



## Maldives: Yet another crackdown on peaceful political activity

The Government of Maldives carried out a wave of arrests of peaceful political activists this morning ahead of a rally called by businessmen, civil society groups and the opposition. This happened despite President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's recent pledges of political reform and his commitment to respect the right to freedom of expression.

"President Gayoom's promises of reforms to protect human rights are in sharp contrast to the arrests made by the police this morning," Amnesty International said today.

The rally planned for 14 February is to protest the government's failure to curb a rising tide of criminal activity in the country. One of the sponsors of the rally is the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which was recently formed in defiance of the government's refusal to allow political parties to function. MDP supporters have planned to carry a letter on a march from the parliament building to the President's office, to inform the President of the formation of the party and to recommend measures to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights.

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

The exact number of those detained is not known. Among those arrested are the entire family of an MDP political activist, Ahmed Falah. Police came to his house at around 3am this morning and said that they had instructions to arrest his entire family. Ahmed Falah was not at home and his family ran into the street to look for help. However, the police caught Aishath Najib, his partner, and their two sons, Shafeen Ahmed, 18 and Habhin Ahmed, 17. Aishath Najib was grabbed by several police officers and thrown onto the rear deck of a police van.

Others arrested this morning include: Abdulla Najib, Nazim Abdul Sattar, Mohamed Miyamon Naseem, Abdulla Saeed and Ali Hashim.

They have all been taken to Dhoonidhoo Detention Centre for interrogation. The reason for their arrest is believed to be their involvement in the election of the Governing Council of the MDP, which took place some three hours before the riot police came to arrest them. Among those detained are Governing Council members, as well as some people who took part in the elections.

"We urge the government to act

immediately to ensure that none of the detainees are subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment," said Amnesty International. "We consider them to be prisoners of conscience and we are calling for their immediate and unconditional release."

"Our message to the government is clear: release these detainees now; ensure their well-being while in custody; reform the laws that allow the detention of prisoners of conscience; and ensure that no such arrests take place in the future", continued Amnesty International.

According to a BBC report, the government has said "the raids targeted burglary and traffic offences and only eight people were held". To Amnesty International's knowledge, none of the prisoners mentioned above are known to have been involved in "burglary" or "traffic offences".

"These people have only been exercising their right to freedom of expression in a peaceful manner. They were holding an election to the Governing Council of their party. There is no justification for arresting them."

### MDP elects the Governing Council

Despite the tight control on freedom of expression, association and assembly members showed an overwhelming wave of support for its first-ever election. The election was conducted online. By the end of February 10th 2004 nominations had been completed, when brave Maldivians, of divergent background nominated themselves as candidates. The online voting for MDP Governing Council members began on February 11th 2004 at 06:00am. (Sri Lanka time)

Voting continued briskly in spite of the fear campaign conducted by the Government of Maldives. The internet provided an alternative channel of communication between MDP secretariat in Colombo and faithfuls back in the Maldives.

01. Abdulla Saeed, *Ma.Kosheeg*
02. Adam Abdul Gafoor, *H.Kuredhimaage*
03. Ahmed Abbas, *G.Bambo*
04. Ahmed Ali Naseer, *G.Fithuroanu Villa*
05. Ahmed Mausoom, *Pleasant Waves*
06. Ahmed Nazim Abdul Sattar, *G.Canaryge*
07. Ahmed Shafeeg (Sappe'), *M.Maafusheeg*
08. Ali Hashim, *Ma.Hithilaage*
09. Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, *H.Hilihilaage*
10. Ibrahim Ismail, *Ma.Boagan Villa*
11. Jenifer Latheef, *M.Nedhunge*
12. Mohamed Mahir, *H.Green*
13. Mohamed Nasheed, *G.Canaryge*
14. Mohamed Ziyad, *M.Saljamuge*
15. Susan Ibrahim Fulhu, *M.Limerick*

### MDP Meets Japanese Embassy Official

On 12<sup>th</sup> February, MDP members met Mr. Kiichiro Iwase of the Japanese Embassy of Sri Lanka and Maldives. The topics discussed included the social-political situation in Maldives and the Gayoom regime's abuse of Japanese aid and development assistance to Maldives. MDP members were reassured that the Japanese Government will continue to assist Maldives and will take necessary steps to ensure that Japanese assistance will be used to help the people of Maldives and not corrupt individuals in Gayoom's regime

### Letters

#### Maldives bans SMS to prevent demonstration

MALE, Feb 14 – Maldives has slapped a 24-hour ban on SMS service throughout the country to prevent a peaceful demonstration planned for Saturday by the

opposition Maldives Democratic Party, local telecoms company Dhiraagu said. This is the first time that the Maldives government took such a measure to prevent a mass protest.

The SMS ban has been in force since pre-dawn Saturday to prevent MDP members from calling on the 70,000 Male residents to gather in front of the Presidential Palace on Saturday afternoon to peacefully protest President Gayoom's systemic abuse of human rights, officials said.

Early Friday, police said they had arrested eight MDP members for distributing leaflets calling on Male residents to gather at the Saturday rally. Home Minister Ismail Shafeeu late Friday said on state television that President Gayoom "would not tolerate" any political parties even though the Maldives Constitution allows this. "It is not in the interests of the Maldives' public that any political parties be allowed," Shafeeu said, adding that the Home Ministry will not allow "any illegal demonstrations" to take place on Saturday.

Article 20 Letters, messages, telephonic conversations and such other

means of communication shall be inviolable. Such letters, messages, telephonic conversations and other means of communication shall not be intercepted, read, listened to or divulged except as expressly provided by law.

Article 26 Persons shall be free to assemble peaceably and in a manner that does not contravene the law.

Article 27 Persons shall be free to form societies and associations, unless prohibited by law in the interest of the protection of sovereignty of the Maldives and the maintenance of public order.

Gayoom continues to terrorize the citizens of Maldives into submission in violation of the above articles of the Constitution of Maldives.

I am disturbed that senior government servants previously with Gayoom have now joined the MDP. If the Party thinks that Gayoom's regime is oppressive and unethical, why would MDP want to include such people.

MDP rules do not bar people who served in Gayoom's government to join the Party.



