

Letter: The Maldives' fragile democracy is under threat once more
By The Guardian
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The outlook for democracy in the Maldives is deteriorating. Last week, former president Mohamed Nasheed, the country's first democratically elected leader, was put under "island arrest" and banned from leaving the capital Male (Report, 27 September). This limits not only his freedom of movement but also his ability to mount an effective democracy campaign across his own country.

The ban was then followed by a series of orders to appear in court this week on spurious civil and criminal charges – a strategy of legal harassment pursued by the illegitimate regime of Mohamed Waheed. Its sole purpose is to sideline Nasheed from active politics and further stamp out any political opposition.

The circumstances surrounding Nasheed's removal from power earlier this year remain a matter of dispute, but other matters are beyond doubt.

Since February:

- No date has been set for free and fair elections by this unelected regime, which has links to former dictator Abdul Gayoom.
- Nearly 2,000 peaceful demonstrators calling for elections have been detained by security forces, many beaten and hospitalised.
- Amnesty International has described events in the Maldives as a "human rights crisis", reporting widespread police brutality and arbitrary arrests.
- The Federation of International Human Rights has concluded that since the removal of Nasheed, the Maldives has suffered a deterioration in democracy and freedom of assembly and expression.

Sadly, much of this remains largely unreported by the world's media.

A young and fragile democracy is under threat once more and we therefore call upon Mohammed Waheed to set a firm date for free and fair elections immediately, to end the culture of systematic police brutality and to release all political detainees including opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed.

We also call upon the international community, including the British government and the rest of the Commonwealth, to condemn this latest campaign of harassment, to demand an end to all human rights abuses and to urge the current regime to hold democratic elections at the earliest opportunity.

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