



**Joint Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the Maldives  
50th Session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group**

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Submission by:

**The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**

and

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## Introduction

1. **The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)** is a membership-based regional network of human rights organisations in Asia. Our collective strength draws from our extensive network of 90 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. FORUM-ASIA works to promote and protect human rights, civic space, and democracy in the region by empowering civil society and marginalised communities.
2. The **Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)** is a non-partisan NGO that has been operating since September 2004. It is dedicated to protecting and promoting human rights as well as the values and principles of democracy in the Maldives. Following a violent smear campaign led by extremist religious groups and local clerics, targeting MDN and its staff, and the subsequent arbitrary banning of the organisation in December 2019, MDN has continued its operations in exile.
3. In this joint submission, the two organisations assess the Maldives' compliance with international human rights obligations and review its progress in implementing previous recommendations. These include issues related to national security and counter terrorism, freedom of religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender identity, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of association, violence against women, migrant workers, transitional justice and accountability for past violations, and the national human rights institution.
4. This submission draws on first-hand information collected by both organisations, including consultation with partners in the Maldives, as well as publicly available secondary sources.

## National Security and Anti-Terrorism

5. During the previous UPR cycle, the Maldives received three recommendations related to countering terrorism, including calls to clarify the grounds for arrest under the Anti-Terrorism Act,<sup>1</sup> and to take effective measures to prevent Maldivians from joining terrorist

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 133.122, UN Doc No. A/HRC/46/10 (15 December 2020)

groups abroad.<sup>2</sup> Although the government accepted all three recommendations, there has been little to no meaningful progress, particularly in addressing serious concerns related to the Anti-Terrorism Act.

6. The Anti-Terrorism Act (Law No. 32/2015), along with its subsequent amendments in 2016, 2019, and 2021, prohibits and condemns acts of terror, activities that may lead to terrorism, or any terrorism-related activity. The Act also prescribes penalties for terrorist offences and grants authorities broad powers to monitor and control individuals suspected of involvement in terrorist activities<sup>3</sup>.
7. The 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act has been widely criticised for its vague definitions and overly broad provisions, which undermine fundamental human rights protected by international law. During her visit to the Maldives in 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, raised several critical concerns. She observed inadequate definitions of “*support*” and “*encouragement*” of terrorism, as well as overly expansive speech-related offenses. These shortcomings pose significant risks to the rights to freedom of expression and association, particularly given the Maldives’ history of using counter-terrorism laws to bring politically motivated charges against critics of the government, including journalists, activists, and political opponents.
8. Moreover, as the Special Rapporteur observed, the widespread use of terms “*extremism*,” “*religious extremism*,” and “*violent extremism*” in legislative, regulatory, and policy frameworks for counterterrorism, including within the criminal justice system and public discourse, is highly problematic. These terms, often undefined or poorly defined, can be perceived as benchmarks for acceptable or required religious practices, thereby enabling arbitrary and informal determinations. This creates serious risks, including threats to individuals' lives and safety. Additionally, the Anti-Terrorism Act grants excessive powers

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<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 133.174, UN Doc No. A/HRC/46/10 (15 December 2020)

<sup>3</sup> The President’s Office, Republic of Maldives. 28.10.2015. *President ratifies Anti-terrorism bill*, <https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/16045>

to both the executive and judiciary during investigations and trials, further undermining civil liberties and due process.<sup>4</sup>

9. The most recent act of terrorism in the Maldives occurred on 6 May 2021, targeting the then Speaker of Parliament and former President Mohamed Nasheed. He was attacked with an explosive device as he approached his vehicle near his residence. Although he narrowly survived, the attack resulted in severe and permanent injuries to him and his security personnel. Seven individuals were charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act in connection with the attack; as of 2023, only one had been convicted, while the trials for others are ongoing<sup>5</sup>.
10. In May 2022, the Special Envoy appointed by the Government to oversee the investigation publicly stated that the investigation had been conducted professionally and in line with best practices. However, he expressed concern over the lack of progress in probing “*wider links and wider financial motives*” behind the attack<sup>6</sup>.
11. Further, in March 2024, the Minister of Defense informed Parliament that the government had acquired new information related to the 2021 attack and reaffirmed the government’s commitment to national security<sup>7</sup>. Despite this, the overall pace of investigations into terrorist attacks remains alarmingly slow. Notably, the law enforcement reported in 2019 that over 1,400 violent extremists were at large in the country<sup>8</sup>. Since then, the government has not disclosed any substantive updates on this matter.

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<sup>4</sup> Paragraph 26, UN Doc No. A/HRC/52/39/Add.1

<sup>5</sup> Edition Maldives. 14 March 2023. *Court denies defence request to restart trial in Nasheed assassination attempt*. [https://edition.mv/dr\\_abdul\\_samad\\_memorial\\_hospital/27410](https://edition.mv/dr_abdul_samad_memorial_hospital/27410)

<sup>6</sup> Social media post by Abbas Faiz May 2022. *Statement of Abbas Faiz, Special Envoy to the Government of Maldives to monitor the investigation, prosecution and trial of the May 6, 2021 terrorist attack against Speaker of Parliament and former President Mohamed Nasheed*. <https://x.com/tweetafaiz/status/1522530134712066049>

<sup>7</sup> PSM News. 26 March 2024. *Minister states new details on attack targeting President Nasheed obtained*. <https://psmnews.mv/en/135263>

<sup>8</sup> Maldives Independent. 19 December 2019. *About 1,400 extremists ‘willing to kill’ in Maldives*. <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/about-1400-extremists-willing-to-kill-in-maldives-149692>

12. While counter-terrorism financing measures are actively used to monitor the financial activities of private citizens, companies, political parties, and most civil society organisations, there are concerns about selective enforcement. In 2022, whistleblowers within the government reported that attempts to investigate donations to specific religious organisations were obstructed by a then-sitting cabinet member.
13. The Maldives faces serious threats from radical Islamist fundamentalist networks. The groups fund local religious organizations and have become deeply embedded in the country's political landscape, exerting significant leverage over the national government<sup>9</sup>. There is an urgent need to raise public awareness, particularly among families with youth, to help parents and guardians identify early signs that their children may be targeted by extremist recruiters. Despite this pressing need, public awareness remains dangerously low, as reflected in the inadequate outreach and educational materials disseminated by the National Counter Terrorism Centre.

### ***Recommendations***

14. Amend the Anti-Terrorism Act in line with recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, to ensure its compatibility with the Maldives' obligations under international law and other relevant international standards, including by:
  - 14.1. Reviewing the definition of "terrorism" in line with international human rights standards and international best practice.
  - 14.2. Narrowing the scope of terrorism-related offences, particularly those related to "encouragement," "support," and speech-based offences, to avoid a disproportionate impact on fundamental freedoms.
15. Ensure full compliance with the right to a fair trial and due process in the investigation and prosecution of terrorism and "extremism"-related offences. Particular attention should be given to provisions that grant excessive powers to the executive, such as the right to arrest

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<sup>9</sup> Eurasia Review. 18 March 2025. *Maldives: treading Cautiously – Analysis*, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/18022025-maldives-treading-cautiously-analysis/>

without warrant, special search powers, restrictions on access to legal counsel, extended periods for reviewing the legality of detention, limited judicial oversight, prolonged pretrial detention, and the absence of bail.

16. Adopt effective measures to protect civil society actors and human rights defenders from threats, harassment, and violence.

### **Freedom of Religion or Belief**

17. The Maldives received 14 recommendations in the previous UPR cycle on protecting freedom of religion or belief and combating religious discrimination and intolerance. The government noted all 14, asserting that Islam is the state religion and fundamental to Maldivian identity, the Constitution, and laws.
18. In July 2024, the Maldives reiterated its intention to maintain its reservation on Article 18 of the ICCPR, arguing that it is essential to preserve Islamic principles fundamental to Maldivian identity, public order, and religious harmony<sup>10</sup>. However, no evidence has been presented to suggest that implementing Article 18, as done by other States, has led to challenges to national identity or security.
19. In practice, the exercise and advocacy of freedom of religion or belief remain effectively prohibited. Article 10 of the Maldivian Constitution stipulates that the right of citizenship is dependent upon being a Muslim. This framework risks rendering individuals who leave the faith stateless, denying fundamental rights to non-Muslims, regardless of their nationality.
20. The Constitution also prohibits the adoption of any law that contradicts Islamic tenets. This provision has been used to justify laws and policies that undermine international human rights standards, especially those related to eliminating discrimination based on religion or belief, sexual orientation, and gender. It has facilitated undue restrictions on other

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<sup>10</sup> Center for Civil and Political Rights. 16.07.2024. *Maldives Excuses Itself behind Islamic Principles to Justify Non-Compliance with ICCPR*, <https://ccprcentre.org/ccprpages/maldives-excuses-itself-behind-islamic-principles-to-justify-non-compliance-with-iccpr#:~:text=The%20Maldives%20maintains%20a%20reservation,as%20fundamental%20to%20Maldivian%20identity.>

fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, assembly, and association, under the pretext of protecting the religion. Moreover, this framework has been invoked to undermine the rights of women and girls, in contravention of the Maldives' obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

21. Advocacy for the protection of freedom of religion or belief, or for tolerance and non-discrimination, is often considered “blasphemy.” Misinformation around secularism, portrayed by local clerics and consecutive governments as “atheism,” has created a climate of hate and violence. Human rights defenders, civil society actors, secularist writers, and journalists have been subjected to threats, violent attacks, political persecution, criminal investigations, and in some cases, murder.

## **Recommendations**

22. Withdraw the reservation to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
23. Revise the Constitution to ensure that religion is not a requirement for citizenship and guarantee the right to citizenship for all Maldivians without discrimination.
24. Guarantee the right of every individual to have or adopt a religion or belief of their choice, to change their religion or belief, and to manifest it in practice—including the right of non-Muslims, whether Maldivian citizens or foreigners, to practise their religion, including in places of public worship.
25. Amend the Religious Unity Act (Act No. 6/94) to ensure all individuals in the Maldives can fully exercise their freedom of religion or belief, including by decriminalising apostasy.
26. Ensure that constitutional provisions that prohibit laws that may contradict Islamic tenets, or allow for restrictions on rights to maintain such tenets, are not invoked to impose undue limitations on rights and freedoms guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights treaties and standards.

27. Introduce legislative measures to prohibit, prevent, and eliminate all forms of hate, intolerance, and discrimination based on religion or belief, and revise all laws that discriminate on religious grounds.
28. Take immediate legal and practical measures to protect human rights defenders, journalists, writers, and civil society organisations advocating for the right to freedom of religion or belief and non-discrimination based on religion, gender, or sexual orientation. Ensure accountability for threats, harassment, and violence perpetrated against them.

### **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

29. The Maldives received six recommendations concerning the decriminalisation of same-sex relations between consenting adults and the need to end discrimination and stigmatisation based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The government noted all six, citing constitutional provisions that define Islam as the state religion and Islamic principles as fundamental to Maldivian identity, the Constitution, and national laws.
30. Sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex, as well as premarital and extramarital sex, are criminalised under the Sexual Offenses Act (No. 17/2014) and punishable by up to seven years in prison and 100 lashes, according to the Penal Code<sup>11</sup>. These laws have been actively enforced. In 2022, private videos depicting consensual same-sex relations between adult men were non-consensually leaked online. Eleven men were charged under the Penal Code, three were sentenced, and others remain in various stages of the investigation.
31. The absence of legal protections against incitement to violence, hatred, and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity has created a space where individuals are routinely targeted, harassed, attacked, and threatened with violence, often by non-state actors. This includes the widespread and unchecked practice of doxxing, where personal information is deliberately exposed online to incite violence or publicly discredit opposition politicians, public figures, journalists, and activists.

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<sup>11</sup> Human Dignity Trust. 21.2.2025. *Maldives*, <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/maldives/>



32. Investigations and prosecutions of crimes committed against individuals based on their sexual orientation remain exceedingly rare. The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives has remained silent in the face of such violence, public harassment, and state-led investigations targeting members of the LGBTIQ community. In contrast, victims of these attacks are frequently criminalised themselves under sexual offense laws, further compounding their vulnerability and denying them access to justice.

### ***Recommendations***

33. Decriminalise consensual same-sex relations between adults and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) persons by repealing all laws and provisions that criminalise, discriminate against, or stigmatise individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
34. Take all necessary measures to prevent and combat violence, discrimination, and stigmatisation based on sexual orientation and gender identity, including by criminalising such acts and ensuring the thorough investigation and prosecution of all related crimes, such as physical attacks, threats, and the practice of doxxing.
35. Implement public awareness campaigns and adopt all appropriate legal, policy, and institutional measures to combat discrimination and harassment against members of the LGBTIQ community, promoting a culture of dignity, inclusion, and justice.

### **Freedom of Opinion and Expression**

36. The Maldives received and supported six recommendations related to the right to freedom of opinion and expression during the previous UPR cycle. However, the government has made little meaningful progress in implementing these recommendations. In fact, both longstanding challenges and new developments during the reporting period have further eroded the fundamental right.
37. The right to freedom of expression remains severely restricted in the Maldives. Systemic constraints include the 2022 amendments to the Evidence Act (Law No. 11/2022), which

compel journalists to disclose their sources in court. This severely undermines the media's ability to investigate and report accurate information to the public, freely and safely. Additionally, Section 35 of the Religious Unity Act (Law No. 6/94) includes vague and overly broad language that can be interpreted to suppress human rights advocacy under the guise of preventing "religious discord."

38. Online and offline harassment—alongside the political persecution of individuals, including human rights defenders, civil society organisations, and journalists—continues with impunity. Investigations into the enforced disappearance of journalist and blogger Ahmed Rilwan Abdullah (2014), the murder of MP Dr. Afrasheem Ali (2012), and the killing of blogger Yameen Rasheed (2017) remain incomplete.
39. The Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances (DDCOM), established in November 2018 under former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, was dissolved in May 2024 without a single conviction across any of the 27 cases under its mandate. The commission refused to disclose any findings or details from its investigations. Although the current government pledged to make the final DDCOM report public, this commitment remains unfulfilled.
40. Beyond these above-mentioned, new developments raise further concern and violate international human rights standards, including those set out in General Comment No. 34 of the Human Rights Committee<sup>12</sup>. Societal pressures, stemming from increasingly conservative religious interpretations, have led to heightened scrutiny and harassment of individuals who do not conform to gendered religious dress codes. Women, in particular, are forced to wear the *hijab*, while men are pressured to shorten their trousers above the ankles and grow beards of a certain length.
41. For instance, female teachers are required to wear long blouses that cover their bottoms and are prohibited from tucking in shirts. Short sleeves are banned, and sleeve lengths must extend below the elbows. One woman HRD was barred from entering a voting booth during

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<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Committee. July 2011. Para. 12. *General Comment no. 34. Article 19: Freedoms of Opinion and Expression*. <https://docs.un.org/ccpr/C/GC/34>

the 2024 parliament elections for wearing a t-shirt that read “Find Moyameehaa”, a campaign calling to investigate the enforced disappearance of Ahmed Rilwan Abdullah. Another woman HRD who applied for a position at the Maldives Islamic Bank was informally told that women who do not wear the *hijab* would not be considered for employment.

42. While such practices may be less visible in the capital region, they are widespread and strictly enforced in the outer atolls. This pattern of moral policing, largely rooted in Salafi or Hanafi interpretations of Islam, is deeply troubling. Some religious groups in the Maldives have even advocated for introducing laws similar to Afghanistan’s “*Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice*” law, enacted by the Taliban in July 2024.
43. Alarming, several schools in the atolls have made the *hijab* a mandatory part of the school uniform. Consequently, girls who are compelled to wear the *hijab* within the school premises often face pressure to continue wearing it outside school hours as well, reinforcing a culture of control and conformity over bodily autonomy and expression.

***Recommendations:***

44. Amend the Religious Unity Act to clearly define prohibited content and actions in a manner that ensures factual reporting and human rights advocacy are not persecuted or criminalised.
45. Amend the Evidence Act in line with international human rights standards, including the ICCPR, to recognize the journalistic privilege of protecting sources.
46. Prevent public and private employers, as well as other officials, from infringing on the individuals’ right to freedom of expression by imposing informal or arbitrary dress codes outside the boundaries of clearly established law.
47. Protect journalists and human rights defenders from all forms of violence, harassment, and censorship. Ensure timely investigations into such attacks and hold perpetrators accountable, with a focus on reparative justice to victims

48. Ensure that the findings of the Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances (DDCOM) are shared with victims' families and made publicly accessible.

## **Freedom of Association**

49. During the third cycle of UPR, the government of the Maldives committed to ensuring that “civil society organizations are free to carry out their activities without fear or hindrance, and in this regard, remove undue restrictions on freedom of association.”<sup>13</sup> While the new Associations Act (Law No. 03/2022), introduced in May 2022, includes relative improvements compared to the previous law, in practice, civic space remains highly restricted.
50. Since 2018, two prominent human rights organisations have had their registrations arbitrarily revoked in connection with their legitimate human rights work. The first was the Maldives NGO Federation, which was targeted and subsequently deregistered in 2018 after issuing a press statement urging the government to implement a Supreme Court ruling calling for the release of all political prisoners and the reinstatement of Members of the Parliament<sup>14</sup>. The second was the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), deregistered in December 2019 following allegations of blasphemy made by non-state actors in relation to a 2016 publication by the organisation<sup>15</sup>.
51. In June 2020, Uthema, a women's rights organisation, was similarly targeted with allegations of blasphemy by non-state actors. The Maldives Police Service confirmed the commencement of a criminal investigation, later informing international stakeholders that

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<sup>13</sup> Paragraph 133.149, UN Doc No. A/HRC/46/10 (15 December 2020)

<sup>14</sup> Maldives NGO Federation consisted of 62 local associations at the time of the press statement, which can be found on their Facebook page via <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1553426804753926&id=1058245644272047&set=a.1553427844753822>

<sup>15</sup> Forum-Asia. 25.12.2019. *Maldives: Dissolution of the Maldivian Democracy Network is violation of fundamental rights*. <https://forum-asia.org/maldives-dissolution-of-the-maldivian-democracy-network-is-violation-of-fundamental-human-rights/>

a formal case was filed<sup>16</sup>. Such attacks have created an environment of fear, compelling civil society organizations to retreat from their work and resort to self-censorship.

52. The government has continued to refuse to reverse the arbitrary deregistration of MDN or to return funds seized from its accounts, despite repeated calls from human rights groups and a recommendation by the UN Human Rights Committee following the Maldives' periodic review under the ICCPR in June 2024<sup>17</sup>.
53. In a lawsuit filed in September 2020 by MDN's founder challenging the denial of due process in the organisation's closure, the Civil Court of Maldives ruled in March 2023 that MDN's deregistration was justified based on the alleged blasphemy in the 2016 report. Pertinently, no court has adjudicated whether the publication constitutes blasphemy. The Civil Court failed to address the original claim concerning violations of due process rights. The ruling of the Civil Court was appealed to the High Court in August 2023. To date, no hearings have been held, and the government has not submitted a response to the appeal within the Court's stipulated time.
54. In March 2024, the Association for Democracy in the Maldives, a local NGO, applied to intervene in the case as a third party. The application was rejected shortly after, and the Supreme Court upheld the same in February 2025. In the same month, FORUM-ASIA also submitted an application to intervene in the case as a third party. The court has yet to make a decision regarding its admission<sup>18</sup>.

## ***Recommendations***

55. Reinstate the registration of the Maldives NGO Federation without delay.

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<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch. 25.6.2020. *Maldives: Extremist groups threatens rights activists*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/25/maldives-extremist-groups-threaten-rights-activists>

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Committee. 25.7.2024. *Concluding observations on the second periodic review of the Maldives*. CCPR/C/MDV/CO/2. [https://ccprcentre.org/files/media/CCPR\\_C\\_MDV\\_CO\\_2\\_59071\\_E.pdf](https://ccprcentre.org/files/media/CCPR_C_MDV_CO_2_59071_E.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Joint statement by Forum-Asia and MDN. 20.2.2025. *Maldives: Forum-Asia submits third party intervention in High Court case challenging arbitrary deregistration of the Maldivian Democracy Network*. <https://forum-asia.org/mdn25/>

56. Implement the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee to reinstate the registration of the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) and return all funds seized from the organisation's accounts.
57. Conduct thorough, transparent investigations into the processes leading to the deregistration or criminal targeting of the Maldives NGO Federation, Maldivian Democracy Network, and Uthema. Share the findings publicly and with relevant national and international stakeholders, including the UN Human Rights Committee.
58. Amend the Associations Act to establish an independent appointment process for the Registrar of Associations, and ensure that all decisions made by the Registrar are subject to judicial review.

### **Violence against Women**

59. Despite several commitments made by the government in the previous UPR cycle, violence and discrimination against women remain alarmingly high in the Maldives. In addition to persistent reports of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women and girls in various private spaces, this submission highlights the alarming practice of *Ruqya* in the Maldives. *Ruqya* is a form of exorcism involving recitation of verses from the Qur'an, often promoted as a healing method outside of formal medical frameworks. It is also used to treat cases where individuals are believed to be possessed by the *jinn* or affected by black magic.
60. Sanctioned and widespread in the Maldives, *Ruqya* is notorious for enabling violent physical and sexual abuse of women and girls, including instances where victims are held captive in their own homes. Both the Maldives Police Service and the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) have received multiple complaints regarding abuse under the guise of *Ruqya*. In November 2020, the Parliamentary Committee on Gender and Human Rights launched an investigation into a case in which a woman and her three daughters were subjected to prolonged physical and sexual abuse while confined for three

months in their house.<sup>19</sup> The perpetrator, the husband/father, repeatedly brought in an exorcist to “heal” the women. A separate complaint also raised concerns of police negligence: when one of the women called for help, the police officer who arrived at the scene left after being told a Ruqya session was in progress. Troublingly, the HRCM responded to public pressure not by calling for an end to the practice but by advocating for its regulation.

61. From 2020 to 2022, multiple allegations of sexual harassment were made against senior government officials, including a senior appointee at the President’s Office, a cabinet minister, and an official at the state-owned Maldives Gas. While former Minister of Tourism Ali Waheed was investigated and charged with multiple counts of sexual assault and harassment, adequate investigations were not conducted on the other cases. Waheed was allowed to leave the country and live and work in the United Kingdom until the Prosecutor General withdrew all charges against him in 2023.<sup>20</sup>
62. A 2024 report<sup>21</sup> shows that while Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) has declined, the practice continues. Awareness of FGM/C remains low, particularly in the northern regions (69.6%). Among those aware of the practice, over 10% believe it is a religious obligation in Islam. In response to CEDAW’s recommendation, the government of Maldives claimed it was committed to legislative change,<sup>22</sup> yet no such reforms have been introduced.
63. In June 2021, Mohamed Iyaz, an Islamic cleric and assistant professor at the Maldives National University, publicly promoted an article claiming FGM/C had health benefits. Although his contract was terminated, he contested the decision at the Employment

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<sup>19</sup> Edition Maldives. 25.11.2020. *Gender Committee launches probe into Ruqya sexual abuse case.* <https://edition.mv/news/20572>

<sup>20</sup> PSM News. 15.6.2023. *PGO withdraws charges against Ali Waheed.* <https://psmnews.mv/en/122418>

<sup>21</sup> Orchid Project. July 2024. *Short report: FGC in the Maldives.* [https://www.fgmc.org/media/uploads/Country%20Research%20and%20Resources/Maldives/maldives\\_short\\_report\\_v1\\_\(july\\_2024\).pdf](https://www.fgmc.org/media/uploads/Country%20Research%20and%20Resources/Maldives/maldives_short_report_v1_(july_2024).pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Replies of Maldives to the list of issues and questions in relation to its sixth periodic report. Para 78 CEDAW/C/MDV/RQ/6. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n20/216/15/pdf/n2021615.pdf?OpenElement>

Tribunal, which ordered his reinstatement in August 2021<sup>23</sup>. Iyaz continues to teach at the Faculty of Shari'a and Law at the university.

### ***Recommendation***

64. Criminalise the practice of *Ruqya* in the Maldives; ensure victims can report abuses without fear of reprisals, intimidation, or community exclusion; investigate abuses committed under *Ruqya* and hold perpetrators accountable.
65. Conduct thorough investigations into all allegations of sexual assault and harassment involving current and former government officials, and pursue legal actions without political interference.
66. Amend the domestic criminal justice framework, particularly the Penal Code, to criminalise Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting.
67. Conduct sustained public awareness-raising campaigns targeting both men and women to eliminate patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes that perpetuate violence against women.

### **Migrant Workers**

68. During the third cycle of UPR, the Maldives failed to support at least seven recommendations urging ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The government asserted that the national legal framework sufficiently protects migrant workers' rights. However, the situation on the ground has worsened, with the government adopting an increasingly securitised approach to address supposedly "illegal" migration of workers.
69. Although over 70% of migrant workers enter the Maldives legally, many fall into undocumented "illegal" status due to employers confiscating identity documents and

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<sup>23</sup> Joint press statement. 8.8.2021. *Concerns about the decision of the Employment Tribunal in the case of Dr Iyaz Abdul Latheef*. <https://democracymaldives.org/?p=241>



violating contractual terms<sup>24</sup>. Migrant workers often face exploitative working conditions, akin to modern-day slavery, with limited legal recourse and severe restrictions on their rights to unionise, assemble, or seek protection.

70. In May 2024, the government launched “Operation Kurangi,” a three-year initiative to collect biometric data on all immigrants and deport undocumented migrants. The national immigration website (IMUGA) also introduced a citizen reporting feature, which led to over 1,300 submissions alleging the presence of undocumented migrants. By February 2025, President Muizzu reported the deportation of over 6,000 undocumented migrants. Public officials have routinely referred to these workers as “illegal labourers,” further dehumanising them. In February 2025, the government announced that all migrant workers lacking biometric registration would be deported beginning in April.
71. On July 25 2024, the Minister of Homeland Security and Technology announced that a group of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Gaafu Dhaalu Thinadhoo would be deported following their peaceful protest in solidarity with student-led protests in Bangladesh.
72. There has been no effort to hold employers accountable for creating an undocumented status among migrant workers. Without structural measures to end modern-day slavery, address xenophobia, and discrimination against migrant workers, the systems established under “Operation Kurangi” risk exacerbating their abuse.

### ***Recommendations***

73. Ratify, without delay, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
74. Establish a comprehensive action plan to investigate and prosecute employers responsible for confiscating documents, withholding wages, subjecting workers to forced labour, or otherwise creating exploitative conditions.

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<sup>24</sup> Public Interest Litigation Center. June 2024. *From vulnerability to exploitation: Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Maldives*. <https://www.pilcmv.org/researchpaper>

75. Urgently review and align the domestic legal framework with international human rights standards to ensure the rights of migrant workers, including their rights to peaceful assembly, association, expression, and legal remedy.
76. Publicly condemn all instances of xenophobia, discrimination, and incitement to hatred or violence against migrant workers and ensure accountability for all such acts.

### **Accountability for Past Injustices**

77. The Maldives began efforts towards addressing historical injustices by passing the Transitional Justice Act (Law number 28/2020), which established a time-bound Office of the Ombudsman on Transitional Justice (OTJ). The OTJ was mandated for a period of nearly three years (December 2020–November 2023) and empowered to refer cases to criminal or civil authorities. The law stipulated that courts would have ultimate jurisdiction over referred cases.
78. However, the OTJ's timeframe (December 2020 - November 2023) was wholly inadequate given the expansive scope of its mandate, concerning violations committed between 1 January 1953 to 17 November 2018. This left little room for meaningful redress for survivor communities. Two years after its establishment, the OTJ had concluded only 111 cases—just one involving torture, 23 involving arbitrary arrest, and the remainder related to economic rights.<sup>25</sup>
79. Outreach by the MDN to encourage survivors to seek justice through the OTJ revealed that many torture survivors were unaware of the Transitional Justice Act, the OTJ, or their eligibility to seek redress. Others expressed reluctance to revisit their trauma due a lack of confidence in the OTJ to conduct fair investigations and limited faith in getting justice.
80. The OTJ failed to take adequate steps to increase public awareness or build confidence in the process. As a result, large groups of survivors—including victims of torture, land

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<sup>25</sup> Avas Online. 26.10.2022. *Ombudsperson's office concludes investigation of over 100 cases.*  
<https://avas.mv/en/123975>

grabbing, politically motivated dismissals, and other systemic violations—remain unacknowledged and unaddressed.

81. In parallel to the OTJ, the Solih government also established the Commission on Deaths and Disappearances (DDCom) under the Presidential Commissions Act to investigate unresolved cases of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and politically motivated murders. Of the 27 cases under its mandate, none were resolved. The DDCom was formally dissolved in May 2024 by the incoming administration of President Mohamed Muizzu, amid growing public dissatisfaction with its inaction.

### ***Recommendations***

82. Re-establish transitional justice mechanisms with adequate timeframes, financial and human resources, and independence to meaningfully investigate past injustices. Ensure survivor-centered processes, widespread public awareness, and access to psychosocial support for victims and survivors.
83. Disclose completed findings from the Office of the Ombudsman on Transitional Justice in a manner that protects survivors' dignity and privacy. Renew efforts to raise awareness of the long-term effects of authoritarianism and cycles of political persecution.
84. Publish the findings of the Commission on Deaths and Disappearances (DDCom), ensuring the safety and anonymity of witnesses are preserved.

### **National Human Rights Institution: violations of the Paris Principles**

85. During the third cycle of UPR, the Maldives supported five recommendations and noted one related to strengthening the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM). The government stated its commitment to strengthening the Commission's independence and functions, but claimed full alignment with the Paris Principles was not feasible due to constitutional and legal provisions, specifically, Section 6(a) of the HRCM Act, which requires all members of the Commission to be Muslim. This religious criterion violates the Paris Principles and has not been challenged by the HRCM at any level—either in Parliament or in the courts.

86. The HRCM has remained largely silent on critical events concerning the violation of human rights in the Maldives, which has contributed to the erosion of the rule of law, completely backsliding to autocratic practices of the pre-2008 Constitution.
87. Direct interactions with the HRCM also reveal troubling institutional practices. Investigations into rights violations are often conducted without input from victims or their families, who are not informed of the findings upon conclusion. This lack of transparency undermines the Commission's credibility and its ability to serve as an effective human rights oversight body.

### ***Recommendations***

88. Remove the legal requirement that restricts Commission membership to Muslims and establish an inclusive, independent appointment process in line with the Paris Principles.
  89. Allocate adequate, sustained human and financial resources to the HRCM to allow it to fulfil its mandate effectively and independently.
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