

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/maldives-journalist-describes-how-he-was-06-09-2012,43343.html>

Asia - Maldives

Illegal detention

Journalist describes how he was arrested for photographing riot police

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Reporters Without Borders, which condemns the many arbitrary arrests of journalists in recent months, got *Minivan News* website reporter **Ahmed Naish** to describe how police arrested him during a protest by the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party on 30 August and held him for 24 hours.

The media freedom NGO reminds the authorities that arbitrary arrest violates article 46 of the Maldivian constitution, which says: "*Everyone has the right not to be arbitrarily detained, arrested or imprisoned except as provided by law by the People's Majlis [parliament] in accordance with the article 16 of this constitution*".

Reporters Without Borders deplores the repeated obstruction of media personnel in the course of their work and urges the government to put a stop to arrests designed to intimidate journalists and encourage self-censorship.

The media and netizens played an important role during the Nasheed administration's ouster in February, photographing and filming aspects of the accompanying crackdown that embarrassed authorities. Some journalists told Reporters Without Borders this was the reason for the current increase in arrests of professional and citizen journalists.

Riot police known as Special Operations (SO) stopped Naish at 5:30 p.m. on 30 August in the Malé district of Sosun Magu as he was photographing them arresting a young demonstrator. They asked him for his press pass, which he did not have on him at the time, and, after refusing to accept his business card as identification, handcuffed him and led him away.

"My hands were tied behind my back with a clip and the SO officer who did so kept tightening it," Naish said in his account. "Another officer kept pinching my arms and hitting my ankles with his boot, telling me to walk faster."

More people were arrested, including [two who had been taking photographs](#) or videos of the police. They were bundled into a vehicle and taken to police headquarters and then transferred to a detention centre on Dhoonidhoo, an island just to the north of the capital.

"They took my personal belongings (...) I was then photographed and taken before an investigating officer (IO) who informed me that I was arrested for obstructing police duty and causing public disorder. I refused to sign the arrest form because, in addition to stating a false reason for the arrest, the place of arrest noted in the form was incorrect."

After being placed in a large cell with other people arrested during the demonstration, Naish asked to see a doctor because his wrists were swollen. The doctor sprayed his wrists and gave him a painkiller. He was then allowed to speak to two lawyers and described to them the circumstances of his arrest.

"I talked to seven people who were arrested similarly for taking photographs. However all were accused of obstructing police duty, disobeying orders and causing loss of public order."

At around 2 a.m., he was moved to a large cell where 25 other people were already being held. He was finally released without charge the next afternoon, after being held for about 24

hours.

"I found out later than government-aligned private broadcaster *Villa Television* showed footage of my arrest, which would have confirmed that the police lied about the place of arrest. It would also show that I was not jeopardizing public order."

Naish added that a journalist with *Mini Radio 97FM*, [Ali Nahyk, was arrested](#) on 31 August for similar reasons.

Maldives is ranked 73rd out of 179 countries in the [2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#), which was compiled before February's turmoil, when President Mohamed Nasheed was forced to resign and Vice-President Mohammed Waheed took over. The media situation has worsened dramatically since then.

Ahmed Naish's full account:



**Ahmed Naish's
account**

