

Transparency Maldives calls to remove all impediments to a free and fair election

In preparation to observe the 2018 Presidential Election, Transparency Maldives has travelled to 20 atolls and trained about 400 observers and volunteers. Those trained include election day observers who will observe ballot boxes in the atolls, most industrial islands and resorts, and boxes placed outside of the country as well as volunteers assisting in the work of the election observation centre at Transparency Maldives. The objective of the observation is to engage people in the electoral process and increase the trust in and integrity of the electoral processes.

Although the main focus of most elections happen to be the voting day process, a free and fair election is incumbent also upon the larger electoral environment. Regressive measures in the electoral environment will impede upon a free, fair and inclusive election. Transparency Maldives published a 'Pre-Election Assessment' in May 2018 that highlighted some key concerns in the electoral environment. These include:

- Questions regarding the independence and impartiality of the Elections Commission.
- Challenges faced by the media.
- Abuse of state resources by the government.
- Lack of a competitive political environment.

While the recommendations made by Transparency Maldives in its Pre-Election Assessment remain unrealized, new problems and concerns have emerged in the electoral environment. These include:

- Lack of proper solutions and redress to the problems raised during the re-registration process.
- Leakage of confidential personal information of voters from the Elections Commission servers to the ruling party.
- Lack of equal campaign opportunities for the opposition.
- Government abuse of state resources and employees, particularly the state media for their campaign.
- Exclusion of CSO representatives at the National Election Advisory Committee.
- Amendment of electoral legislations to curtail fundamental rights and freedoms.
- Lack of transparency in the selection of electoral officials and allegations of ruling party activists heading most of the polling stations in the country.

While the main objective of an election is to envisage the choices of the people, Transparency Maldives calls upon the Elections Commission to immediately remove all impediments to exercise that choice through a free and fair election. We believe that unless these issues are resolved, it is very likely that the outcome of such an election will not be accepted by the people.

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