

PRESS RELEASE



Today Transparency Maldives released the findings of the assessment of the Maldives Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). This initiative is an effort spearheaded by Transparency International intended to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs). Within the framework of this methodology, seven key aspects of the ACC were assessed and scored. These areas were: the ACC's Legal Independence and status; Prevention, Education and Outreach; Detection and Investigation; Co-operation with other agencies; and Accountability and Oversight.

For the study the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) of Maldives was assessed on its performance during a two year review period, from July 2014 to July 2016. Scoring was based on a literature review of law, media reports and previous assessments of the ACC, followed by interviews and focus group discussions with ACC staff, Commissioners and relevant stakeholders.

From a scale of a 100, the ACC received a score of 58 for overall effectiveness, which is moderate. By comparison the ACA of Bangladesh scored 61 and the ACA of Bhutan scored over 70. To receive a high score an ACA must score over 67; and any score below 34 is considered low. While the ACC performed adequately in carrying out its tasks, and performed exceptionally well with regard to its Prevention and Education efforts, the report illuminates several areas of opportunity for improvement.

The ACC scored lowest with regard to cooperation with other organizations chiefly due to the poor working relationship between the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) and the ACC. As the ACC does not possess the discretion to prosecute cases, it is essential that the working relationship between these two institutions be improved, especially in light of the poor record of convictions for corruption related offences. During the review period there was only one conviction for a corruption related crime. A memorandum of understanding has recently been signed between the ACC and the PGO, intended to rectify issues that have prevented effective collaboration between the PGO and the ACC in the past.

While the report finds that the ACC is generally autonomous in conducting investigations and setting its own regulations, the ACC Presidents acceptance of a luxury flat at a significantly discounted price by the government elicits question about the institution's practical independence and integrity. Furthermore, the report also assesses whether or not the ACC has been used as a weapon against a political opponent of the ruling government. No solid proof of such an event occurring was found the review period and hence did not affect scoring. However, the ACC's recent decision to summon MP Farish Maumoon ahead of a no-confidence motion against the pro-government Speaker of the House was not included in the report as it was outside of the review period.

The report further finds that the staff retention rate of the ACC is extremely low with a 25% turnover in its investigation department this year alone. The ACC's inability to retain experienced staff is especially problematic as the report illuminates that there is a pressing need for the ACC to increase expertise in conducting investigations; it was noted that current investigations are overly reliant on witness testimony and furthermore there is a lack of skill in carrying out investigations into complex financial crimes. Additionally there is a need for the ACC to more proactively engage the public and explain delays in reporting on the findings of prominent corruption scandals such as the MMPRC Grand Corruption scandal.

With regard to oversight of the institution this is a responsibility that falls under the responsibility of the Parliamentary Committee on Independent Institutions. During the review period, this committee has neglected this responsibility in total, and there is no practical oversight of the ACC.

It is finally worth reporting that like other independent local institutions government provided funding to the ACC is unstable, with budget reductions occurring in the past two years, which limits the scope of the ACC's work with regard to travel and outreach, funding training opportunities, and expanding the physical space of its offices.