

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

46th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Item 6: Universal Periodic Review - Outcome Adoption of Maldives

Oral statement delivered by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)

Monday, 15 March 2021

Thank you, Madame President.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) commends the Government of the Republic of Maldives for supporting 187 recommendations fully and five partially. We welcome the efforts for strengthening legislative and institutional framework as well as renewed cooperation with international mechanisms.

While we recognise the steps taken towards reforming the democratic and civic space in the last two years, we note that the legal framework continues to impede fundamental freedoms. Despite accepting recommendations to create a safe and enabling environment for civil society, in December 2019, the Government arbitrarily dissolved the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) on allegations of blasphemy. Its members have faced continuous harassment, intimidation and threats on social media, especially from extremist groups.

In June 2020, the social media campaign to ban *Uthema*, a prominent women's rights organisation, for being anti-Islam, raised similar concerns over the lack of timely and effective action by authorities.

While we welcome the decision to overhaul the law on associations, accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED), and other domestic efforts, we call on the Government to decriminalise blasphemy and apostasy in line with international standards, guarantee civic freedoms, and protect human rights defenders.

We acknowledge the focus on formulating a bill on Police Accountability and Democratic Policing.

Similarly, while creation of Prison Reform Monitoring Committee is a positive step, we call on the Government to allocate adequate resources to bring conditions of detention and prison management in line with the Nelson Mandela Rules.

Lastly, we appreciate the anti-trafficking efforts, especially training of first responders, victim assistance and the first amendment to the Anti-Trafficking Act ratified in March 2020. We urge the Government to continue to raise awareness among vulnerable groups, extend protection to foreign victims and survivors, expedite all requisite amendments to bring its law in conformity with the Palermo Protocol and ensure improved implementation of the Standard Operating Procedure for early victim identification and referral.

Thank you.