The Maldives: Immediately revoke the suspension of the Maldivian Democracy Network

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 22 October 2019) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASA) and the undersigned civil society organisations strongly condemn the ‘temporary’ suspension of the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), a leading human rights organisation in the Maldives and a member of FORUM-ASIA. We call on the Government of the Maldives to immediately revoke the decision to suspend MDN, and allow the organisation and its staff to continue their legitimate work to promote and protect human rights without fear of reprisal, intimidation and harassment.

The Government ordered the suspension of MDN following allegations of blasphemy made in response to a 2015 report, entitled ‘Preliminary Assessment on Radicalisation in the Maldives’. The blasphemy allegations have been accompanied with continuous harassment of the organisation, its staff and associates in the form of death threats and incitement to hatred and violence.

The suspension of MDN, without due process, constitutes a serious violation of the right to freedom of association guaranteed under the Constitution and international treaties that the Maldives has ratified. The move sets a dangerous and regressive precedent that threatens to undo the limited progress towards the meaningful restoration of democracy and respect for fundamental freedoms the country has committed itself to.

The persecution of MDN further emboldens religious extremists, who continue to threaten human rights defenders, and signals the failure to effectively counter violent extremism in the Maldives. Failure to protect human rights defenders from such threats has had devastating consequences in the past.

The Government’s actions also contradict its commitments made during the 42nd regular session of the UN Human Rights Council in September 2019. The Government had pledged to condemn all allegations of reprisals, intimidation, or attacks against human rights defenders, journalists and individuals working to protect and promote human rights in the Maldives as a matter of urgency.

We call on the Government to respect its commitment to uphold all fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular the rights to the freedom of association and expression, and to guarantee the protection of human rights defenders from all forms of attacks, harassment and intimidation, in line with its international obligations. The Government must urgently investigate and hold accountable those responsible for threats and incitement against MDN and its staff, as well as other human rights defenders.

The Government must also ensure the organisation and its staff are able to carry out their legitimate work to promote and protect human rights in the Maldives without fear of reprisal, intimidation and violence.

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Endorsed by:

1. Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK),
2. Association of Women for Awareness and Motivation (AWAM), Pakistan,
3. Awaz Foundation Pakistan – Centre for Development Services (AWAZ CDS), Pakistan,

1 https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/22376?term=0&fbclid=IwAR3opMSfrE26Gaom6uXrBr5NeJ1rcA06sqq-7Zv7BipWcELVpdx6Lx-pHI4
4. Balay Alternative Legal Advocates for Development in Mindanaw (Balaod Mindanaw), the Philippines,
5. Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM), India,
6. Bytes for All, Pakistan,
7. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), Cambodia,
8. Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), Mongolia,
9. Centre for the Sustainable Use of Natural and Social Resources (CSNR), India,
10. Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN), Afghanistan,
11. Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS), Indonesia,
12. Community Resource Centre (CRC), Thailand,
13. Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC), Nepal,
14. Dignity – Kadyr-kassiyet (KK), Kazakhstan,
15. Human Rights Alert, India,
16. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Pakistan,
17. Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), Indonesia,
18. Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), Nepal,
19. INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Sri Lanka,
20. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR), Kazakhstan,
21. MONFEMNET National Network, Mongolia,
22. National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), Pakistan,
23. Odhikar, Bangladesh,
24. People’s Empowerment Foundation (PEF), Thailand,
25. People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), South Korea,
26. People’s Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR), India,
27. People’s Watch, India,
28. Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA), Pakistan,
29. Programme Against Custodial Torture & Impunity (PACTI), India,
30. Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), Bangladesh,
31. Right to Life Human Rights Centre (R2L), Sri Lanka,
32. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Malaysia,
33. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), the Philippines,
34. Think Centre, Singapore,
35. Timor Leste Alliance for International Tribunal, Timor-Leste,
36. Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR), Vietnam,
37. Women’s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Nepal.