

For Immediate Release**Maldives: Release Former President Nasheed and All Detained Protestors
Recent Arrests Violate Fundamental Human Rights and Rule of Law**

(Male'/Bangkok, 24 February 2015) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) deplored the arrest and charges against opposition party leader and former President of Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed, as well as the detention of fourteen other protestors criticising Nasheed's arrest. The two human rights groups called on the government of Maldives to release Nasheed and all detained protestors, and further ensure that any case against Nasheed is pursued in full adherence with criminal law and constitutional provisions as well as international human rights norms.

On 22 February 2015 Nasheed was arrested and charged under anti-terrorism laws. Earlier last week, the Prosecutor General's office withdrew previous charges of abuse of power against Nasheed, pressing now charges under the tougher provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. During the detention and transportation to the Court, Nasheed and his supporters were manhandled by the police.

"The State authorities' repeated failure to adhere to procedures prescribed under the criminal and constitutional provisions in the arrest and charges against Nasheed is of great concern," said Shahindha Ismail, Executive Director of MDN. *"In particular, the authorities have failed to issue summons in Nasheed's latest arrest and have denied him the Constitutional right to legal representation during hearings that all citizens of Maldives are entitled to. The arrest was also made at the request of the Prosecutor General, which is beyond the mandate of his office and without adequate information being provided as required under Article 51 of the Constitution,"* she noted.

Following Nasheed's arrest, another fourteen persons were themselves arrested for protesting against his detention. The police also used pepper spray and brute force in dispersing crowds. FORUM-ASIA and MDN pointed out that the environment for human rights and rule of law and the independence of the judiciary in the Maldives have been on a serious backslide over the last three years and that this latest episode has heightened concerns of further deterioration of the situation in the country.

"The right to freedom of assembly in the Maldives has come under severe attack over the last few years and serious concerns have been raised about the restrictive provisions of the Freedom of Peaceful Assembly Act and the arbitrary use of force by the security forces," said Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA. *"We call for the immediate and unconditional release of Nasheed and all protestors detained,"* stressed Balais-Serrano, while urging the government to refrain from making further arbitrary arrests or violating the fundamental rights of its citizens.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 47 member organizations in 16 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta and Geneva. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

About MDN:

Maldivian Democracy Network is a non-governmental, non-profit organization based in Male', Maldives. MDN focuses on the protection and promotion of human rights, especially civil and political rights, human rights defenders and engagement of the general public in ensuring respect for democratic principles in the

country. MDN is a member organization of the Forum-Asia and work in close partnership with other regional and international human rights organizations.

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