

The Maldives: Justice for Yameen Rasheed necessary to ensuring rights and freedoms in the Maldives

(Kathmandu/Bangkok, 25 April 2019) – Tuesday, 23 April 2019, marked two years since prominent human rights defender and writer, Yameen Rasheed, was brutally murdered in the Maldives. Two years on, no one has been held accountable for his killing. The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) remains deeply concerned by the continued impunity for his murder, and calls on the Maldives to bring his killers and all involved in his murder to justice through a transparent and credible investigation and trial.

Yameen Rasheed, a prolific writer and a vocal critic of religious extremism and intolerance as well as a relentless defender of human rights and justice, was stabbed to death on 23 April 2017 in the stairwell of his residence in Malé. He was the leading campaigner for justice for his close friend and journalist, Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, who has been missing since August 2014.

Although in September 2017, six individuals were charged with Yameen Rasheed's murder, and another with aiding and abetting, since then there has been no marked progress towards justice and accountability. Investigations that led to their indictment lacked transparency and credibility. Similarly, lack of transparency in the judicial processes that followed dampened any hope for justice. In addition, human rights defenders including his family, friends and civil society organisations campaigning for justice for Yameen Rasheed have been met with contempt and harassment by Maldivian authorities.

The appointment of a Presidential Commission to independently investigate unresolved murders and disappearances, including the murder of Yameen Rasheed and the disappearance of Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, by the new Government has, however, renewed hope for justice for Yameen Rasheed. The Government, led by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, came to office pledging to ensure justice and accountability for those who were murdered or disappeared, including Yameen Rasheed, and Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla.

The Presidential Commission, appointed in November 2018, has reportedly identified those responsible for Yameen Rasheed's murder and uncovered their motives.¹ However, the Parliament's repeated obstruction of attempts to grant the commission necessary investigative powers in accordance with the Criminal Procedure Code remains a key obstacle to justice and accountability.

The Government of the Maldives must step up and expedite its efforts to ensure justice and accountability for Yameen Rasheed, as well as the disappearance of Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla. The overwhelming victory of the ruling-Maldivian Democratic Party in this month's Parliamentary Elections

¹ <https://edition.mv/news/10260>

should remove all obstacles within Parliament to fulfil the Government's pledge to hold everyone involved in Yameen Rasheed's murder to account.

Yameen Rasheed's murder follows systematic failure by the Maldivian authorities, in particular, the Maldives Police Service to act on the repeated reports of death threats. His murder is emblematic of the pervasive threats against human rights defenders, writers, journalists, and minorities in the Maldives from state and non-state actors, including Islamic radicals and criminal gangs. .

Sustainable protection and promotion of human rights in the Maldives, in accordance with the Constitution and its international obligations depend on holding all responsible to account through independent and transparent investigations and credible judicial processes. The prolonged impunity for the murder of Yameen Rasheed further emboldens the perpetrators and remains a grave reminder of the consistent failures to uphold human rights, justice and the rule of law in the Maldives.

FORUM-ASIA reiterates its calls on the Government of the Maldives to take all necessary steps to ensure justice for Yameen Rasheed, including by empowering the Presidential Commissions to immediately and effectively investigate his murder. Two years of inaction is too much.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 67 member organisations in 21 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 democratization.

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