



# Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

New Delhi, India. London, UK. Accra, Ghana

## PRESS STATEMENT

### CHRI's Response to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group Statement of 20<sup>th</sup> April 2016 on the Maldives

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) welcomes the continued scrutiny of the deteriorating situation in the Maldives by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which serves as a watchdog group for Commonwealth countries.

However, CHRI must point out that no measurable improvements have taken place on ground in the Maldives since CMAG's February 24<sup>th</sup> call for reforms in the country.

Democracy in the Maldives continues to suffer.

The judiciary remains co-opted, the rule of law fractured and freedom of press and expression severely curtailed.

Since February 24<sup>th</sup> when the country was placed on the formal agenda of CMAG, a measure that sent out a warning to the Maldives of strong action from the Commonwealth if it did not adhere to the values of the Commonwealth Charter, the Maldivian government has shown little regard for the six-point reform plan laid out by CMAG.

Instead of initiating a political dialogue with opposition representatives, Vice-President Mohammed Shifaz of the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party was arrested two days before the first All Party talks on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. Only members of the ruling coalition attended the talks, which were meant to include all political parties.

In April, 16 newspaper and television journalists were arrested (and some beaten) while protesting, among other things, the introduction in the Maldivian parliament of a broad-ranging Defamation Bill, which would severely restrict the freedom of press and expression.

Since February 24<sup>th</sup>, in spite of CMAG's call to the Maldivian government to prevent misuse of the Anti-Terrorism Act, three more public officials have been arrested under the law -former Prosecutor General Muhtaz Muhsin and Judge Ahmed Nihan were arrested on 8<sup>th</sup> March, and former Vice President Ahmed Adeeb on 17<sup>th</sup> March.

*"The reality on the ground is that human rights, the rule of law and democracy remain under grave threat in the Maldives. The Maldivian government has made no progress on the priority areas first identified by CMAG in its statement of 24<sup>th</sup> February, and in fact the situation has*

*deteriorated since. Heightened pressure must be placed on the Maldives to retrace its steps quickly from its present headlong rush into authoritarianism,”* said the Director of CHRI, Mrs. Maja Daruwala.

The Maldives must accept that it is now on the formal agenda of CMAG. The Maldivian government needs to acknowledge the gravity of the Commonwealth’s concern about the continued deterioration of democratic values in the country, which can lead to its suspension or expulsion from the association.

Also, while CHRI applauds the Secretary-General’s decision to appoint a high-level Special Envoy to the Maldives ahead of the 2018 elections, we urge that the Special Envoy be appointed and sent to the Maldives without further delay.