

## Maldives: Report exposes violent repression of opposition supporters

By Amnesty International

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Maldivian security forces have continued to commit serious human rights violations since the transfer of presidential power in the Indian Ocean chain of islands on 7 February this year, Amnesty International said in a new report today.

In stark contrast to the Maldives' reputation as a tourist's paradise, the report documents targeted attacks on opposition supporters as well as bystanders at demonstrations.

"Police have carried out beatings, arbitrary detentions, attacks on the injured in hospitals and torture, yet not a single criminal case has been filed against those responsible," said Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International's Maldives researcher.

"Without an end to – and accountability for – these human rights violations, any attempt at political reconciliation in the Maldives will be meaningless."

The other side of paradise: a human rights crisis in the Maldives is based on interviews with scores of Maldivians about the violence around 7 February 2012, many of which were conducted during a three-week visit to the country in February and early March. Those interviewed included survivors of human rights violations and their families, lawyers, activists, medical professionals, security officials and senior politicians – among them former President Mohamed Nasheed and current President Mohamed Waheed.

Maldivian Member of Parliament Mariya Ahmed Didi described her brutal treatment in February by security forces after she was detained at an opposition rally:

"Police and military officers forcefully opened my eyelids. They went for the eye that had been injured the day before. They sprayed pepper spray directly into my eye. Then they did the same with the other eye... At one point when they were beating me one of them shouted: 'Is she still not dead?'"

Amnesty International's report documents how police and military personnel have used unnecessary force against peaceful demonstrators – including striking people on the head with batons, aiming pepper spray directly into demonstrators' eyes, and kicking them.

State security forces have targeted individuals apparently for their political affiliation – including ministers, parliamentarians and supporters of the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party.

Hundreds of people have been arrested, and most of them injured by police. Methods used include beatings, the use of pepper spray in the eyes, being denied drinking water and being held in dog cages. Police also tracked down injured protesters in hospitals, to beat them again.

The Maldivian authorities have failed to bring those responsible for such violations to justice, the report found.

“There has been a complete failure to so far prosecute any of the police or military officers involved in committing these human rights violations,” said Abbas Faiz.

“Serious failings in the Maldivian justice system – including the absence of codified laws capable of providing justice equally to all and the appointment of judges who lack formal training in law without serious scrutiny of their legal qualifications – have led to a system that entrenches impunity and is prone to political bias.”

Amnesty International calls on the Maldives authorities to ensure prompt, independent and impartial investigations into allegations of violence by officials and reparations to survivors.

All security forces must be instructed not to attack demonstrators and be given adequate training to ensure they comply with international law enforcement and human rights standards.

The criminal justice system must be reformed to guarantee its independence and impartiality.

The international community, which has so far focused its efforts on resolving political differences in the Maldives, must not turn a blind eye to the country's human rights crisis. It must press the Maldivian authorities to ensure an immediate end to human rights violations, justice for the survivors, and to provide assistance for appropriate police training and judicial reform, the organisation said.

Several of Amnesty International's findings and human rights recommendations are reflected in the 30 August report of the Commission of National Inquiry into events around the change of government on 7 February. The Commission concluded, among other things, that with respect to "allegations of police brutality and acts of intimidation, there is an urgent need for investigations to proceed and to be brought to public knowledge with perpetrators held to account."

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