

Maldives: FORUM-ASIA condemns killing of blogger Yameen Rasheed, calls for a credible, independent investigation

(Bangkok, 24 April 2017) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is deeply shocked by the brutal murder of Yameen Rasheed, a prominent blogger and human rights defender from the Maldives. The Government and law enforcement authorities of the Maldives must conduct a swift, credible and independent investigation into this murder and hold perpetrators to account.

‘Yameen Rasheed’s murder puts the Maldives in the league of the most unsafe countries for human rights defenders and freedom of expression in Asia,’ says John Samuel, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA, *‘Yameen Rasheed was a known critic of the Government and its role in corruption and human rights violations. Any failure on the part of the Government to follow due process in investigating and establishing accountability will raise serious suspicions of state complicity in his murder.’*

Yameen Rasheed, 29, was stabbed to death in the early hours of Sunday. His wounded body was reportedly discovered with multiple stab wounds near the staircase of his residence around 3 am Sunday morning. According to local media reports, he was taken to a hospital at about 3.15 am, and was pronounced dead at about 3.50 am.

Yameen Rasheed was one of the most well-known bloggers and social media commentators in the Maldives. He had been a vocal critic of militant Islamic extremism, and pervasive injustice, human rights abuses and Government corruption in the Maldives. He was the leading advocate of justice for his close friend and disappeared journalist, Ahmad Rilwan Abdulla, who has been missing for almost 1000 days.

He had received numerous death threats as a result of his writing, which had been reported repeatedly to the Maldives Police Services. According to his social media posts, he received no response from the police.

‘The failure of Maldivian authorities to protect this relentless advocate of free speech and human rights is a matter of grave concern. The Government and police have routinely ignored constant threats against Yameen Rasheed, and several other human rights defenders, writers and journalists who it has an obligation to protect,’ adds John Samuel.

The Maldives Police Service is facing harsh criticism and lack of public confidence over its failure to properly investigate several attacks on journalists, writers, human rights defenders and social media activists, including Ahmad Rilwan Abdulla.

Given this concerning track record it is imperative for the international community to closely monitor the investigation of Yameen Rasheed’s murder. FORUM-ASIA calls on the Government to engage closely with UN human rights mechanisms, including Special Procedure mandate holders, as well as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in investigating this murder. The Government should also provide full and unimpeded access to international experts and observers, who wish to monitor the progress of such investigations.

'Yameen Rasheed's murder is a wakeup call to the international community on the deteriorating situation in the Maldives. Adequate international scrutiny is needed to ensure that the Maldives does not see more victims, such as Yameen Rasheed and his friend, Ahmad Rilwan,' closes John Samuel.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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