

URGENT ACTION

MALDIVIAN ACTIVIST FACES JAIL FOR BLASPHEMY

Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba, 39, a Maldivian religious freedom and human rights activist, faces five months in prison, if convicted, on charges of blasphemy. Accused of posting blasphemous contents on social media, he was detained for more than six months without trial under the Maldives' Penal Code, in violation of international human rights law. The Maldivian authorities must immediately drop the charges against Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr. Ibrahim Riffath
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Honourable Attorney General Ibrahim Riffath,

I write to you with grave concern about the fate of **Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba**, a Maldivian religious freedom and human rights activist, who is being prosecuted for blasphemy and possession of "obscene material" under the country's Penal Code and if convicted, could face up to five months in prison.

On 11 May 2022, Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba told the criminal court, where he is being prosecuted, that he was detained for six months, in excess of the sentence stipulated if convicted. However, the state prosecutor argued at the court that he was detained for 29 days, 22 hours and 19 minutes. The reduced time argued by the state means that he could be imprisoned again.

Accused of posting content critical about religion on social media, he was subjected to pretrial detention between 10 September 2019 and 12 March 2020.

I wish to remind you that blasphemy laws are incompatible with international human rights law including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Maldives is a state party. Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba is being punished solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression, which includes criticism of religious leaders or commentary on religious doctrine and tenets of faith.

I, therefore, urge you to:

- **Immediately drop the charges against Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba and all those implicated under domestic laws solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and religion;**
- **Repeal blasphemy laws in the Penal Code and other domestic laws;**
- **Withdraw reservations to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba, 39, is a self-proclaimed atheist and a Maldivian religious freedom and human rights activist from the island of Thinadhoo. He was first detained by the Maldives' police on 10 September 2019 for posting content that was critical about religion on social media. Accused under section 617 and 622 of the Penal Code of the Maldives for criticising Islam and possessing obscene material, Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba could face up to five months in prison, if convicted.

"I was tweeting about women's rights, freedom of conscience and errors in religion, why it is wrong and why it must not be forced on anyone. They had all the tweets printed. It was nearly 6,000 tweets," he told Amnesty International.

In the Maldives, blasphemy implies critical views about Islam, Quran, the Prophet and Allah and is punishable by imprisonment. The Maldives' Islamic Affairs Minister Ahmed Zahir [said to RaajjeMV](#), a local media outlet, that the Maldives is a 100% Muslim country and blasphemy will not be tolerated.

Prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), except in the specific circumstances that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. The actions against Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba contravenes international human rights law including the ICCPR.

The Maldives acceded to the ICCPR in 2006 and made [reservation](#) on the application of the principles set out in Article 18, which relates to the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The country's [constitution](#) prohibits the right to freedom of opinion and expression that are "contrary to any tenet of Islam."

Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba does not have a lawyer to represent him at the court because of the religious sensitivity attached to his case and the country's prohibition of religious freedom.

Amnesty International has previously [observed](#) that the prison conditions in the Maldives are notorious and resulted in unnatural death of inmates. Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba was subjected to repeated mental examinations at different clinics by the police. These examinations returned normal results, he said, adding, "the doctors knew that atheism wasn't a mental illness." He was denied clothes to change into during his detention in the police custodial prisons. In addition, he was told blasphemers are the greatest sinners. At the Maldives Correctional Services, the prisons under judicial custody, he was kept in a small cell of about 64 square feet with three other prisoners. "When we slept, we couldn't even roll to sides or even stretch our legs," he told Amnesty International. He was attacked by several prisoners during his detention. The cells where he was kept were dirty and smelled of urine and defecation.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Dhivehi

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 15 August 2022

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Mohamed Rusthum Mujuthaba (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: N/A