

Joint Press Statement calling for transparency and due process of law and justice in the Investigations by the Maldives Police Service into the serious incident in Male' on 18 April 2025



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26 April 2025-

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, are gravely concerned about the conduct of the ongoing police investigations into the tragic incident reported on 18th April 2025 involving a 21-year-old woman. At this difficult time, we extend our heartfelt wishes for her full and complete recovery. We stand in solidarity with the victim, her family and friends, and the public in their demand for justice and accountability. We urge all investigative authorities, media outlets and the general public to respect the privacy and dignity of the victim and her family.

Key concerns:

- 1. Dissemination of information about the case by the police that contributes to narratives that promote victim-blaming and contradicts with the standards set forth in the Sexual Offences Act (17/2014):** During the first press conference held behind closed doors on 22 April 2025 by the Maldives Police Service (MPS), personal information of the victim was disclosed to the media, while information about other individuals or locations related to the case were withheld. Sharing CCTV footage of the events publicly during the second MPS press conference held on 24 April 2025 further sensationalised the case, enabling narratives that blame the victim and reinforce existing prejudices regarding victims of gender-based violence. We note that this type of conduct by the police will deter help-seeking behaviors of victims and create fear and distrust in the system, particularly in a society where gender-based violence and substance abuse is persistent and prevalent.
- 2. Delays in conducting sexual assault testing by the police:** The family's statements indicate that the legally required sexual assault testing was initially not conducted due to lack of confirmation from the Family Protection Unit (FPU) of the MPS. While the tests have limited usefulness after the initial 72 hours, the family was only contacted to conduct the sexual assault testing by the MPS and the FPU five days after the incident.
- 3. Impunity and lack of accountability:** This incident, among countless others, highlights the widespread public disillusionment in the criminal justice system due to the continuous lack of justice and accountability, and ongoing impunity for those in power. It further raises questions about the credibility, reliability and impartiality of investigative authorities and oversight bodies. The apparent preferential treatment given to those who are politically or socially connected, at different stages of the investigation, further undermines rule of law and equality.

In light of the above, we call on:

- **The Maldives Police Service** to conduct a comprehensive and timely investigation into the case, and hold perpetrators of crimes accountable without bias, delay, or exception in compliance with Article 17(a) of the Constitution. All evidence must be handled with due procedural diligence and care throughout all stages of the investigation to ensure fairness in any prosecution and/or court-related proceedings.

- **The Prosecutor General's Office** to ensure a professional and credible investigation, protection of all evidence and witnesses, and that all evidence is presented to the Criminal Court according to set procedures in a timely manner befitting the urgency of the case.
- **Journalists, Media outlets and Regulatory bodies** to comply with standards of ethical journalism in their efforts to seek transparency, in a manner that does not impinge on the privacy and dignity of the victim or her family, nor compromise the viability of an ongoing criminal investigation. Media reporting must protect media integrity by conveying truthful and objective information to the public which constitute credible facts and information that are suitable for release for the purpose of keeping the public informed.
- **The Ministry of Social and Family Development** to ensure timely access to psycho-social, legal, and protective services, and take proactive measures to protect the youth, women and vulnerable communities in our country and ensure timely access to justice. This includes implementing long-overdue reforms, strengthening survivor support systems, and taking concrete, preventative measures to protect women, youth, and vulnerable groups.
- **The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives**, to fulfil their obligations towards the protection of the fundamental rights of all individuals without discrimination, and closely monitor institutional responses to cases of human rights violations, and to publicly report on systemic gaps and failures that enable such violence to persist. The Commission must act as an independent and vocal watchdog, ensuring that no institution is above scrutiny and that victims receive protection and justice, consistent with the Constitutional mandate of the Commission.
- **The People's Majlis 241 Committee** to ensure the ongoing inquiry into the matter is rigorous and transparent, including scrutinising delays in response from investigative authorities, mishandling of evidence and publishing the Committee's findings to the public. All relevant institutions must be summoned, and accountability must be ensured.
- **The National Integrity Commission of the Maldives** to independently and impartially investigate the conduct and actions of the Maldives Police Service, including observations stated in this statement, and review whether due procedure was followed at all stages of the ongoing investigation. The Commission must ensure that police officers are held to the highest standards of conduct and discipline in all cases that are being investigated, and publish their findings in a timely manner.
- Furthermore, we call on all institutions, the media, politicians and the public to refrain from narratives that promote victim-blaming and gender-based stereotyping. Unaddressed social issues have historically exacerbated the struggle of young people in the Maldives. It is imperative that we recognise the systemic governance and political failures that continue to disserve and undermine the dignity of vulnerable people.

Given the persistent failures of law enforcement authorities in similar cases, it is inevitable that public calls questioning significant taxpayer funds and resource allocation to these institutions have increased. The continued youth-led protests on this matter raise legitimate concerns over delays in investigation and allegations of cover-ups to protect individuals of families with influence, wealth and power, at the expense of justice, national laws and international obligations of the State. These are not isolated concerns. They highlight a pervasive culture of impunity, patronage and selective justice, impacting public trust and confidence in institutions mandated to safeguard and protect the wellbeing of everyone. It is essential for law enforcement authorities to justify their heavy financial burden to the public by conducting transparent and open performance reviews. We further call on investigative authorities to ensure equality before the law according to Article 20 of the Maldivian Constitution.

-ENDS-

1. Transparency Maldives
2. Family Legal Clinic
3. Association for Democracy in the Maldives
4. Mental Health Support Group
5. Uthema
6. Project ThimaaVeshi
7. Ecocare Maldives
8. Hope for Women
9. Save Maldives
10. Zero Waste Maldives