

Press Statement
16 October 2016, New Delhi

Maldives decision aimed at stifling democracy

A group of Human Rights organizations and activists from South Asia, expressing disappointment at the decision of the Maldives to leave the Commonwealth, says this could lead to greater authoritarianism in the island nation.

The following is the text of the statement:

We, the undersigned, regard the decision of the Maldives government to leave the Commonwealth as a smokescreen to prevent further scrutiny and censure and deter the possibility of suspension.

By opting out of the Commonwealth, which the Maldives joined voluntarily in 1982, it has demonstrated its determination to stifle democracy and rule through authoritarianism.

The decision follows the meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) on 23rd September 2016 that placed Maldives on its formal agenda and called for “substantive progress” across specific priority areas, failing which it warned of its suspension from the Councils of the Commonwealth by March 2017.

The warning followed a long period of patience with the Maldives government’s continued resistance to take visible steps to repair its democratic credentials. Male’s assertion that that this “penalizes” the Maldives stands in stark contrast to CMAG’s largely conciliatory approach. Despite compelling evidence of the continued curbs on fundamental rights and persecution of Opposition leaders, CMAG allowed the Maldives six more months, and again offered technical assistance.

Our view is that the Maldivian Government’s defence of 94 laws that “directly relate to the core values set out in the Commonwealth Charter” misrepresents the facts. In reality, several of these laws limit and violate fundamental rights including the freedom of expression, assembly and core fair trial rights. In the worst cases, constitutional rights have been withdrawn altogether.

Key democratic institutions have been systematically undermined. Swift convictions of several Opposition leaders through deeply flawed trials point to a politicized judiciary. The Parliament, dominated by the ruling Progressive Party of the Maldives, has been reduced to a rubber stamp. The space for dissent and informed political debate has been curtailed through legal and administrative measures. Politicized appointments and systemic attacks on their autonomy have crippled independent bodies.

We are deeply disappointed that the government has chosen to reject the Commonwealth’s technical assistance centered on strengthening democratic institutions and promoting political inclusivity. Walking away from the

Commonwealth indicates a refusal to hold to its core standards and poses a serious danger that the Maldivian people may now face greater authoritarianism and impunity.

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)

Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR)

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