

Transparency Maldives to Observe Local Council Elections

Transparency Maldives (TM) will observe the upcoming local council elections currently scheduled to be held on 6 March 2017. The key objective of this observation will be to understand the challenges facing the electoral system, identify issues in the larger electoral environment and to provide meaningful recommendations to address electoral issues in the Maldives.

Approximately 25 registered observers will support our election day observation. In addition to election day observation, TM also will monitor the run up to the election and the larger electoral environment. In this regard, TM has consulted relevant stakeholders including the Elections Commission and political parties, with further consultations due over the next few weeks.

Based on past election observation findings, Transparency Maldives notes two key trends in Maldivian elections:

1. Voting day processes are generally well administered and fair.
2. Issues such as vote buying, misuse of state resources, intimidation of political opponents and undue restriction of space for political activity tend to take place in the run up to the election.

Based on this, Transparency Maldives will focus on the following aspects in our observation of the local council election:

1. The electoral environment of Maldives.
2. The electoral legal framework.
3. Election day proceedings.

We note with concern that the local council election will be held against a backdrop of concerning level of repression of civil and political liberties in the country. Political persecution is at an all time high with all opposition political leaders currently in prison, under some form of detention or operating out of the country, in exile.

The introduction of a host of laws and regulations that undermine and counter democratic norms and freedoms has put serious constraints on freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. The newly enacted Protection of Reputation and Freedom of Expression Act, has criminalized defamation and undermined press freedom in the country, and the amendment to the Freedom of Assembly Act has placed serious constraints on political activity. Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and the

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freedom of expression are prerequisites for a free and fair election and are necessary to ensure a campaigning environment, free of intimidation and undue influence.

As of now the election day has been delayed thrice, citing various reasons. Internal conflict within the ruling Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM) led to a civil suit which consequently postponed the initial date (14 January 2017) scheduled for voting. We also note that repeated election delays have created a tradition of undermining legal and constitutional deadlines set for elections. Such actions contravene democratic principles and undermine the integrity of elections.

In the coming days, Transparency Maldives will continue to publicise information of its election observation. On election day we will hold a press conference after voting concludes to share our observations with the public. A final election report will be published following the election.

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