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Maldives: Repression of political opponents must stop

In a report published today, Amnesty International highlighted an endemic pattern of arbitrary detention of government critics and their continued imprisonment before and after convictions in grossly unfair trials.

"In a country with a total population of about 318,000, dozens of people - including politicians, journalists and others protesting government policies - have been detained arbitrarily in defiance of their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly," Amnesty International said.

Prisoners of conscience have been tried and convicted by the Criminal Court without having access to a lawyer, or to an independent and impartial appeal mechanism. They have been denied even the most basic facilities such as pen and paper to prepare their defence.

"The government has portrayed their convictions as being a result of criminal activity, but the real reason for their imprisonment has been their political opposition to the government," the organization added.

Detailed case studies in the report highlight the failure of the government to address fundamental flaws in the criminal justice system resulting in arbitrary detention, grossly unfair trials and long term imprisonment of government critics.

The limited steps the government has taken to improve aspects of the criminal justice system have not removed the shortcomings of the system. For instance, a new law meant to allow the detainees access to legal assistance for specific purposes does not allow confidential communication between the lawyer and the accused as required by international human rights law.

The report also describes a pattern of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners and the failure of the government to investigate reports of torture and to bring those responsible to justice.

Amnesty International is calling upon the Government of Maldives to implement the recommendations contained in this report to ensure that the rights of those seeking to peacefully express their political opinion are guaranteed.

The organization is urging the Government of Maldives to release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally; ensure the independence of the judiciary through a clear separation of the judiciary from the executive; reform the criminal justice system to ensure the fair trial of prisoners according

to international human rights standards; investigate all allegations of torture or ill-treatment through an independent, impartial and competent authority; and bring anyone involved in torture or other human rights violations to justice.

For the full text of the report, please go to:
www.web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa290022003

Public Document

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