



**46th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council  
Item 2: Adoption of the Universal Periodic Review Outcomes of Maldives**

**Oral Statement Delivered by Ahmed Adam  
On behalf of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**

**Tuesday, 16 March 2021**

Madam President,

FORUM-ASIA welcomes the recent positive steps by the government to protect human rights in the Maldives including the adoption of the Transitional Justice Act and the decision to ratify the convention on enforced disappearances.

These steps will, however, remain wholly inadequate without justice and accountability for the murders of human rights defender Yameen Rasheed and moderate religious scholar Afrasheem Ali and the disappearance of journalist Ahmed Rilwan. Lack of accountability in these cases illustrates the persistent impunity for attacks on human rights defenders and journalists. We call on the government to expedite the investigations into these cases in a transparent and credible manner.

We welcome that the Maldives has accepted several key recommendations to protect the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as human rights defenders.

The exercise of these rights remains under threat without protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief and prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity as recommended by several states.

Human rights defenders, civil society and social media users regularly face threats from extremist groups. Human rights advocacy including calls to end discrimination and violence against women and children, as well as legitimate criticism of violent extremism is often construed as blasphemy or contradictory to religion. Instead of protecting those under threat, the government has legitimized such extremist narratives for political expediency.

The arbitrary dissolution of the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) under pressure from extremist groups is emblematic of the threats to fundamental freedoms in the Maldives. Despite claims in response to UPR recommendations that MDN has recourse through judicial proceedings, the government has asserted in court that it has no obligation to respond to complaints over the lack of due process in the dissolution of MDN, in complete disregard for its human rights obligations and the rule of law. We call on the Maldivian authorities including the parliament to conduct a transparent and public investigation into the arbitrary ban of MDN in line with international standards and UPR recommendations.

Thank you.