



Press Statement

2nd January 2011

We oppose the decision by the People's Majlis to increase the salaries, allowances and benefits given to high ranking state officials, at a time when the State faces a large budget deficit, average citizens face pay cuts and the threat of job losses, and the State is reducing its expenditure on public services. We oppose not only the increase in benefits and allowances for Majlis members, but also the increase in salary and benefits for ministers, judges and senior officials of independent institutions.

While Article 102 of the Constitution grants the People's Majlis the power to set the salary structure of the State and to decide on the salary, allowances and privileges given to members of the People's Majlis, this power must be used responsibly. We do not believe that increasing the salary and benefits given to high ranking State officials at a time when the State faces a large budget deficit is a responsible decision.

We note that the bill on parliamentary privileges has been passed in a manner that will further increase State expenses. The bill also grants members of the People's Majlis certain privileges in criminal matters. We note that these privileges are of a nature that are not granted to parliamentarians in other open democratic societies, and are not even granted to the President under the Maldivian legal system. We further note that the People's Majlis is yet to use its powers under 2 (a) of Article 88 of the Constitution to pass a procedure by which the salaries and benefits given to members of the People's Majlis can be deducted.

We accept that given the duties and responsibilities of high ranking State officials, a difference in salaries and benefits, when compared to average citizens, is necessary and inevitable. However, it is unacceptable that this gap be widened by increasing the salaries and benefits given to high ranking State officials at a time when the average citizen faces financial difficulties. It is only fair and just that the burden of economic hardship be shared equally among all citizens.

While social security is a basic right, it should be provided through a fair, equitable and transparent system. This security or assistance should not be provided from the private income of the members of the People's Majlis. We remind both the members of the People's Majlis and the citizens, that providing such assistance from the private income of members of the People's Majlis causes dependency and undermines the democratic system. We therefore strongly reject the argument that the salaries and

benefits given to members of the People's Majlis need to be increased as the members must provide welfare services to constituents. Such a practice would also be against the spirit of the law.

We note that the People's Majlis has passed many important bills and completed several important tasks during its last session. While we thank the members of the People's Majlis for their service, we call upon the People's Majlis to consider the issues noted above and accordingly amend the salary structure of the State and the bill on parliamentary privileges.

Ends

Note: This is a joint press statement by Democracy House and the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)