

Transparency Maldives calls on the Parliament to immediately reconsider criminalisation of defamation which will further restrict freedom of expression in Maldives.

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Transparency Maldives (TM) calls on the Parliament of the Maldives to immediately reconsider the proposed bill criminalising defamation. At a time when fundamental civil and political liberties are under stringent restrictions of the State, the proposed defamation bill will be a further step back for press freedom and freedom of speech in the Maldives.

While recognising that a defamation law is required to protect people's reputation, defamation must not be treated as a criminal matter but as a civil matter. Criminalising defamation will restrict freedom of expression as enshrined in Article 27 of the Constitution of Maldives.

Similarly, UN Human Rights committee, (UNHRCm), considers the criminalisation of libel to be a violation of freedom of expression and to be inconsistent with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Following concerns raised by journalists, civil society organizations, political parties and international actors on the initial draft, there was a glimmer of hope that this bill would be substantially revised in line with the Constitution of the Maldives and international best practice. Instead, a revised defamation bill has been tabled which does not address the concerns raised by journalists and human rights advocates in the country. Similarly, concerns raised by the Maldives Media Council were also disregarded.

Anyone convicted under the proposed Law could be fined between MVR 50,000 to MVR 2 million and if unable to pay the fine, face a jail term of 3 to 6 months.

While many democratic countries do have defamation laws, it is important to note that such countries also have mechanisms and conditions set to promote and protect free speech. However, in the Maldives free speech is in decline and the State has consistently failed to protect freedom of speech.

This bill is yet another attempt to stifle freedom of expression and dissenting voice in the Maldives. This proposed law will severely restrict media freedoms and the people's ability to hold the Government to account.

Transparency Maldives calls on the Parliament to reconsider criminalising defamation and substantially review the proposed law so that it is in line with accepted international standards and the Constitution of the Maldives.

ENDS

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