

AI Index: PRE 01/007/2013
08 January 2013

Maldives: Girl sexually abused should be protected not punished

The charges of “fornication” against a 15-year old girl in Maldives, who there is strong reason to believe was raped by her step-father, is outrageous, Amnesty International said.

The girl and her step-father were first arrested after the body of a baby she had given birth to was found buried outside their house on Feydhoo island in Maldives in June 2012.

The step-father, who had reportedly sexually abused his daughter for years, has been charged with sexually abusing a minor, possessing pornography, and murder, while her mother has been charged with concealing a crime and murder.

The 15-year old girl has reportedly been charged with “fornication”, though the Maldivian authorities have refused to confirm the details of the case and whether it is related to the rape by her step-father.

“This is an absolute outrage, regardless of the reason for her charges. Victims of rape or other forms of sexual abuse should be given counselling and support – not charged with a crime,” said Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International’s Maldives Researcher.

“We urge the Maldivian authorities to immediately drop all charges against the girl, ensure her safety and provide her with all necessary support.”

If found guilty of “fornication” the girl could be punished with flogging. She would likely be kept under house arrest until she turns 18 when, under Maldivian law, the flogging can be carried out.

“Flogging is a violation of the absolute prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and punishment. The Maldivian authorities should immediately end its use regardless of circumstances. The fact that this time a 15-year old girl who has suffered terribly is at risk makes it all the more reprehensible,” said Faiz.

“Flogging is not only wrong and humiliating, but can lead to long-term psychological as well as physical scars.”

The Maldivian Department of Judicial Administration today claimed that no case against the girl has been filed in the Juvenile Court, even though it acknowledged that charges against her exist.

Amnesty International has received credible reports that the Maldivian authorities have in the past charged and convicted other girls, some of whom have been survivors of rape and other sexual assault, with “fornication” which had led to them being punished by flogging.