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Maldives: Detention of government opponent politically motivated

The Government of Maldives should remove the current detention order imposed on Ismail Saadiq, a political opponent who was taken into custody on the allegation that he had been in contact with a BBC journalist while under house arrest, Amnesty International urged today.

“Not only has Ismail Saadiq been denied the right to express himself freely but the allegation that he has talked to a BBC journalist is not even true,” the organization said.

In early February Ismail Saadiq was taken from house arrest -- for alleged business irregularity -- to police custody in Male and was held there for about two weeks in complete isolation from the outside world. He was told that he had broken house-arrest rules by talking to a foreign journalist and that his incommunicado detention was to prevent him from doing so in the future. In mid-February, he was transferred from the police station to Dhoonidhoo prison where he is currently detained.

“Hundreds of letters sent to President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom by Amnesty International members and a letter to him by the organization’s Secretary General, Pierre Sané, seeking clarification of Ismail Saadiq’s situation have remained unanswered,” the human rights organization said.

“It clearly supports the fact that the Government of Maldives has detained Ismail Saadiq arbitrarily under the false pretext that he has talked to a BBC journalists. The real reason may be to stop him from playing a role in the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.”

Ismail Saadiq, a Maldivian businessman, has been in detention or under house arrest intermittently for the last 23 months, on allegations of business irregularities. In apparent contravention of international human rights standards, Ismail Saadiq has not been officially charged or tried. The decision on whether or not he should remain in detention is reportedly solely with the Maldivian President. He is suffering from serious health problems and has been denied access to adequate medical facilities despite international appeals to President Gayoom.

His officially accepted nomination to stand as a candidate in the forthcoming parliamentary by-elections for North Ari Atoll was simply cancelled by the Ministry of Defence and National Security earlier this year.

“Ismail Saadiq’s prolonged detention without charge or trial, his political background of peaceful opposition to the government, and the vagueness of the allegations of business irregularities against him, lend support to the strong possibility that his arrest and detention may have been politically motivated from the start,” Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is calling on the Maldives Government to guarantee that Ismail Saadiq and all citizens in the Republic of Maldives can exercise their right to peaceful political activities and freedom of expression in the run-up to the elections. ENDS.../