

Transparency Maldives calls on the State to deliver on their constitutional duty to uphold and protect civil and political liberties

PRESS RELEASE - March 29, 2016

Transparency Maldives (TM) calls on parliamentarians, political parties, civil society actors including media, and citizens to stand up to protect civil and political liberties guaranteed under Chapter 2 of the Constitution.

TM is deeply concerned by the recent bill submitted by the ruling party to criminalise defamation and expressions contrary to national interest or tenets of Islam. The bill criminalises defamatory comments, anti-Islamic rhetoric and comments threatening national security. Anyone convicted under the law faces an initial punishment of a fine ranging from MVR 50,000 (USD 3, 262/-) to MVR 5 million (USD 324,000/-). Should a convict fail to pay the fine, he/she would be sentenced to a year in prison.

The criminal defamation bill is yet another attempt to stifle freedom of expression and dissenting voice in the Maldives. The law would be an addition to the list of anti-democratic laws and regulations passed over the past year to repress criticism and mark a dramatic deterioration on an already poor human rights record.

We also note with concern that this proposed law comes at a time when a massive grand corruption case amounting to MVR 1.22 billion is being investigated with widespread allegations of involvement of high-level public officials. Restrictions on freedom of expression also infringes on freedom of information and freedom of speech, making exposing corruption and holding corrupt officials to account impossible when individuals, particularly civil society actors and journalists, can be prosecuted for dissent.

We call on the parliament, judiciary, the executive and the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives to deliver on their constitutional duty to protect civil and political liberties of Maldivians and to facilitate an environment where citizens can hold those that govern them accountable without fear of persecution.

ENDS

For all media queries, please contact Program Manager, Thoriq Hamid (00 960 7999268).