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<http://www.rsf.org/maldives-the-government-shuts-down-blog-in-23-11-2011,41437.html>

Asia - Maldives

Censorship

The government shuts down blog in climate of growing religious intolerance

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Reporters Without Borders condemns the closure on 19 November of the blog run by **Ismail Khilath "Hilath" Rasheed** (www.hilath.com) by the Communications Authority of Maldives on the orders of the Islamic affairs ministry, on the grounds that it contained anti-Islamic material.

"The increase in acts of religious intolerance is a threat to the Maldives' young democracy", the press freedom organization said. "Incidents involving media workers are rare but that is only because most of them prefer to censor themselves and stay away from subjects relating to Islam, unlike Ismail Khilath Rasheed."

"We request the immediate reopening of his blog. The government should not give in to the fanatical minority but must do all it can to ensure the media are free to tackle any subjects they choose. The Religious Unity Act should be changed to allow this."

According to Rasheed, the Islamic affairs ministry had his blog in its sights because he is a Sufi Muslim, not a Sunni like most Maldivians, and has always been highly critical of religious fundamentalism. He [said](#) his blog, the first to be shut down since January 2009, is just the first victim of an impending crackdown by the conservative fringe in charge of the Islamic affairs ministry. The blogger intends to bring his case to court, since a website shut by the government can only be reopened by a court order.

Rasheed received anonymous [death threats](#) via the Internet in March last year.

There are harsh penalties for blasphemy under Maldivian law and in September the government toughened the 1994 Religious Unity Act. The law bans the media from circulating any material that "humiliates Allah, his prophets, the Koran, the Sunnah or the Islamic faith". The publication of material about beliefs other than Sunni Islam, the state religion, is punishable by between two and five years' imprisonment.

The Maldives is ranked 52nd out of 178 countries in the world press freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Border in 2010.

Cached pages of Rasheed's blog can still be accessed via Google. Screen shots of the cached pages and some articles are available below.

You can download those documents on our website :

- Article published on November 1st, 2011, (PDF - 69.9 kb)
 - Article published on May 15th, 2010, (PDF - 108.4 kb)
 - Article published on January 18th, 2011, (JPEG - 319.6 kb)
 - Article published on May 9th, 2010, (JPEG - 640.5 kb)
 - Homepage of www.hilath.com, (JPEG - 578.3 kb)
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