
**Trial Observation of Individuals Charged for the Abduction of Maldivian Journalist
Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla**

20 September 2017

Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, journalist, blogger and human rights defender, was disappeared on 8 August 2014. The Maldives Police Service established in 2016 that Abdulla was abducted. Three men have been charged with terrorism for the abduction.

According to a press briefing by the police in August 2017 the investigation on what happened to Abdulla is ongoing at the newly created Major Crime Management Centre at the Maldives Police Service.

The information revealed by the police 18 months after the disappearance repeated information contained in a [report](#) of findings of a private investigation, published six weeks after the disappearance.

Terrorism charges

On 20 August 2017 the Prosecutor General's Office filed a case of terrorism against Muhammad Suwaid (S. Hulhudhoo / Athiri-aage), Ahmed Aalif Rauf (Male' / M. Hilton) and Muhammad Nooradeen (G.Dh. Vaadhoo / Karankaage) for the abduction of Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla.

Trial

Preliminary hearing

The Criminal Court conducted the preliminary hearing on 20 September 2017. The media and members of the public were allowed to observe the hearing.

The hearing was scheduled to begin at 13:30 hours, however media and other observers were asked to wait until the hearing began at around 14:30 hours.

It must be noted that neither of the accused are in State custody, despite the fact that these

individuals are accused of an abduction, and it is unclear why the third person facing the same charges was not present in court. The Article 49 of the Constitution states that a person can be held in remand custody for any of the following reasons:

1. Destruction of evidence;
2. Influencing witness(es);
3. Failure to appear in court;
4. Fleeing;
5. Menace to society.

The hearing was presided by Chief Judge of the Criminal Court, Judge Adam Arif. Two of the defendants, Ahmed Aalif Rauf and Muhammad Nooradeen were present at the hearing.

The judge began the hearing by explaining to the defendants that they had the right to proceed with the trial with or without legal representation, to which both defendants requested time to acquire legal assistance. The judge granted both defendants 10 days within which to inform the court of legal representation and also informed the defendants that failure to do so will result in the court assuming that the defendants did not require legal representation, therefore continuing the trial without defense lawyers. The longest duration allowed in the Criminal Procedure Code for acquisition of legal representation is 10 days.

The judge informed the prosecution that upon efforts by the Criminal Court to summon the third accused, Muhammad Suwaid, to court, the family of Suwaid had informed the court that the individual was deceased. The judge enquired from prosecution whether the prosecution did not ascertain this information when processing the terrorism charges. The prosecution responded by saying that the prosecution had requested the Maldives Police Service to find Muhammad Suwaid and was told that the police were unable to locate Suwaid.

The judge informed the prosecution that the court would enquire with the Department of Immigration and Emigration regarding Muhammad Suwaid in order to continue the trial. The prosecution did not comment on whether they were going to establish the claim by Suwaid's family that Suwaid was deceased.

The judge enquired from the prosecution whether they had anything to note, and having none, adjourned the hearing. A date for the next hearing was not announced by the court.

ENDS.