

Press Statement

3rd February 2011

The Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) has been conducting an election violence monitoring initiative for the first ever local councils election to be held in the Maldives. The aim of this UNDP funded initiative is to systematically record instances of elections related violence, understand the causes of the violence and propose measures to mitigate further election related violence. MDN's Human Rights Defenders have been monitoring election related violence in 8 atolls since 15th January 2011. These 8 atolls are Haa Alif, Haa Dhaal, Raa, Faafu, Laamu, Gaaf Alif and Gaaf Dhaal. MDN has also been conducting limited media monitoring and gathering reports through the Elections Commission and Maldives Police Service. Post-election monitoring will continue for a period of 2 weeks after the election date.

MDN has received a concerning number of reports of elections related violence in the 3 week pre-election period. These include reports of fights between opposing groups, threats, obstructing campaign activities, damage to property and infringements on women's political rights. Such incidents are unacceptable in a democratic society and MDN condemns in the strongest possible terms all those responsible for these actions and those who have supported such actions. We remind all those concerned that the freedom to campaign and to participate in political activities without fear is a fundamental human right.

It is MDN's most fervent hope that the elections on 5th February 2011 will be held in a peaceful, free and fair manner in which everyone can exercise their constitutional right to vote, free from fear and intimidation. This can only be achieved with the sincere support and cooperation of all those involved. As such:

MDN calls upon all candidates, political parties and their supporters to conduct themselves in a peaceful manner. If a grievance or matter of concern should arise during the course of the elections, it should be dealt with through the legally established complaints mechanisms and procedures. No individual or party should attempt to address grievances or concerns through any extra-legal means. MDN calls upon all parties and individuals to refrain from any actions or language which may provoke or facilitate violence or any other election related crimes. Senior party officials and candidates have a special responsibility to take all possible measures to ensure a smooth and peaceful election process.

Open and transparent procedures are one of the pillars on which the public's trust for the elections process is built. Public trust for the electoral process in turn is one of the most important factors which helps ensure a peaceful and smooth election. MDN calls upon the Elections Commission (EC) and all electoral officials to consider the importance of transparency in a peaceful election process and to ensure that all elections related activities are carried out in the most open and transparent manner possible. MDN also calls upon the Elections Commission to give appropriate attention to all complaints received by the Commission, and deal with them in a just and timely manner. MDN highlights the importance of communicating the reasoning behind all complaints related decisions to all those involved. It is of the utmost importance that the EC and its officials conduct themselves transparently and in a communicative manner, in order to ensure a peaceful election.

MDN calls upon the Maldives Police Service (MPS) to investigate elections related criminal offences and notes that a lack of action on serious elections related offences might contribute to a culture of impunity in such cases. MDN further calls upon the MPS to do its utmost to ensure a peaceful, free and fair election by making all necessary security arrangements.

The local councils elections to be held on the 5th of February 2011 is an important step towards empowering the people of the Maldives. MDN calls upon all Maldivians to participate in the elections and vote for the most capable and deserving candidate, taking into consideration the powers and responsibilities associated with the office. We further call upon Maldivians to refrain from selling their vote and to give their full cooperation to all those working towards a peaceful, free and fair election.

MDN would like to thank all those working towards a peaceful, free and fair election, including the Elections Commission and the Maldives Police Service, for their efforts to date and the work that they continue to do.

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