

UN Human Rights Committee Tells the Maldives: Radical Changes Are Needed

Geneva 12,13 July 2012. The United Nations Human Rights Committee finalized the examination of the initial periodic report of the Maldives, which took place on 12 and 13 July 2012 in Geneva. For the first time in history, the UN Human Rights Committee session was broadcast nationally in the country of review. Civil society of the Maldives welcomed the opportunity to witness the Committee's commentary as it unfolded.

Today marked the conclusion of an extensive first dialogue on the state of human rights in the Maldives. The discussion was dynamic, and in covering some highly controversial subject matter, moments of the dialogue were incendiary. The Committee did not hesitate to criticize the delegation in areas where the State will not fully embrace the Covenant, and it questioned information cited by the State that directly conflicted with both the State's own reports, and those from independent sources.

The State's firm and continued reservation to the Covenant's Article 18, the freedom of religion and belief, implicates a host of intertwining social, political, and cultural issues. The Committee made clear to the delegation that these issues will not be resolved until the State agrees to withdraw this reservation. The Committee also urged the delegation to understand that allowing the Islamic tenets of their Constitution to definitively supersede the human rights standards enshrined in the Covenant will mean a continued lack of protection for the human rights of the people of Maldives.

The Committee stated that incidents of torture in the Maldives appear both systematic and systemic. At one point, it confronted the State delegation with documented, detailed testimonies of victims of torture in the Maldives. The Committee expressed grave concern about the low number of these cases that have undergone investigation, and urged the delegation to set up an independent Commission of Inquiry to conduct criminal investigations and ensure compensation for all victims of torture.

Although the State says there is an unofficial moratorium on death penalty, the law sanctioning capital punishment still stands. As such, the Committee has asked the State to enact legislation to officially abolish the death penalty. The State itself has admitted that capital punishment does not deter crime.

Finally, the Committee is deeply concerned about the state of the judiciary in the Maldives. The State has admitted that this body's independence is seriously compromised. The Committee has said the judiciary is desperately in need of more serious training, and higher standards of qualification. As 6 of 7 Supreme Court judges are experts in Sharia law and nothing more, this court in particular is in need of radical readjustment. This must be done to guarantee just trials, and fair judgments for the people of Maldives.

The Committee concluded the session by stating that the Maldives must be serious about bringing itself into compliance with all aspects of the Covenant. This is an absolutely critical step in evolving into a fully functioning society – one that not only respects, but protects, the human rights of all people in the Maldives.

The Human Rights Committee will make its recommendations public at the end of its session, on 27 July 2012.

The archived webcast of the Maldives review can be seen at treatybodywebcast.org or <http://www.ccprcentre.org/country/maldives/>

For additional information on the review of the Maldives contact:

Redress: www.redress.org / info@redress.org

Find their report on torture and ill-treatment in the Maldives here:

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/ngos/REDRESS_Maldives_HRC105.pdf

http://www.ccprcentre.org/doc/HRC/Maldives/REDRESS_Maldives_HRC105.pdf

Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR): www.ccprcentre.org / info@ccprcentre.org

(Centre for Civil and Political Rights / A.Tucker)