



*For Immediate Release*

MDP/2006/PR-80

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2006 (Thursday)

### **MDP welcomes the report on the political situation in the Maldives prepared by the UK Conservative Party Human Rights Commission**

MDP welcomes the balanced and objective assessment of the political situation in the Maldives in the report prepared by Mr Benedict Rogers, Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission.

Mr Rogers' report, produced following discussions with the government and various other stakeholders, contains constructive recommendations to facilitate peaceful transition of the country to multi-party democracy through dialogue and consultation.

Mr Rogers' recommendations for the Government of Maldives include:

1. To release immediately and unconditionally the MDP Chairperson Mohamed Nasheed from house arrest, and drop all charges against him.
2. To release immediately and unconditionally Jennifer Latheef from house arrest and drop all charges against her.
3. To revise the proposed legislation on Freedom of Assembly, and especially to reduce the provision requiring 14 days' notice for permission to hold a protest, perhaps to three days' notice.
4. To stop all arbitrary arrests and detentions.
5. To stop all police brutality and violence by thugs allegedly controlled by the government.
6. To bring to justice the real perpetrators of violence.
7. To allow the protest planned for June 15 to proceed peacefully and without interruption.
8. To cease all harassment of the MDP and the media.
9. To allow all political parties to carry out their activities unhindered, including permitting the appearance of MDP spokesman on national television.

10. To register and approve Minivan Radio and other unregistered broadcasters.
11. To announce a timetable for the implementation of further reforms immediately, including reducing the powers of the President.
12. To fulfill these steps within the next six weeks, and invite the MDP and others to all party talks with President Gayoom, in the presence of representatives of the international community.

Mr Rogers has noted that he recommended the immediate release of Mr Mohamed Nasheed and Ms Jennifer Latheef because (a) “in both cases the charges of terrorism are completely inappropriate and disproportionate”, (b) “the evidence of the crimes they are alleged to have committed appears extremely weak and highly doubtful”, (c) “the conditions do not exist currently for a fair trial” and (d) “their release would be a significant gesture that would provide credibility for the reforms”.

The recommendations proposed in the report for the international community include:

1. To urge the Government of the Maldives to release Mr. Nasheed and Ms. Latheef immediately and unconditionally, preferably before their next court hearings on June 18.
2. To offer to facilitate and mediate in all-party talks.
3. To urge the Government of the Maldives to stop arbitrary arrests and detentions and police brutality, and to stop the activities of pro-Government thugs.
4. To consider measures, including an EU travel ban for members of the Government, if significant progress is not made immediately towards preventing arbitrary detentions and police brutality, and if Mr. Nasheed and Ms. Latheef are not released.
5. To send observers to trials and demonstrations, in particular to the proposed demonstration on June 15 and the hearings of Mr. Nasheed and Ms. Latheef’s cases on June 18.
6. To provide expertise and training opportunities to the Maldivian Government to assist in the reform process, including opportunities for the Police and Judiciary to study in established democracies such as the United Kingdom or Australia.
7. To provide assistance, including expertise and training in the functions of an opposition party, to the MDP.
8. To provide assistance, including expertise and training, to civil society and media organisations.

The recommendations in the report for MDP include:

1. To issue a clear statement expressing its willingness to engage in all party talks, subject to the release of Mr. Nasheed and Ms. Latheef.
2. To issue a clear statement condemning violence and committing to a peaceful transition to democracy.
3. To indicate its willingness to engage in constructive dialogue by reducing the frequency of demonstrations.

MDP welcomes the recommendations and reiterates yet again its pledge to engage in all party talks subject to demonstration of commitment to reform by President Gayoom's regime with the release of political prisoners Mr Nasheed and Ms Jennifer Latheef.

It was frustration over the systematic violation of human rights by the Government of Maldives and the use of brute force to suppress opposition to Gayoom's autocratic regime that led to the inception of MDP. The party condemns unequivocally the use of violence, will remain steadfast in its commitment to democracy, and will continue to use peaceful means in its struggle for justice and the rule of law.

MDP's commitment to non-violence was clearly demonstrated over the past year during which the party refrained from retaliation although thousands of its members were assaulted by police and gangs and the homes and property of the party's leadership were vandalised.

Freedom of assembly is an integral part of democracy which is also enshrined in the Maldives' constitution. In the past, MDP has carried out demonstrations for a purpose and focused on national issues which need government's attention. However, MDP is willing to reduce the frequency of demonstrations if the government of Maldives demonstrates a commitment to reform and feels that such a reduction is necessary for constructive dialogue.

MDP hopes that the international community and the Government of the Maldives will respond positively to the recommendations made in the report and give peaceful transition to a democracy in the Maldives a chance.

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