



Human Rights Conference 2017

Conference Organizer: Transparency Maldives

Founded in 2007, Transparency Maldives (TM) is the national contact of Transparency International (TI) in the Maldives. TM is a non-partisan organization that promotes collaboration, awareness and other initiatives to improve governance and eliminate corruption in the Maldives. Since its inception in 2007, TM has undertaken research, advocacy, outreach and awareness raising and capacity building initiatives on a range of areas including electoral reform, right to information, freedom of association, migrant worker rights, climate finance integrity, civic education and local governance.

Project Human Rights (PHR), funded by the British High Commission, is a cross-cutting human rights program implemented by TM. The main objective of PHR is to reclaim democratic space and reengage in human rights discourse in the Maldives through advocacy, campaigns, trainings and dialogue with key human rights actors. To achieve the project and the larger objectives of TM, one of the key activities of the project is to hold multi-stakeholder debate and discussions on key human rights issues in the country.

The First Human Rights Conference

The first Human Rights Conference organized by TM, titled ‘Include All, Exclude Non’ was held from the 8th – 9th of December 2016. Addressing a wide range of issues, the 2016 conference, brought together state actors, civil society organizations, religious groups and human rights activists to discuss issues and identify ways to collaborate. The conference highlighted key human rights challenges in the country including the problems faced in providing services to survivors of domestic and gender based violence, the inadequate legal support for victims of human rights violations, and the regressive legislations that undermine the State obligation to respect, protect and fulfill human rights as well as counter religious fundamentalism. In addition, discussions were held on the rights of people with disabilities, challenges hindering women’s political participation, human rights related to climate change and the misunderstandings between Islam and human rights. (Please refer to attached Annex 1 with summary of issues and recommendations)

The 2017 Conference will focus the increasing impact of violent crimes on the sanctity of life in the Maldives and how the curtailing of fundamental freedoms like freedom of expression and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly are impacting the assurance of the right to life.

Conference theme: The Right to life

Right to life arises from the moral principle that every person has the right to live and should not be harmed or killed by another human being. Its sanctity is often spoken of in relation to action or inaction by the State to protect and respect the lives of the people who live within its jurisdiction.

The right to life is a fundamental and inherent human right that is both sacred in its own right as well as a necessary prerequisite for the realization of other fundamental human rights. Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) realizes the right to life as an inherent and supreme right from which no derogation is permitted even during extraordinary circumstances. According to the General Comment No. 36 to the ICCPR, right to life should not be interpreted narrowly. It entitles individuals to be free from acts or omissions intended or expected to lead to the unnatural or premature death as well as to enjoy a life with dignity.¹ Article 6 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to life to everyone including those convicted of the most heinous of crimes.

The fundamental provisions concerning the right to life is associated with those aspects that the State either fails to protect through omission or actively partakes in through policies and practices that demean the human dignity of a person. The discourse on right to life in the Maldives is often undermined either by an incessant focus on the former in place of the latter. It is also common to see the increasing crime rates and unnatural and premature deaths as a result, being used as an excuse to undermine the right to life by calling and advocating for the death penalty.

The theme right to life was chosen particularly because of the nuanced conversation that needs to be had about it in the Maldives. The discourse on the right to life, for the purposes of this Conference will focus on both the inaction of the State that has

¹General comment No. 36 on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life, Human Rights Committee

brought forth the unnatural and premature deaths of people as well as the implications of the deteriorating law and order situation on the right to life. The Conference will also focus on the importance of realizing the fundamental freedoms like freedom of expression, media and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly for a holistic understanding of the right to life. The Conference will also focus on the intersecting issues in these two aspects (right to life from the perspective of the State failing to protect and the State proactively derogating from its responsibility to uphold the sanctity of life) of understanding the right to life.

The Conference will focus on the following aspects of Right to life.

- The Right to life in the International Covenants.
- Freedom of Expression and the Right to life
- Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and the Right to life.
- Right to life and State Responsibilities
- Right to life in Islam
- Discourse about Capital Punishment

We also hope to conclude the conference with a Declaration reaffirming the need for State commitment to uphold the sanctity of life. This Declaration will be drawn using the conference presentations and dialogue between participants. It is envisaged that the Declaration will act as a local impetus to further the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in elaborating Article 6 of ICCPR through its revised General Comment to the Article. The Declaration will also serve as a civil society response to the overall issue of right to life as well as an aspirational document to voice out the concerns.

Conference Participation

TM will make a public announcement on the 28th of September 2017 calling for interested presenters to apply with a short abstract 200-300 words of their presentation.

Submissions are encouraged from individuals and organizations from the following areas:

- Human rights activism



- Lawyers and legal professionals working on human rights.
- Victims and witnesses or those impacted by violent crimes.
- State and non state actors and organizations working within the criminal justice system.
- University students (particularly those studying Law, Sharia, Human Rights)

Successful applicants will be informed on October 15th.

In addition to the presenters, TM will also invite selected participants from relevant stakeholder groups to contribute to the Conference. The Conference will also have participation from an international expert.

Day 1 of the Conference will feature presentations on thematic areas and Q & A sessions. Each session will have a rapporteur who will note down the key recommendations to be included in the Declaration.

Day 2 of the Conference will focus on drafting and finalizing the Declaration. Participants will be divided into two groups to deliberate, focusing on the following areas:

- a) State Responsibility to Protect the Right to life.
- b) Right to life and the criminal justice system.

The Declaration will focus recommendations based on these two distinct and yet interrelated areas.

The Conference will conclude with a press conference to publicize the Declaration as to lay out future steps in ensuring the realization of the Declaration.