

AI Index: PRE 01/161/2012  
28 March 2012

## **Maldives must investigate sexual harassment of detained women protesters**

Maldives authorities must immediately investigate allegations that police beat and sexually harassed four women detained during an anti-government rally, Amnesty International said.

According to testimony gathered by Amnesty International, the women, who were arrested on 19 March, were beaten during and after their arrest.

While in detention they were forced to undergo naked body checks on the spurious suspicion of concealing drugs in their genitals. They were forced to strip and squat several times while in prison.

“The Maldives has an image as a luxury holiday destination, and over the past few years, it had established a positive track record on human rights. But the fact is at the moment, not only is repression of peaceful political protest an everyday reality, it has taken an appalling new twist with this cruel and degrading treatment,” said Amnesty International's Maldives researcher Abbas Faiz.

“The government of Maldives must ensure that these allegations are investigated and that those found to be responsible are brought to justice.

“The beating and sexual harassment of political detainees under the pretext that they are suspected of possessing drugs must end. None of the four women detainees had been arrested on that suspicion so there was no justification for the searches.”

The rally on 19 March was organized by the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) to protest about the opening of parliament where the new President, Dr Waheed was to give a speech.

Protests have continued in the capital Malé and other cities since 7 February in support of former president, Mohamed Nasheed who was ousted after a police and military mutiny.

There is no indication that the women protesters were involved in any acts of violence during the rally. Their detention therefore was arbitrary.

Cases of molestation and other humiliating sexual acts against women have been reported in the past, but these latest allegations highlight a new police drive to suppress political activity under the pretext of body searching female detainees for alleged possession of drugs.

Maldives police has denied the allegations and said those aggrieved should ask Maldives Human Rights Commission (MHRC) to investigate their allegations.

But the MHRC has told Amnesty International that they have serious limitations in terms of trained investigative staff and dealing with human rights issues in a highly politicized environment is an

overwhelming challenge for them.

The MHRC has yet to complete investigations into the alleged sexual harassment of female detainees in 2004.

"By referring cases of police abuse of power to the MHRC, when it is clear that such investigations are beyond its capacity, the government is in effect forfeiting its own responsibility to enforce respect for human rights within the police force," said Abbas Faiz

"This is the wrong message to give to the police as it will encourage police officers to violate human rights with impunity. The Maldives government must ensure that the right to freedom of assembly and expression is protected at all times."

### **Case testimonies**

**Yusra Hussein**, 22, told Amnesty International that four women police officers arrested her around lunch time on 19 March, near the Maldivian Democratic Party offices. She said: "They beat me as they handcuffed me. They beat me on my stomach, which was very painful as I had had a caesarean section in the past. They grabbed my breasts and twisted them."

They then took her from the police station to the Dhoonidoo detention centre, on an island about 5km north-west of Malé.

"They beat me there with electric cables. I still have marks of their beating on my body. They then forced me to strip naked and made me squat on the floor. They took a urine test and did a body check on me.

"They forced me to sit in that position for a body check several time. Each time I felt sick but they paid no attention. They just wanted to humiliate me as they were shouting filthy words at me all the while."

**Aishath Muna**, said police arrested her after she had taken another female protester to hospital. Police had pepper sprayed the protester and she had been feeling sick. When Aishath Muna returned to the MDP offices, two policewomen arrested her. She said the handcuffs which they used on her were very tight. She complained but they took no notice. She was then taken to Dhoonidoo detention centre where she was forced to take off her clothes and undergo a body check.

**Mariyam Waheeda**, 44, told Amnesty International that two women police officers who detained her on 19 March beat her and dragged her along the floor. They grabbed her breasts and twisted them while handcuffing her. She said they took her to the police station and only released her after she convinced them she had not taken part in the protest rallies.

**Aishath Aniya** said she had been forced to undergo a urine test, was made to take off her T shirt, bra and jeans, and was told to squat three times.

### **Notes to Editors**

#### **Previous Amnesty International statements on the Maldives -**

[Maldives security forces use violence against peaceful women protestors \(7 March 2012\)](#)

[Blog: Maldives security forces assault women protestors \(29 February 2012\)](#)

[Maldives security forces must stop using violence against supporters of Mohamed Nasheed \(8 February 2012\)](#)

[Maldives must avoid persecution of ousted government \(7 February 2012\)](#)

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