

Transparency Maldives calls on the Government of Maldives to reconsider the hasty and detrimental decision to withdraw from the Commonwealth and to consider public opinion on the matter.

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Transparency Maldives (TM) is deeply disappointed by the Maldivian government's decision to leave the Commonwealth on 13 October 2016. The Commonwealth has been an intrinsic part of the country's political, economic and social development since 1982 and an ardent advocate for democracy in the Maldives. To withdraw from the Commonwealth without any public consultation and in response to the Commonwealth's attempts to hold the government accountable, demonstrates disregard for public opinion in matters that directly impact the people, and the government's inability to live up to the inherent principles of good governance, democracy and human rights enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter.

The timing of this decision also raises a number of questions about the government's motives for leaving the Commonwealth. It comes at a critical juncture when the country is on the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) Agenda with clear and straightforward recommendations to improve the gradually eroding democratic principles and the derogation from human rights standards in the Maldives. While the recently planned all party talks supported by the Commonwealth and the UN saw some hope for political reconciliation, the government's decision has certainly impeded that very crucial process the Maldives needs for the upcoming Presidential Elections in 2018. The hope for a free and fair election hinges on political stability, State accountability and public trust that is greatly lacking in the country at the moment. The present move takes that process on an entirely different trajectory; one that forces international support and commitment towards the installation of democratic values to be misconstrued as encroachments onto the sovereignty of the Maldives.

The most recent statement from the CMAG identified several reasons for including Maldives in its formal agenda. There was also a sense of hope that things can and must improve. However, it is disheartening to realize that one of the oldest partners in development of democracy and human rights in the Maldives will no longer be able to play a role in the country's future, despite an overwhelming public outcry against the decision to withdraw.

TM calls on the Maldivian government to immediately reconsider this hasty and detrimental decision and to consider public opinion in this issue. TM also notes that withdrawal from the Commonwealth will not bring an end to the criticism and concerns raised by civil society, media, political parties and the international community. Only by genuine political will, reconciliation and respect for local and international democratic principles will there be an end to local and international scrutiny.

Finally, TM urges the government not to jeopardize and undermine the Maldives' standing internationally. Just as the present generation has benefitted from the countless opportunities and partnership facilitated by the Commonwealth, it is reprehensible to deprive the future generations from similar opportunities by leaving the Commonwealth.

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