



ASSOCIATION FOR
DEMOCRACY
IN THE MALDIVES



Joint-Press Statement – 18 August 2022
Male', Maldives

Concerns about the decision of the Employment Tribunal in the case of Dr Iyaz Abdul Latheef

The increasing incidences of sexual violence and abuse towards girls and women in the Maldives have been negatively impacting the whole society. These are concerns that we have been raising repeatedly. For many years, certain persons have been widely using social media and other mediums in the Maldives to promote the practice of female circumcision/genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) as a religious requirement. Concern about this development [was raised in 2009](#) by the then State Attorney General. FGM/C is an inhumane, abusive and dangerous traditional practice taking place globally among various faith communities and cultural groups. However, according to Islamic scholars, this is not a practice required in Islamic Shari'ah. Available academic knowledge and research evidence also shows that this practice harms women and girls physically and mentally causing life-long health impacts with sometimes fatal consequences. Therefore, FGM/C is a practice that is recognised as an international public health issue, which international organisations and governments are working to address.

However, FGM/C is a practice that some segments of society in the Maldives have been incorrectly presenting and promoting as a religious requirement. Available information from the Maldives Demographic and Health Survey 2016/2017 shows that 10% of the respondents believed FGM/C is a religious requirement. Furthermore, 13% of survey respondents had endured this dangerous practice. We believe that the dissemination of incorrect information that this abusive practice is a religious requirement has contributed to exacerbate this issue.

A notable proponent of such information dissemination is Dr Iyaz Abdul Latheef who held the position of lecturer at the Maldives National University. While occupying the position of Vice President at an entity formerly known as the Fiqh Academy under the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in 2014, [it was reported](#) that he was endorsing FGM/C. A further [report in 2020](#) also provided details of his endorsement of FGM/C using social media. In June 2021, public concerns were raised in connection with Dr Latheef's FGM/C promotion activities on social media, leading to [a member of parliament](#) to submit a complaint against him to the Human Rights and Gender Committee of the People's Majlis. Media reported that the Ministry of Islamic Affairs had also launched [a probe into this issue](#). In addition, in July 2021, the Maldives National University took [disciplinary action](#) against Dr Latheef in connection with his FGM/C promotion activities and dismissed him from his job. However, it was with deep concern that we learned about Dr Latheef's [reinstatement at the university](#) by the Employment Tribunal on 8 August 2022. We believe the reinstatement of someone with a sustained history of promoting a harmful practice against women and girls to such a position by a responsible State institution is a serious negligence of duty of care to students at the university and the public, specifically women and girls.

We believe the Employment Tribunal has a mandate to make responsible decisions. In this instance, the Maldives National University had taken action to dismiss someone they deemed unsuitable to teach there. We believe the reinstatement of such a person back into that environment facilitates to undermine the university's academic standards and the quality of its learning environment. The decision of the tribunal indicates that members of the tribunal had given no consideration to uphold the basic human rights of women and girls in their decision-making process. Although the university had recognised the seriousness of the issue and taken responsible action to address it, the decision of the tribunal has obstructed the university's attempts to safeguard and protect students and public safety. This is a situation that concerns us deeply. As noted previously, the State Attorney General brought the issue of the revival of FGM/C in the Maldives to public attention in 2009. While the reasons for the escalation of the situation was known, the results of negligence and inaction became evident in the findings of the 2016/2017 Maldives Demographic and Health Survey.

For all these reasons, we call on President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and relevant State authorities to :

- revoke the religious fatwa and preaching license given by the Government of Maldives to Dr Iyaz Abdul Latheef
- remove him from his lecturing position at the Maldives National University with due consideration that his academic, professional and social standards and performance are inappropriate for such a position
- appeal the decision of the Employment Tribunal by the Maldives National University
- plan and implement public awareness programmes about the public health dangers of FGM/C by the Ministry of Health, and to add this issue to their public health monitoring agenda
- considering that FGM/C is not a religious requirement, for Dr Iyaz Abdul Latheef to publicly acknowledge his acceptance of this fact.

To fulfil the State's legal and social responsibility to protect the basic rights of women and girls to safety and security, we believe that the above points must be accepted and implemented without delay.

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