

PUBLIC

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"Disappearance" / Prisoner of Conscience

27 July 2001

REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES      Abdulla Shakir [m], MP for Male' Atoll

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Abdulla Shakir, a member of parliament for Male' Atoll, who has "disappeared" after reportedly being arrested.

Abdulla Shakir was apparently arrested on 18 July. His whereabouts are currently unknown. It is thought he was arrested solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Amnesty International believes him to be a prisoner of conscience.

Abdulla Shakir was among the signatories to a petition handed over to the Minister of Home Affairs on 28 February, requesting permission to set up a political party in the Maldives, the Maldivian Democratic Party. Currently, the government does not recognize any political parties or allow them to function. Among the 42 signatories were three other members of parliament, academics, intellectuals and businessmen.

The Ministry reportedly referred the matter to Parliament on 17 June, seeking its recommendation on applications for the registration of political parties. The parliament does not appear to have taken a decision on the matter yet. However, following Abdulla Shakir's arrest, there are fears that other signatories may also be arrested.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The parliament (known as the *Majlis* or Citizens' Council) has 50 members. Eight of these are appointed by the President, two elected by the people of Male' and two elected from each of the 20 atolls.

In November 1997 the President of the Maldives ratified a new Constitution, which came into effect on 1 January 1998. Articles 25, 26 and 27 of the Constitution enshrines rights to freedom of expression, including the right "to form clubs and organizations as long as they are not prohibited by the laws related to preserving the independence of the Maldives, and maintaining public peace".

In April 2001, Amnesty International wrote to President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, seeking his assurances that the rights of those involved in trying to establish the Maldivian Democratic Party are respected, and that none of the signatories will be harassed by government officials because of their to form this party. To date, Amnesty International has received no reply to its letter.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:**

- expressing concern that Abdulla Shakir, MP for Male' Atoll, has "disappeared" after reportedly being arrested;
- asking the authorities to establish and make public his whereabouts;
- expressing concern that he appears to have been arrested solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- urging the authorities that if, as it appears, Abdulla Shakir has been arrested solely for being part of a group that is seeking to establish a political party, he be released immediately and unconditionally;
- urging the authorities to ensure that none of the signatories to the application to register the Maldivian Democratic Party are subjected to any form of harassment by government officials.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom  
The President's Palace

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Maafannu Theemuge  
Male 2002  
Republic of Maldives  
**Telegrams: President Gayoom, Maldives**  
**Faxes: + 960 32 55 00**  
**Salutation: Dear President Gayoom**

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of the Republic of Maldives accredited to your country. If there are none, please copy you appeals to:

The Maldives High Commissioner  
25 Melbourne Avenue  
Colombo  
Sri Lanka  
**Fax: + 94 1 581 200**

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 September 2001.