

26 August 1998

**Further information on UA 197/98 (ASA 29/05/98, 8 July 1998) - Prisoners of conscience/Fear of torture or ill-treatment****THE MALDIVESAt least 20 people**

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Amnesty International remains concerned about at least 20 people who reportedly remain in detention on suspicion of spreading Christian beliefs, and are being held in conditions that appear to amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

The majority are held at Dhoonidhoo detention centre, which comes under the direct responsibility of the police, but a small number are also reported to be held at Gaamadhoo Prison, where convicted prisoners are sent to serve their sentences.

The women detainees are reportedly being kept in a small, hot and overcrowded cell without adequate sleeping space. At least one woman has been continuously held in solitary confinement. All the detainees are reportedly being forced to perform daily ritual Islamic prayers and reading the Qur'an.

In response to appeals by Amnesty International members on behalf of these detainees, the Maldives Government stated in a letter dated 18 July 1998 that "the allegations claiming that a number of persons arrested in the Maldives for the peaceful exercise of their religious beliefs are false and totally baseless. Similarly reports about the alleged beating of persons in custody are unfounded".

Furthermore, The *Weekend Express* newspaper, published in Sri Lanka on 11 July, reported that the High Commissioner of the Maldives to Sri Lanka had "refuted allegations of persons held in police custody in the Maldives due to their faith in Christianity". However, continuous reports reaching Amnesty International indicate that the prisoners remain in detention for the non-violent expression of their religious beliefs.

**FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the detainees if they are being held for the peaceful exercise of their religious beliefs;
- expressing concern that they are reportedly held in conditions which amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment;
- urging the authorities to take all measures to ensure that the detainees are treated humanely in accordance with international standards;
- calling for the authorities to ensure that the detainees are given full access to their relatives, lawyers and a doctor;
- reminding the Maldives Government of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 18: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

**APPEALS TO:**

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom

The President's Office

Marine Drive (North)

Male', Republic of Maldives

**Telegrams:**           **President Gayoom, Male', Maldives**

**Faxes:**               **+ 960 32 55 00**

**Salutation:**       **Dear President**

Lt Colonel Adam Zahir

Officer in Charge

Police Headquarters

C/O Ministry of Defence and National Security

Bandeyrige, Ahmed Magu, Male'

Republic of Maldives

**Telegrams:**       **Lt Colonel Zahir, Police Headquarters, Male', Maldives**

**Faxes:**             **+960 32 5525**

**Salutation**       **Dear Lt Colonel**

**COPIES TO:**

Abdulla Hameed

Speaker, Office of the Citizens' Majlis

Naadi

Ameer Ahmed Magu

Male'

Republic of Maldives

and to diplomatic representatives of the Maldives accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 October 1998.

***"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."***

*Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

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