

Transparency Maldives is gravely concerned by the implications of the Media Commission Bill submitted to the Parliament on 22 October 2017, on the already dwindling freedoms of media and expression in the Maldives despite the Constitutional provisions guaranteeing these very rights. At a time when specific broadcast media are being disproportionately intimidated using the Anti Defamation and Freedom of Expression Act ratified in August 2016, Transparency Maldives believes the present Bill, by creating a single Commission to fulfill the role of the Media Council and the Broadcasting Commission, will expand its sphere of state control on print and social media as well.

Today we are witnessing the State using the Broadcasting Commission to intimidate and silence broadcast media and journalists critical of or questioning the policies of the government through hefty fines and/or threats of criminal prosecution. But this Bill has the possibility to allow for this intimidation to extend to published media, blogs and even social media posts. It is imperative for the people be cognizant, during the debate of this Bill at the Parliament, of the negative implication this Bill might have on the already dwindling freedom of media in the Maldives.

The level of media freedom in Maldives is at an all time low with the country ranking 117 out of 180 in the 2017 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders. The present Bill submitted to the Parliament has the propensity to bring the ranking even lower. Transparency Maldives therefore calls upon the Parliament to immediately publicize the provisions of this proposed Bill and to allow for proper and meaningful public consultation. We are troubled by the increasing number of legislations and policies that are passed without any real public consultations leading to further violations of fundamental human rights of the Maldivian people. We call on the Government of Maldives to fully respect its human rights obligations as stipulated in the Constitution of the Maldives as well as the international human rights mechanisms of which Maldives is party to.