

Press Release

12 May 2021

Maldives: Regarding the 6 May 2021 terrorist attack on the Speaker of Parliament,

former President Mohamed Nasheed

On Thursday, 6 May 2021 an IED aimed at the Speaker of Parliament and former president of Maldives Mohamed Nasheed, exploded in Male', injuring Nasheed and five other people. After 16 hours of surgery to remove shrapnel from internal organs, Nasheed is now recovering in hospital. All others injured in the blast have been treated with no medical complications.

On 7 May the Maldives Police Service (MPS) admitted that their intelligence department failed to pick up on an imminent threat. The National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), under the Ministry of Defense and National Security, echoed the same message: their intelligence failed too. Several national intelligence and counter terrorism authorities: the NCTC, the Counter Terrorism and Intelligence departments at the MPS and the Maldives National Defense Force (MNDF) Intelligence Department—exist in the Maldives. It is shocking and unacceptable that these authorities appear to have missed the threats alluding to a call to attack in the last 10 days of the month of Ramadan made in the April edition of the online propaganda magazine published by a Pro-Islamic group active in the Indian sub-continent called 'Voice of Hind', or 'Sawt al Hind'. This same magazine in its past editions had laid claimed to previous incidences of terrorism in the country¹.

We remind authorities and the international community that this is not the first terrorist attack in the Maldives. Nor is it the first attempt at taking the life of an individual in the name of religion. The stabbing of Hilath Rasheed (2012), murder of former MP Dr Afrasheem Ali (2012), enforced disappearance of journalist Ahmed Rilwan (2014) and the murder of blogger Yameen Rasheed (2017) were all connected to extremist religious groups, as the presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearance announced in September 2019. Authorities under consecutive governments have failed to investigate these crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. Many of those implicated in

¹ <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/maldives>

violent extremist activities are repeat offenders, suggesting that failures are occurring not just at the intelligence level but also in providing effective deradicalisation programs to rehabilitate and reintegrate such individuals.

We remain concerned that government institutions appear unable to take a coordinated and systematic approach to address the drivers of radicalization in the Maldives. Most individuals facing charges related to violent extremism and terrorism, including those arrested in connection with the attack on President Nasheed, are young people. This implies that little effort has been made in the past three years of this government to address the acute vulnerability and exclusion known to be experienced by youth.

It is extremely worrying that individuals who have publicly displayed their support for ISIS and the Al-Qaeda, and those suspected of hate crimes in the Maldives, hold political positions within the government and political parties in addition to high level positions within the media. That several such individuals and groups move fluidly between and among violent gangs, politicians and businessmen is widely known.

The Maldives Police Service has systematically failed to adequately investigate hate speech and violent threats made online and on mainstream media, creating an atmosphere of fear for individuals who do not follow the increasingly dominant conservative narratives on Islam.

The Government and the Parliament must immediately undertake a review of the institutions that failed in their responsibilities, allowing the current dangers to emerge in society. This should include:

- 1) A review of the Maldives Police Service's capacity to counter violent extremism and terrorism. Additionally, in light of the impunity which has surrounded such terrorist activity, the review needs to confirm the institution itself has not been compromised.
- 2) A review of the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment (MoYSCE) to check their performance against their mandate to address the drivers of radicalization
- 3) A review of the Ministry of Home Affairs in performing their mandate to build social cohesion and ensure peaceful co-existence in the country.
- 4) A review of the scholars and preachers licensed by the Ministry to ensure they have adequate and valid qualifications from recognized institutions that do not promote violence or hatred in the name of religion.

- 5) Ensuring that scholars and preachers who disseminate messages of intolerance and hate are held to account.
- 6) A review of the performance of the Ministry of Education in ensuring that curricula and learning material at educational establishments at all levels—from primary to higher education—are free of hate and intolerance spread in the name of religion.

The terrorist act of 6 May 2021 shows a colossal failure at all levels of government to recognise and address one of the most pressing issues facing Maldives today—the violent radicalisation of our youth. We call on the parliament to make a full audit of this failure and hold the government accountable.

ENDS.