

URGENT ACTION

NGO SHUT DOWN, STAFF AT RISK OF ATTACK

The Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) was permanently shut down by the authorities on 5 November 2019, in response to their 2015 report "Preliminary Assessment of Radicalization in the Maldives" which allegedly contained "content slandering Islam and the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH)". Subject to a social media smear campaign by religious hardliners, staff and members of MDN have faced alarming threats of violence, rape and even death against them. The Maldivian Government must uphold its obligations under international human rights law and ensure that human rights defenders, activists and civil society organizations are able to freely carry out their activities without the threats of violence, prosecution and repression.

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

*Rt. Honourable Ibrahim Mohamed Solih
President of the Republic of Maldives
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Your Excellency,

*I am deeply shocked to hear the decision of your government to shut down the **Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)**, and seriously concerned about the resulting death threats against its members and staff.*

As one of the most prominent NGOs in Maldives, MDN has played a crucial role in promoting human rights in the country including invaluable research on topic such as police reform, torture, threats to human rights defenders and the right to freedom of expression, among others. In fact, I find it very distressing that MDN is currently facing intimidation from the very government whose members, former prisoners of conscience, it campaigned so tirelessly to have released.

Human rights defenders and activists around the world have been optimistic about the improved situation for civil society in the country following the formation of your government in November 2018, and the promise to put an end to the repressive tactics used by previous governments. However, the decision to shut down MDN, and allow religious hardliners to launch threats of violence, death and rape against human rights defenders and activists, sends a chilling message to local civil society, outside observers as well as many travellers who plan to visit Maldives. These acts are in violation of several international human rights treaties to which Maldives is a state party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

I, therefore, urge you to reinstate MDN, ensure the safety and security of all its members and staff, and create an enabling environment for human rights defenders, activists and civil society organizations to freely carry out their activities without the threats of violence, prosecution and repression.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) is a non-partisan NGO that “promotes human rights” and the “values and principles of democracy”. Its mandate includes raising awareness, monitoring human rights violations, and advocacy. The MDN’s reports over recent years have included research on police reforms, torture, threats to human rights defenders, threats to the right to freedom of expression, enforced disappearance, attacks on lawyers and other human rights issues. The MDN is one of the prominent NGOs speaking out against repression under former President Abdulla Yameen, who was voted out of office in November 2018. The new government, led by President Ibrahim Solih, includes former prisoners of conscience whose release Amnesty International and MDN campaigned for.

On 10 October 2019, the Maldivian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a press release saying that it had temporarily suspended the operations of the MDN. In a press release, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs alleged that the content of the 2015 report, “Preliminary Assessment of Radicalization in the Maldives” contained “content slandering Islam and the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH)”.

On 5 November 2019, the Maldivian Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment – which regulates the activities of NGOs - issued a press release saying that it had decided to shut down the operations of MDN altogether. The closure comes against the backdrop of threats to the MDN’s staff, including its director, Shahinda Ismail, from religious hardliners.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 2 January 2020

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)