

Money laundering allegations must be investigated; government must end harassment of civil society

PRESS RELEASE - September 09, 2016

At a time when countless allegations are being levelled against top government officials, parliamentarians as well as heads of independent institutions for having been involved in one of the biggest corruption scandals in the country, the investigative documentary 'Stealing Paradise' by Al Jazeera and the subsequent news articles published on their website have given reason for extreme concern.

The accusations made in this documentary clearly indicate a lack of sincerity and blatant abuse of power. They were sourced from evidence acquired through text messages from three mobile phones belonging to the former Vice President Ahmed Adeb as well as testimony from some of the key accused in the case brings forth several areas of grave concern.

These accusations include:

- The highest ranking members of the state and government including the Vice President as well as the Governor of the Central Bank were involved in a massive attempt to launder USD1.5 billion.
- Top government officials made illegal deals through corrupt means to sell off national property at a devalued price and at the same time pocketed the profits made out of these trades.
- The three men who were actively involved in the biggest corruption scandal accused the President of the country as being an accomplice in the process and having gained financial benefits through the involvement.
- The text messages in the documentary reveal attempts by the President of Maldives to undermine and influence the investigation of the kidnapping of the journalist Ahmed Rilwan.
- The revelation that the incident of arson at Raajje TV was a calculated criminal act perpetuated by the State with the participation of Maldives Police Service, a state institution tasked with protecting and serving the people. This was successively echoed when it was revealed that illegal orders were given and accepted to blast the Auditor General's Office which employs some 200 staff.
- The reiteration of the accusation of governmental control over the judiciary as well as the reach of corruption influencing the decisions of the Courts particularly the continuous influence of the President and the government on the Supreme Court.

As a result of these grave accusations, Transparency Maldives calls on the State to pay close heed to the following recommendations.

- To ensure that the judiciary, parliament as well as the senior officials of the State are free from corruption by establishing a system by which they will be mandated to disclose their financial statements.
- While the right to express oneself in matters of national and individual importance is a constitutional right, it was clearly observed that those who gave information to the documentary were intimidated, violating their constitutional right to freedom of expression as well. Transparency Maldives urges the government to immediately cease from such intimidation and violation of the fundamental rights of its citizens.
- To provide adequate protection for whistleblowers in order to create a conducive environment to stop the spread of corruption.
 - To utilize the information in the documentary to hasten a broader investigation free from political influence and to ensure transparency at every step of such an investigation.
 - To ensure concrete steps to reacquire the faith and trust in state institutions.

These recommendations can only be achieved by ensuring that legislations formulated and amended at the Parliament are inclusive of public opinion and sentiment and by ensuring that such legislation does not violate the constitutional rights of the people. In addition, it is imperative that crucial state institutions like the Auditor General's Office, the Anti-Corruption Commission as well as the Prosecutor General's Office act in a timely manner to investigate and take necessary action against the cases of grand corruption being revealed with adequate evidence.

Transparency Maldives believes that the widespread impunity in cases of corruption and the abuse of power is a consequence of the powers of the state being held in the firm grip of a few powerful people. As a result fundamental rights are curtailed and the developmental pace of the country is also greatly decelerated.

We call on all state institutions to take necessary and effective measures to halt the vicious spread of corruption to the highest levels of power. We also call on the political parties to insist on integrity at all levels in order to rid the country of this systemic corruption and to do everything possible to save state property by closing all possible avenues leading towards corruption. It is a collective as well as an individual responsibility to hold elected representatives to account in order salvage the country from the bleakness that is corruption.



/TransparencyMaldives



@TransparencyMV



www.transparency.mv