



**JOINT PRESS STATEMENT ON THE ARBITRARY SEIZURE OF DONOR FUNDS
FROM THE MALDIVIAN DEMOCRACY NETWORK**

Re: The request made to the People's Majlis (Parliament), to investigate and take adequate action against the freezing of accounts and unauthorised seizure of MVR 866,620.35 (US\$ 56,201.06) from the State Bank of India accounts held by Maldivian Democracy Network in the Maldives.

03rd June 2020

The undersigned organisations have jointly submitted a petition to the People's Majlis Human Rights and Gender Committee on 31 May 2019 regarding the freezing of accounts and unauthorised seizure of funds belonging to the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), a human rights organisation registered from June 2006 until its arbitrary closure by the government of Maldives in December 2019. The shutdown of MDN was enforced while the organisation was awaiting a response to clarifications made after receiving a baseless and unlawful order to terminate its operations on 5 November 2019.

While we condemn the arbitrary de-registration of MDN, which took place without due process, we are appalled to learn that the State Bank of India in Malé and the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Engagement have frozen the bank accounts of MDN, whereby obstructing the human rights group from returning unused donor funds and paying wages for its employees.

We further condemn the unauthorised seizure of all of MDN's funds deposited at the State Bank of India and the refusal by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Engagement to clarify the basis of these actions.

We remind the People's Majlis that the actions detailed above amount to a violation of the right to due process and fair administrative action and redress and call on the Majlis to uphold fundamental rights of Maldivian citizens and civic groups.

The dissolution of MDN was unprecedented in the country and in the Maldivian civil society landscape. We urge that the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Engagement explain their conduct to the People's Majlis. It is a dangerous precedent for other civil society groups in the country if left unaccounted for.



Our organisations await a positive response to our letter to the People's Majlis Human Rights and Gender Committee and hope that the People's Majlis will examine the matter within the ambits of Maldivian laws and in consideration of the international legal obligations of the Maldives.

Signed by:

The Asian Forum on Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a membership-based organisation with 81 members in 21 countries across Asia, headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand, with offices in Kathmandu and Geneva. Since 1991, the organisation has been actively working to promote human rights and the right to development in the South and Southeast Asian region. MDN has been a member of FORUM-ASIA since January 2015.

CIVICUS is a global alliance dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world with 8,500 members in more than 175 countries. Based out of Johannesburg, CIVICUS has offices in New York and Geneva.

The **International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)**, is a non-partisan, non-sectarian, international non-governmental human rights organisation that federates 197 organisations from 117 countries. Founded in 1922 in Paris, FIDH is the world's oldest human rights organisation. MDN has been a member of FIDH since 2019.

The **Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)** is an independent non-governmental human rights organisation with specialisation in Access to information, Contemporary Forms of Slavery and Human Trafficking as well as Access to Justice. Founded in 1987, CHRI is headquartered in New Delhi, with offices in the UK and Ghana. It has been a partner of MDN and has provided technical assistance in Right to Information in the Maldives and on police and prison reforms.

The **Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)** is a non-partisan civil society organisation based in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland, operating under the Swiss civil code. MDN, registered in the Maldives from 2006 until December 2019, was one of the longest-running human rights groups in the country until the Government of Maldives forcefully shut down the organisation.