



Joint statement by CSOs regarding sexual violence against children and women in the Maldives

10th May 2022

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Over the past few months on numerous occasions, we have jointly expressed our concerns to various law enforcement authorities and oversight institutions regarding the State’s lack of implementation of sexual offences laws. We note with regret that our concerns have not resulted in a push towards justice for survivors, but instead, a disquieting level of inaction by the relevant authorities.

We note the increased reports of sexual violence cases and express grave concern regarding the lack of prevention efforts and the relatively few numbers of cases that are seen through to justice. We recall the recent cases of sexual violence against minors, particularly, the questionable investigation into the case of sexual violence against a minor in Addu City, as well as the release of a perpetrator who has committed sexual violence against six minors. In both cases and myriad others, justice has been repeatedly denied to survivors by several systemic failures, either through impunity granted to perpetrators or through negligence of the prosecution. These actions have corroded public faith in the justice system, reversing the intended effects of the laws we have in the Maldives against sexual violence.

While the Maldives has adopted all United Nations Conventions against sexual violence and passed formal laws to adopt them, there is a visible lack of State’s commitment to take nationwide preventative measures, strengthen the protection systems, fully implement the laws, and hold institutions accountable for their inaction. This inaction has exacerbated the lived realities of children and women experiencing sexual violence across the country. Today, sexual violence is one of the most pressing human rights issues that affect children and women in the Maldives, raising questions about the State’s commitment towards protecting citizens in vulnerable situations, and advancement of the rule of law.

Additionally, the prevalent culture of victim blaming remains one of the biggest factors that reinforces perpetrator impunity and the prevailing notion that sexual abuse is the fault of the survivor, resulting in a needless cycle that continues to deny justice to those who need it. The lack of commitment of the State towards ensuring justice for victims is a facet of this culture that needs to be addressed and eradicated.

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We call on the Government to take immediate measures to strengthen the current prevention and protection systems and to *fully* implement the sexual offences laws. We reiterate that the enforcement of laws is the foremost method of giving weight to our legislations.

We remind the oversight institutions of their duty to hold law enforcement and social protection institutions accountable and urge them to become an active partner in transforming our systems for the better.

Finally, we call on the community at large to address prevailing social norms that perpetuate the culture of impunity for sexual violence offenders.

All children and women have the fundamental right to safety and security. On the occasion of Children's Day, it is with grave concern that we remind the State to undertake its duty to fulfill its obligation towards eliminating sexual violence.