



The Maldives: Maldives continues to fail to deliver justice for slain blogger Yameen Rasheed

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 23 April 2021) – The Maldivian authorities must bring the killers of blogger and human rights defender Yameen Rasheed, found dead in his home four years ago today, to justice.

‘Yameen Rasheed was 29 years old when he was murdered four years ago today. Despite election pledges by the current government to bring his perpetrators to justice, it has failed to deliver,’ the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and its member Maldivian Democracy Network said in a statement today.

Yameen Rasheed was stabbed to death in the early hours on 23 April 2017, in a brutal attack that shook the nation. His body was found at the entrance to his home, with over 30 stab wounds and a slit throat. He was the leading campaigner for justice for his close friend and journalist, Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, who was forcibly disappeared in August 2014.

The current government, which took office in November 2018, established a Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances to investigate suspicious deaths and disappearances, including the murder of Yameen Rasheed. The Commission, which was subsequently empowered by law in June 2019, assured the public that all 27 cases falling under the mandate of the Commission would complete the investigation within two years. To date, there have been no convictions.

One of the main election pledges of the current government was to seek justice for Yameen Rasheed and Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla. This narrative was successfully instrumentalised by the ruling party in almost all campaign speeches during both the 2018 presidential election and the 2019 parliamentary election.

‘Almost three years later, the government’s election promises and pledges have proven to be empty. The government, the parliament and other state institutions have not only failed to bring Yameen Rasheed’s murderers to justice, but appear to be attempting to hinder investigations and undermine accountability,’ the organisations said.

FAILED COMMISSION MARRED BY DELAYS

The five-member Presidential Commission has been severely impaired since 2019 following the resignation of two of its members, including the chairperson of the Commission, and the government’s failure to appoint replacements. In 2019, the former Prosecutor General instructed the Commission to halt the investigation into Yameen Rasheed’s murder, citing interference with an [ongoing criminal court trial](#).

In July 2017, six individuals were charged with Yameen Rasheed’s murder while a seventh was charged with aiding and abetting. The first six hearings of the trial that began in September 2017 were held behind closed doors on the pretence of national security concerns. Subsequent hearings were marred by delays and repeated cancellations – 14 out of the total 36 hearings scheduled in the trial so far were cancelled, often without clear explanation. In the course of the trial, several witnesses for the

prosecution withdrew their statements or refused to testify citing threats and intimidation. Some witnesses have also alleged torture in detention.

To date, the Commission has remained silent about the progress in its investigation, and no updates have been shared with Yameen Rasheed's family.

STATE COMPLICITY AND LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

While it is evident that the previous government influenced the investigation to protect perpetrators, the same worrying trend of impunity for attacks on human rights defenders continues under the current administration. The family of Yameen Rasheed has repeatedly raised concerns about police negligence and prosecutorial failures during the investigation and the trial hearings. The refusal of the police and the Prosecutor General to investigate and respond to these complaints demonstrates the lack of will by the government and state entities to hold perpetrators of Yameen Rasheed's murder to account.

Similar failures continue to perpetuate impunity for the disappearance of Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla. The Maldivian police has refused to investigate two of their intelligence officers who intercepted Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla on the day he was abducted. These officers were allowed to travel out of the Maldives in 2019 and subsequently dismissed from duty over a different case. Three men charged for the enforced disappearance of Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla were acquitted on the basis of state negligence and failure to adhere to court protocols rather than a lack of evidence.

'The state's interference and wilful negligence during the investigation and trial illustrate the government's failure to uphold its pledges and obligation to bring Yameen Rasheed's killers, and all involved in his murder, to justice through transparent, credible investigations and judicial processes.'

'We call upon the Maldives to conduct the criminal trial in line international fair trial standards and reiterate the Rasheed family's call to the Criminal Court to complete the trial within the timeframes provided under the Maldivian Criminal Procedure Code. The People's Majlis must uphold its duty to hold the government and the presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances accountable to their pledge to the Maldivian people to serve justice for Yameen Rasheed's family. The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms depend on ensuring justice for Yameen Rasheed,' the organisations said.

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The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

The Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) is a non-partisan civil society organisation based in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland, operating under the Swiss civil code. MDN, registered in the Maldives from 2006 until December 2019, was one of the longest-running human rights groups in the country until the Government of Maldives forcefully shut down the organisation. www.mvdemocracy.org

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