



**OPEN LETTER FOR THE URGENT ATTENTION OF
Minister of Agriculture and Animal Welfare, Dr. Maryam Mariya**

12 February 2025, Hithadhoo, Addu City



COPIED TO:

*Ministry of Tourism and Environment
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)*



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Minister of Agriculture and Animal Welfare, Dr. Maryam Mariya**

12 February 2025, Hithadhoo, Addu City

Dear Minister Dr. Maryam Mariya,

On 25 January 2025, the Addu City Council gazetted an announcement [(IUL)426-28/426/2025/58] to build a new road in Hithadhoo, Addu City. This road is planned to cut across a significant portion of wetland area which currently, and has for many generations, been used by farmers to cultivate banana and taro. As per the announcement, they were ordered to clear the area within a period of ten days for work to begin on the project.

However, the farmers we spoke to were unaware that such a notice even existed until it was too late. Although they are the people who are directly impacted by the proposed project, they were notably not consulted, informed, or involved in any discussions regarding this proposed development. While the decision to construct this road was passed on 1 November 2023, no effort was made to inform or alert the farmers until the clearance order was issued last month.

It is deeply unjust that the livelihoods of community-based farmers are threatened in this way, but the methods used to dispossess them of their land and livelihood is also deeply cruel, inconsiderate and unfair. A period of ten days is inadequate for the farming families to harvest and save their crops and prevent their hard work and investment from being decimated in front of them. It is also inconsiderate in the extreme to do this right before Ramadan, a time of year for which the farmers have been preparing to harvest their crops for months, thereby depriving these families of the income and livelihood on which they depend.

While we question the need for the proposed road, its construction will undoubtedly cause significant harm to natural resources and critical habitats essential for both local livelihoods, wildlife and ecosystem resilience. These are essential public resources that are part of the natural and ecological heritage, livelihood assets and food security necessary for community resilience. As a proponent of food security in the country, you will undoubtedly be aware that food insecurity is one of the most pressing national concerns, especially in light of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Addu City Council's decision to destroy our last remaining fertile lands suitable for food crops in Hithadhoo, along with farmers' harvest is, in our opinion, extremely irresponsible. We believe that such productive land must be preserved and protected, instead of being permanently destroyed. We find these irresponsible and destructive decisions by the Addu City Council completely unacceptable.

As you will be aware, the loss of fast-depleting arable land for food crops today exposes us all to food insecurity and related vulnerabilities tomorrow. Once lost, these local resources will not be recoverable. This would be a permanent loss of a critical natural asset and resource that is essential for the economic and climate resilience of our community. We believe such actions deprive our generation's capacity to thrive and support the sustainable development of our community and the country.

Therefore, as the Minister of Agriculture and Animal Welfare, we urge you to intervene and put a stop to this injustice and prevent the loss of critical land and community livelihoods that threaten the financial wellbeing and stability of primarily women farmers and their families in Hithadhoo. The current situation threatens not only farmers and their families, but also the present and future sustainability and resilience of our islands and the whole community. We write to you with the expectation that you will give your urgent and active attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Project ThimaaVeshi

VeshiSaafu, SaveMaldives, Small Island Geographic Society (SIGS), BeLeaf, Ecocare Maldives, Transparency Maldives, Land Sea Maldives, Association for Democracy in the Maldives, Zero Waste Maldives