

## URGENT APPEL - THE OBSERVATORY

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**MDV 001 / 0118 / OBS 002**  
Death threats / Harassment  
**Maldives**  
January 5, 2018

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a partnership of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and FIDH, requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in **Maldives**.

### **Description of the situation:**

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about death threats and harassment against Ms. **Shahindha Ismail**, Executive Director of the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN).

According to the information received, Ms. Shahindha Ismail has received several death threats that were posted on anonymous accounts on Twitter and Facebook, following the publication of news articles on the *Vaguthu Online* newspaper on December 28, 2017 over an alleged anti-Islamic tweet posted by Ms. Ismail on December 21, 2017. Ms. Ismail tweeted in response to President Yameen Abdul Gayoom's statement that he would not allow for any religion but Islam. Ms. Ismail's tweet read: "Religions other than Islam exist in this world because Allah allowed for it. No other religion would exist otherwise, is it not?". The articles published accused her of blasphemy and branded her an apostate, two crimes that carry serious legal penalties in Maldives, including the death penalty in some cases. Death threats were also made through comments posted in response to the *Vaguthu Online* articles.

Moreover, on December 28, 2017, the Maldives police announced that they had launched an investigation against Ms. Shahindha Ismail under the Religious Unity Act, which carries a five-year jail term, in relation to the above-mentioned Twitter post. Shortly before the launching of the investigation, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs had issued a statement calling for anti-Islamic speech to be put to an end. On the other hand, no investigation was carried out into the threats and acts of intimidation against Ms. Ismail.

The Observatory fears that Ms. Shahindha Ismail is being targeted because of her criticism of President Yameen Abdul Gayoom's human rights record. In particular, Ms. Ismail is a strong advocate against religious fundamentalism in Maldives and has been a vocal critic of law enforcement agencies' inaction and impunity regarding the ongoing disappearance of journalist **Ahmed Rilwan** and the murder of Mr. **Yameen Rasheed**, a human rights activist and blogger in Maldives<sup>1</sup>.

The Observatory strongly condemns the above-mentioned death threats and harassment against Ms. Shahindha Ismail and urges the authorities of Maldives to guarantee in all circumstances her physical and psychological integrity.

### **Actions requested:**

Please write to the authorities of Maldives, urging them to:

- i. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Ms. Shahindha Ismail and all human rights defenders in Maldives;

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Observatory Urgent Appeal MDV 001 / 0417 / OBS 046, published on April 25, 2017, and Joint Open Letter to the Government of Maldives, May 12, 2017.

- ii. Carry out an immediate, thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation into the above-mentioned threats against Ms. Shahindha Ismail in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before an independent tribunal, and sanction them as provided by the law;
- iii. Put an end to all acts of harassment - including at the judicial level - against Ms. Shahindha Ismail as well as against all human rights defenders in the country so that they are able to carry out their work without hindrance;
- iv. Comply with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, in particular with its Articles 1 and 12.2;
- v. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments signed or ratified by Maldives.

**Addresses:**

- Mr. Azleen Ahmed, Minister of Home Affairs of the Republic of Maldives, Twitter: @homeministrymv Email: [info@homeaffairs.gov.mv](mailto:info@homeaffairs.gov.mv)
- Mr. Abdulla Yameen Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives, Fax: (960) 332 5500 Twitter: @presidencymv
- Ms. Aminath Eenas, President of the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, Fax: +960 3338658, +960 3304725, Email: [aminath.eenas@hrcm.org.mv](mailto:aminath.eenas@hrcm.org.mv) / [info@hrcm.org.mv](mailto:info@hrcm.org.mv)
- Ms. Hala Hameed, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland, Fax: +41 22 732 63 39, Email: [info@MaldivesMission.ch](mailto:info@MaldivesMission.ch)
- Ambassador, Embassy of the Republic of Maldives to Belgium, Fax: +32 (0)2 256 7569, Email: [info@maldivesembassy.be](mailto:info@maldivesembassy.be) / [info@maldivesmission.eu](mailto:info@maldivesmission.eu)

Please also write to the diplomatic representations of Maldives in your respective countries.

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Geneva-Paris, January 5, 2018

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

*The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and FIDH. The objective of this programme is to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. OMCT and FIDH are both members of [ProtectDefenders.eu](http://ProtectDefenders.eu), the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.*

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

- E-mail: [Appeals@fidh-omct.org](mailto:Appeals@fidh-omct.org)
- Tel and fax OMCT +41 22 809 49 39 / +41 22 809 49 29
- Tel and fax FIDH + 33 (0) 1 43 55 25 18 / +33 1 43 55 18 80