

## **Press Release**

25 November 2019

### Regarding the calls within State institutions to ban Jamiyya Salaf

We are deeply concerned over the recent discussions at the People's Majlis and by Members of Parliament, regarding the banning of yet another non-governmental organisation (NGO), after the government unlawfully banned the Maldivian Democracy Network on 5 November 2019.

We remind the Government of Maldives that the Article 30 of the Maldivian Constitution grants the freedom to form and run political parties, associations, and civil society organisations, and that the State has acceded to the Article 22 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights without any reservations.

The allegations against Jamiyya Salaf, and individuals associated with the NGO of engaging in terrorist activities is a serious issue. Our 2015 report, 'Preliminary Assessment of Radicalisation in the Maldives' highlighted the connections Jamiyya Salaf has to increasing violent narratives. Although this information has been reported, the inaction over the past several years has worsened the situation. We call on the Maldivian authorities to investigate these allegations and take legal action in due course.

Nevertheless, we strongly condemn banning of civil society organisations as a first step following allegations against an organisation, without affording the right of reply or procedural propriety in line with democratic principles. The existing legal framework on civil society organisations is highly problematic and undemocratic. Maldivian NGOs have repeatedly been raising this issue over the past years. Introducing necessary amendments to the legal framework of associations was pledged by the Solih administration. However, giving the portfolio of civil society organisations to individuals who are unqualified and unable to comprehend the role and independence of NGOs, clearly demonstrate the extent to which the government has failed in creating an enabling environment for civil society actors.

We call on the People's Majlis to hold the Registrar of Associations and the Minister of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment to account for failing to make necessary amendments to the legal framework and for taking unlawful and disproportionate action against civil society organisations.

We call on the Government of Maldives and the State to stop obstructing the legitimate work of civil society, to enable the civil society to continue beneficial work and to engage with civil society to correct themselves if and when a mistake is made.

ENDS.