org/>

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