

ASSOCIATION FOR  
DEMOCRACY  
IN THE MALDIVES



**Joint Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the Maldives  
50th Session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group**

7 April 2025

**Submission by:**

Association for Democracy in the Maldives

and

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Association for Democracy in the Maldives (ADM) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation committed to promoting and protecting human rights in the Maldives. Its focus areas include civil and political rights, justice, accountability, and good governance. ADM was officially registered as an NGO on 13th August 2020, under the Associations Act (Law No. 01/2003) of the Maldives.
- 1.2. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a membership-based regional network of human rights organisations in Asia. With 90 member organisations across 23 countries in Asia, FORUM-ASIA strengthens civil society, human rights defenders, and marginalised communities by advocating for human rights, civic space, and democracy in the region.
- 1.3. This joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by ADM and FORUM-ASIA highlights the following rights issues in the Maldives since its review in the third UPR cycle in 2020: Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society; Freedom of Expression; Right to Information; Migrant Rights; and Right to Education.
- 1.4. The information herein is based on primary and secondary sources of data. ADM conducted interviews with individuals with lived experiences, including victims, survivors, and their families. Additional data was obtained through Right to Information requests submitted to public authorities, and consultations with civil society partners. Publicly available resources, including media reports and human rights publications, were used for further verification. The submission is also informed by FORUM-ASIA's ongoing civic space monitoring and regional-level documentation.

## **2. Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society**

- 2.1. During the review of the Maldives in the third cycle of the UPR, the government received eleven (11) recommendations concerning human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society, of which nine (9) were supported. These include commitments to:

- “Ensure a safe and favourable environment in which human rights defenders can work without fear of sanction, reprisal or intimidation” and
- “Investigate, prosecute and punish threats or acts of violence against [human rights defenders and civil society organisations]”.

Despite these commitments, implementation has remained partial and inadequate.

2.2. Civic space in the Maldives remains obstructed<sup>1</sup>. HRDs—including journalists—and civil society organisations operate in an ever-restrictive environment, facing threats, persecution, smear campaigns, and attacks on credibility from both state and non-state actors. Successive governments have lacked the political will to ensure protection for HRDs—in law and practice—or create a truly enabling environment for civil society.

2.3. Unsolved emblematic cases of threats and violence against human rights defenders and civil society include: the murder of human rights defender Yameen Rasheed (2017)<sup>2</sup>; the enforced disappearance of journalist Ahmed Rilwan Abdullah (2014)<sup>3</sup>; and the near-fatal attack on journalist Ibrahim ‘Aswad’ Waheed (2013).<sup>4</sup>

2.4. In 2018, the Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances (DDCom), was established to investigate 27 emblematic cases, such as the killing of moderate religious scholar and Member of Parliament Dr Afrasheem Ali (2012)<sup>5</sup> and those mentioned above. However, the Commission was dissolved in June 2024, without having resolved a single case or making its findings public<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> CIVICUS (2025), *CIVICUS Monitor - Tracking Civic Space*. Accessed at <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/maldives/>

<sup>2</sup> OMCT (2017), *Murder of human rights activist and blogger Yameen Rasheed*. Accessed at <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/murder-of-human-rights-activist-and-blogger-yameen-rasheed>

<sup>3</sup> International Federation of Journalists (2024), *Maldives: No justice for Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla after ten years*. Accessed at <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/article/maldives-no-justice-for-ahmed-rilwan-abdulla-after-ten-years>

<sup>4</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists (2013), *Maldives journalists assaulted in political violence*. Accessed at <https://cpj.org/2013/02/maldives-journalists-assaulted-in-political-violence/>

<sup>5</sup> The Maldives Independent (2019), *Dr Afrasheem killed by ‘jihadi group’ linked to al-Qaeda*. Accessed at <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/dr-afrasheem-killed-by-jihadi-group-linked-to-al-qaeda-149248>

<sup>6</sup> The Edition (2024), *President dissolves Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances*. Accessed at <https://edition.mv/news/33808>

2.5. In 2024, ADM and other rights organisations (local and international) called for a public disclosure of DDCom’s findings. The Commission refused, citing executive orders from the President’s Office<sup>7</sup>. Despite multiple requests, the DDCom failed to clarify which specific provision of the Presidential Commissions Act (Law no. 2019/4) prohibits the sharing of its findings with victims’ families or the public. Although the government had promised to publish the findings once the President’s Office received them, no such report has been made public as of this submission<sup>8</sup>.

2.6. Politicisation of the Registrar of Associations: The Associations Act (Law No. 3/2022) established the position of a Registrar of Associations, granting discretionary powers over the registration or deregistration of associations, as defined under the Regulation of Associations (2024/R-74). However, Section 24 of the Act politicises this role by assigning the appointment of the Registrar solely to the President. This undermines protections for associations and increases the risk of arbitrary or politically motivated actions under Section 12 of the law, including investigations that, even without resulting in deregistration, can severely disrupt an organisation’s work and endanger its staff.

2.7. A prominent example is the deregistration of the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) in 2019 following a targeted campaign. In a lawsuit filed in 2020 by MDN’s founder, challenging the lack of due process in the deregistration, the Civil Court of Maldives ruled in March 2023 that the organisation must remain deregistered over an allegedly blasphemous report, despite no court having ruled the report blasphemous. The Court did not address the core issue of due process. In August 2023, the decision was appealed to the High Court, where no hearings have taken place. ADM filed a third-party intervention application in March 2024, which was rejected in October 2024 on the basis that ADM had not demonstrated adequate interest. In February 2025, the Supreme Court

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<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch (2024), *Maldives: Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances must disclose findings of investigations to victims’ families and the public*. Accessed at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/14/maldives-presidential-commission-deaths-and-disappearances-must-disclose-findings>

<sup>8</sup> The Edition (2024), *DDCom findings will be disclosed once they are received: government*. Accessed at [https://edition.mv/political\\_party/33573](https://edition.mv/political_party/33573)

upheld this decision without providing a clear legal rationale. FORUM-ASIA also filed a third-party intervention application before the High Court in February 2025. A decision on this application is still pending.<sup>9</sup>

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1. Publicly disclose the findings of the DDCom investigations to victims' families and the wider public.
- 3.2. Conduct credible, independent, and transparent investigations into all cases of threats, harassment, and violence against HRDs and CSOs, and ensure accountability in accordance with international standards, particularly those of due process and the rule of law.
- 3.3. Establish, in law and practice, a safe and enabling environment for HRDs and CSOs to operate freely, without fear of reprisals.
- 3.4. Review the Associations Act to align it with international human rights standards, ensuring the independence and impartiality of the Registrar of Associations.
- 3.5. Promote inclusive, transparent, and responsive decision-making by institutionalising dialogue and consultation mechanisms between the Government and civil society.

### **4. Freedom of Expression**

- 4.1. During the last review of the Maldives in the third cycle of the UPR, the government received twelve (12) recommendations on the right to freedom of opinion and expression. It supported nine (9) of these, including the following:

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<sup>9</sup> FORUM-ASIA (2024), *Maldives: FORUM-ASIA calls on the government to stop the judicial harassment of the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)*. Accessed at <https://forum-asia.org/mdn25/>

- *“Work towards creating an enabling environment in which individuals can freely exercise their rights to freedom of expression and of association,”* and
- *“Strengthen efforts to apply, in law and practice, full respect for freedom of opinion and expression”*.

The government has only partially implemented these recommendations.

4.2. Since the last review in November 2020, the right to freedom of expression continues to be obstructed. Journalists and protestors continue to face arbitrary arrest, excessive use of force, and systemic reprisals. A persistent culture of intolerance toward dissent, particularly criticism of government officials and policies, has prevailed under successive administrations.

4.3. Individuals across all employment sectors—including the civil service, state-owned enterprises, and the private sector—hesitate to express critical views or raise concerns, even internally, due to a widespread culture of retaliation. Employees who speak out against wrongdoing or propose changes that are not aligned with their employer’s preferences frequently face harassment, professional penalties, and punitive action. In one case documented through interviews for this submission, an individual who requested that their employment contract be updated to reflect significant changes in job scope and working hours was subsequently labelled a “troublemaker.” As a direct consequence, a promotion they had been on track to receive was denied. The individual eventually resigned due to the increasing workplace hostility and persecution they faced for merely asserting their rights.

4.4. In 2021, an employee of the Hulhumalé Magistrate Court was dismissed for publicly criticising President Solih and the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). Ironically, before assuming office in 2018, President Solih had criticised the then Yameen administration for similar restrictions, stating:

*“There is no freedom in today’s workplace ... Government jobs have forced employees to do things only as they are told. Speaking the truth and rejecting injustice has been made a crime.”<sup>10</sup>*

4.5. A double standard persists in the exercise of freedom of expression and assembly. Peaceful protestors and media outlets critical of the government face restrictions, while those aligned with the administration are permitted greater latitude, provided they do not criticise the government or its allies. For instance:

- In 2024, two pro-Palestinian protestors were charged for staging demonstrations outside foreign embassies. If convicted, they face up to six months’ imprisonment<sup>11</sup>.
- In December 2024, the Maldives Police Service arrested peaceful protestors from a taxi drivers’ demonstration and towed more than 20 vehicles without prior notice<sup>12</sup>. The Drivers Association of Maldives (DAM) reported that some of the impounded vehicles were not even involved in the protest. Two protestors remanded for five days were later released with conditions prohibiting travel and future protest participation<sup>13</sup>.

4.6. The Maldives dropped from 72nd in 2021 to 106th in 2024 in the World Press Freedom Index, reflecting a steady decline in press freedom<sup>14</sup>. The 2024 decline was largely attributed to the Evidence Act, which empowers courts to compel journalists to disclose their sources.

4.7. Following the 2023 elections, the Muizzu administration blocked access to websites critical of the government,<sup>15</sup> allegedly they were spreading “fake news.” These sites were reinstated only after public and international backlash.

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<sup>10</sup> The Maldives Journal (2021), *Judiciary Employee Fired For Social Media Posts Criticising President Solih*. Accessed at <https://themaldivesjournal.com/31656>

<sup>11</sup> Sun Mv (2024), *Pro-Palestine protestors charged with obstruction, disorderly conduct*. Accessed at <https://en.sun.mv/93053>

<sup>12</sup> Raajje Mv (2024), *Authorities take action, protesting taxis seized*. Accessed at <https://raajje.mv/160912>

<sup>13</sup> MV Plus (2024), *Taxi Drivers Granted Conditional Release Following Protest in Hulhumale’*. Accessed at <https://www.plus.mv/english/taxi-drivers-granted-conditional-release-following-protest-in-hulhumale/>

<sup>14</sup> Reporters without Borders, *Maldives*. Accessed at <https://rsf.org/en/country/maldives>

<sup>15</sup> Civicus Monitor (2024), *Maldives: critical websites blocked while journalists, civil society continue to face challenges*. Accessed at <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/maldives-critical-websites-blocked-while->

4.8. Media outlets are highly dependent on advertising revenue, which is influenced by political affiliations and government preferences. The lack of financial independence encourages self-censorship and undermines editorial objectivity.

- Under the Solih administration, the state-owned Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company Ltd (MIFCO) was accused of funneling funds to politically aligned media outlets under the guise of advertising<sup>16</sup>. MIFCO refused to disclose information on its advertising policies despite orders from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICOM) and is currently challenging the order in the High Court<sup>17</sup>.
- Similarly, whistleblowers at another state-owned company, Maldives Water and Sewerage Company Ltd. (MWSC), reported that despite posting a profit of less than four million US dollars in 2022, the company withdrew over USD 250,000 from its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds to pay media outlets—claiming the payments were for advertising.

4.9. Multiple complaints submitted via the Whistleblowers Portal of the President's Office regarding this issue were ignored. Due to the absence of clear regulations governing CSR funds and the lack of transparency in the Maldives Media Council, it is impossible to verify whether these funds were genuinely used for advertising.

4.10. In this context, *Reporters Without Borders* has noted:

*“Advertising is allocated without any transparency or oversight, which poses serious problems for the independence of media outlets. In several cases, media outlets with no significant readership received large sums of money from state enterprises. In return, editors are told to remove articles that displease or not to cover a sensitive subject.”*<sup>18</sup>

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[journalists-civil-society-continue-to-face-challenges/#:~:text=In%20December%202023%2C%20human%20rights,of%20the%20government%20were%20blocked](#)

<sup>16</sup> The MIFCO is a State owned Company, which replaced their Marketing Department lead in April 2021, appointing the First Lady's sister and the wife of the then Commissioner of Police. Accessed at <https://themaldivesjournal.com/38803>

<sup>17</sup> The Maldives Journal (2022), *MIFCO ordered to issue details of media spend*. Accessed at <https://themaldivesjournal.com/38803>

<sup>18</sup> Reporters Without Borders, *Maldives*. Accessed at <https://rsf.org/en/country/maldives>

4.11. Despite having a mandate under the Broadcasting Act to protect and promote the constitutional right to freedom of expression, the Maldives Broadcasting Commission has repeatedly been used by successive governments to curtail this very freedom. The most recent example is its investigation into Raajje TV for airing a song critical of the current administration. It remains unclear whether the investigation was initiated independently or in response to a complaint.<sup>19</sup>

4.12. **Evidence Act:** Amendments to the Evidence Act in 2022 undermine journalistic independence by introducing overbroad and vague provisions under which the judiciary may compel journalists to disclose their sources. Journalists who refuse to comply with such court orders face penalties of fines or up to three months' imprisonment<sup>20</sup>. In a context where journalists already face significant risks reporting on sensitive issues such as corruption, drug trafficking, and gang violence, the inability to protect sources has become a serious impediment to investigative journalism and public interest reporting. In such an environment, it is highly unlikely that informants will come forward, further weakening media freedom and transparency.

## 5. Recommendations

5.1. Amend the Evidence Act in line with international human rights obligations and standards to safeguard journalistic independence and ensure the protection of confidential sources.

5.2. Adopt regulations and policies, in line with international best practices, to promote transparency in media financing and protocols, including disclosure of advertising expenditures by the government and state-owned corporations.

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<sup>19</sup> The Edition (2025), Probe into song aired on Raajje TV criticizing government. Accessed at [https://edition.mv/mariyam\\_waheeda\\_president\\_broadcom/39260](https://edition.mv/mariyam_waheeda_president_broadcom/39260)

<sup>20</sup> Reporters Without Borders (2022), *RSF seeks revision of Maldives law forcing journalists to reveal sources*. Accessed at <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-seeks-revision-maldives-law-forcing-journalists-reveal-sources>

- 5.3. Conduct thorough and transparent investigations into all allegations of threats, harassment, and violence against journalists and media personnel, and ensure accountability through credible legal processes that adhere to international due process standards.
- 5.4. Undertake comprehensive legal reforms to align domestic laws on freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly with international standards, ensuring they are clear, specific, and non-discriminatory.
- 5.5. Strengthen the independence and impartiality of the judiciary to ensure it can effectively serve as a check on executive overreach and safeguard constitutional rights, including freedom of expression and association.

## **6. Right to Information**

- 6.1. Despite the existence of a relatively robust Right to Information Act (Law no. 1/2014), its implementation remains weak due to systematic failure of state institutions to comply with the law, and the widespread and blatant refusal to disclose information upon Right to Information requests<sup>21</sup>.
- 6.2. Moreover, a narrow interpretation of the law—excluding state-owned companies and banks from its scope—has set a troubling precedent. These entities have increasingly contested RTI requests and decisions of the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICOM) in the High Court. While state-funded institutions have the capacity and resources to pursue judicial appeals, RTI practitioners and members of the public often do not, making it difficult to challenge non-compliance effectively. The judicial process for resolving RTI disputes is slow and costly, often taking years, thereby undermining timely access to information on issues of public interest. This significantly weakens the law’s intended role in promoting government transparency and accountability.

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<sup>21</sup> Association for Democracy in the Maldives (2022), *State compliance to the mandatory proactive disclosure requirements of the right to information act*. Accessed at <https://democracymaldives.org/?p=248>

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1. Conduct full and transparent investigations into cases where state institutions have failed to comply with the mandatory proactive disclosure requirements under Section 37 of the Right to Information Act, and ensure accountability.
- 7.2. Amend the Right to Information Act to explicitly include state-owned enterprises and publicly funded bodies within its scope, ensuring their full compliance with RTI obligations.

## **8. Migrant Rights**

- 8.1. During the review of the Maldives in the third cycle of the UPR, the Maldives received fourteen (14) recommendations regarding the rights of migrants, out of which six (6) were supported. These included calls to:
  - *“Accede to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families”;*
  - *“Implement legislation to protect migrant workers from xenophobic and racial discrimination.”;*
  - *“Take concrete steps to promote and protect the human rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers”;* and
  - *“Scale up efforts to combat human trafficking and protect the rights of victims, and to promote and protect the rights of migrants”.*

The government has only partially implemented these recommendations.

- 8.2. The Maldives has yet to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Migrant workers continue to face serious rights violations, including modern slavery practices, fraudulent recruitment, violence, discrimination, and xenophobia. Access to justice, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association for migrants remain severely restricted.

8.3. In 2024, President Muizzu publicly stated that “illegal expatriates” posed a threat to national sovereignty unless a permanent solution was found<sup>22</sup>. His administration has continued the policy of previous governments by detaining and deporting migrants without due process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Solih administration deported over 13,500 migrant workers in a similar fashion<sup>23</sup>. According to President Muizzu, over 6,000 migrants have been deported since he assumed office in 2023<sup>24</sup>.

8.4. In addition to the issues facing migrant workers, foreign nationals residing in the Maldives, including those married to Maldivians and/or have children who are Maldivian, face severe restrictions on their rights. In 2024, 163 marriages out of 2485 registered marriages involved a Maldivian and a foreign national<sup>25</sup>. Despite often residing in the Maldives for years, sometimes as their only or primary domicile, these individuals face limited legal protections and are denied rights afforded to their Maldivian spouses and children. This situation is particularly difficult for foreign nationals from conflict zones or politically unstable regions, for whom the Maldives may be the only home.

8.5. According to the Citizenship Act (Law no. 1/95), the power to grant citizenship rests on the choice of the President. While Maldivians by birth can hold dual citizenship, a naturalised citizen must renounce their original citizenship once Maldivian citizenship is granted.<sup>26</sup> Given the extremely low likelihood of success, many individuals choose not to apply for permanent residency. As a result, they are ineligible to purchase property or own sole-proprietorships, and are excluded from state-funded health insurance and other essential services such as healthcare, public spaces, and banking.

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<sup>22</sup> The President’s Office, Republic of Maldives (2024), *Illegal expatriates could threaten national independence: The President*. Accessed at <https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/32093>

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch (2020), *Maldives: Covid-19 Exposes Abuse of Migrants*. Accessed at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/25/maldives-covid-19-exposes-abuse-migrants>

<sup>24</sup> The Maldives Independent (2025), *What is Operation Kurangi?*. Accessed at <https://maldivesindependent.com/explainer/what-is-operation-kurangi-9c87>

<sup>25</sup> MV Plus (2025), *Over 160 Maldivian-Foreign Marriages Processed Last Year, Family Court Reveals*. Accessed at <https://www.plus.mv/english/over-160-maldivian-foreign-marriages-processed-last-year-family-court-reveals/>

<sup>26</sup> Refworld, *Maldivian Citizenship Act*. Accessed at <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2017/en/123163>

- 8.6. These limitations also undermine the well-being of mixed families, placing them at a significant disadvantage compared to families composed entirely of Maldivian citizens. This disparity has mental, physical, social, and financial impacts on affected families.
- 8.7. While foreign nationals married to Maldivians can apply for a Marriage Visa, initially valid for one year and renewable every five years, many face difficulties in the process of securing renewals. Foreign men wishing to marry Maldivian women face discriminatory legal requirements. Under the Marriage Act, they must demonstrate financial capacity to support a family—a condition not imposed on Maldivian men marrying foreign women; only foreign men need to meet this requirement. It is widely believed that these provisions are designed to discourage marriages between Maldivian women and men from Bangladesh and India, who represent the largest share of migrant workers in low-income sectors. These discriminatory policies further fuel xenophobia and the stigmatization of migrant workers, Maldivian women in such marriages, and their children.
- 8.8. If a Maldivian spouse passes away, the surviving foreign partner may be forced to leave the country unless they can obtain a Work Visa or Widow Visa. Without one, they risk family separation—even from their Maldivian children—and displacement from the only home they may have known for decades. Given the limited access to justice for migrants in the Maldives, winning custody of their children in such cases would be extraordinarily difficult, particularly if contested by the deceased partner’s Maldivian family.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1. Ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and ensure adherence to minimum standards of treatment for stateless persons.

- 9.2. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the challenges faced by foreign nationals married to Maldivians and their families, and take prompt action to address and alleviate these challenges.
- 9.3. Ensure equal access to employment, housing, education, and healthcare and public relief (including state-sponsored healthcare assistance) for foreign nationals married to Maldivians, on par with their Maldivian family members.
- 9.4. Guarantee access for migrant workers to essential services such as healthcare, education, and social protection schemes, and eliminate any administrative or discriminatory barriers that hinder access.
- 9.5. Develop a national legal framework and administrative procedures to protect refugees and asylum seekers, and ensure fair, equitable, and efficient asylum processing and adjudication.
- 9.6. Enact comprehensive legislation in line with international human rights standards to uphold the rights of migrant workers, including provisions on equal treatment, non-discrimination, and access to justice.
- 9.7. Regulate and monitor labour recruitment agencies to prevent and penalise fraudulent practices, excessive recruitment fees, debt bondage, and trafficking in persons.
- 9.8. Strengthen mechanisms for verifying the legality and legitimacy of job offers and employment contracts before migrant workers arrive in the Maldives.
- 9.9. Improve access to justice for migrant workers by establishing legal aid services and ensuring their ability to access courts and complaint mechanisms
- 9.10. Implement legal, regulatory, and policy reforms to combat and prevent discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and related intolerance, as well as incitement to hatred and violence against migrants and migrant workers.

## 10. Right to Education

10.1. During the last UPR of the Maldives, the government received seven (7) recommendations on the right to education, all of which were supported by the Maldivian government. These included pledges to:

- *“Continue its efforts to ensure children’s access to education, including all children with disabilities.”;*
- *“Integrate comprehensive sexual education into the school curriculum,”;* and
- *“Continue to strengthen schools and educational programmes in remote areas and difficult-to-reach islands”.*

The government has only partially implemented these recommendations.

10.2. Free education in government-funded public schools is available to all Maldivian children regardless of socio-economic background, up to the higher secondary level. However, the quality of public education is steadily declining, while the number of students is increasing significantly faster than the available funding, human resources, and infrastructure.

10.3. In 2023, reports indicated that Hulhumalé—one of the three islands comprising the Greater Malé Area—required four additional schools.<sup>28</sup> By 2024, this number had increased to six<sup>29</sup>. With over one-third of the country’s population concentrated in the Greater Malé Area, the pressure on public schools is severe. For instance, in March 2024, Salaahuddin School in Hulhumalé had 2053 enrolled students, far exceeding its capacity of 1700<sup>30</sup>. Overcrowding and resource constraints have resulted in large class sizes, reduced individual support, and a general decline in the quality of education.

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<sup>28</sup> The Edition (2023), *Four additional schools required in Hulhumalé to solve capacity issue: Minister*. Accessed at <https://edition.mv/news/30455>

<sup>29</sup> PSM News (2024), *Hulhumale' requires additional six schools*. Accessed at <https://psmnews.mv/en/135005>

<sup>30</sup> The Edition (2024), *Salahuddin School To Run in Two Sessions*. Accessed at <https://edition.mv/news/32367>

- 10.4. These conditions have also been linked to rising cases of bullying and delinquency. In 2023, the Ministry of Education launched an investigation into a case involving a first-grade student whose hair and shorts were cut by another student—following five months of bullying previously reported by the family.<sup>31</sup> Despite repeated complaints, the school had reportedly taken no meaningful action. Other concerning trends include reports of students sharing vapes and pornographic materials within school premises.
- 10.5. The gap in education equity is being further exacerbated by the growth of private schools, which offer significantly higher quality education but are accessible only to the wealthy. Tuition fees range from MVR 3,000 to MVR 6,000 and above (approximately USD 196 to USD 390), excluding costs for books, uniforms, and other materials. In comparison, the minimum wage in the public sector is around USD 2 per hour, with many private sector workers earning even less.<sup>32</sup>
- 10.6. Previously, the presence of students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in public schools helped foster cross-class relationships and encouraged investment in public education by high-income families. With the rise of private schooling, this intermingling has disappeared, leading to a growing class divide and a risk of intergenerational inequality with long-term implications for social cohesion in the Maldives.
- 10.7. Private schools also boast superior infrastructure, including air-conditioned classrooms, while parents in public schools are often forced to crowdfund basic amenities such as fans or air conditioning—a pressing issue in the face of rising temperatures due to climate change.
- 10.8. Moreover, private schools offer a diverse curriculum, with multiple language options, extra-curricular activities, and participation in international programmes. By contrast, most public schools offer only two academic streams (Business and Science), along with

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<sup>31</sup> MV Plus (2023), *Education Ministry Probes Allegations of Bullying and Assault at Salahuddin School*. Accessed at <https://www.plus.mv/english/education-ministry-probes-allegations-of-bullying-and-assault-at-salahuddin-school/>

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Republic of Maldives, *Minimum Wage Order*. Accessed at <https://trade.gov.mv/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/minimum-wage-order-en-v01.pdf>

English, Mathematics, Dhivehi (Maldivian language), and Islam in secondary and higher secondary education. Humanities subjects—such as History, Geography, and Literature—are offered in very few public schools.

10.9. This growing disparity is not only fuelling wealth inequality but also creating a population less informed about history, civic responsibilities, and rights. The neglect of civic and rights-based education undermines citizens' ability to meaningfully participate in democracy, advocate for their rights, and support vulnerable and marginalised groups.

## **11. Recommendations**

11.1. Increase funding to the public education sector and ensure sufficient resources are allocated to meet the needs of all students.

11.2. Address socio-economic disparities in access to education and ensure equity in quality and facilities across all regions.

11.3. Ensure access to education for all children, including children with disabilities and those in remote and hard-to-reach areas.

11.4. Establish anti-bullying frameworks and independent grievance redress mechanisms; ensure equitable access to extracurricular activities and infrastructure in all schools; and incorporate civic and rights-based education as a core component of learning.