

Press Statement – 23 August 2022

Transparency Maldives calls on the State to ensure accountability and recover funds lost to corruption in the procurement of 75 ventilators during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government of the Maldives spent over MVR30 million to procure 75 ventilators through Dubai-based Executors General Trading. While the perpetrators of this alleged corruption have not been made accountable, we are deeply concerned that the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has decided to file the cases of eight individuals that were involved in this transaction, after the cases were sent back to ACC by the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO).

In the two years since the alleged corruption came to light, the case of eleven individuals involved in this procurement, including the former Minister of Health Abdullah Ameen, has been previously submitted by the ACC to PGO three times. Following the fourth submission, the cases of eight individuals was sent back by the PGO without charge, and the cases were subsequently filed by the ACC. This raises questions on the political will of the current administration to tackle corruption and the capacity of the investigative bodies to conduct independent investigations. The lack of transparency also raises concerns regarding the selective application of justice and the impunity enjoyed by those in power, affecting the public trust in the system.

The upfront payment of 90 per cent of the total value, the use of single source procurement procedures using false information, the absence of a performance and advance payments guarantee, and selecting a brand of ventilators that was not agreed by the Bid Committee in order to award the contract to Executors General Trading all show that an unfair advantage was given to a particular party. We call for a proper investigation into this matter, to bring those responsible to justice and make them accountable, and recover the money lost from the Maldivian public.

Furthermore, Transparency Maldives calls on the institutions responsible for investigating such cases to put aside their own interests and differences, and to act with integrity to make public interest the highest priority. Identifying and taking legal action against those who have directly and indirectly benefited from this ventilator corruption is an important step towards addressing corruption vulnerabilities and closing the doors to corruption in the Maldives.

We further call the Government of the Maldives and relevant institutions to take the necessary measure to eliminate corruption:

- Proactively disclose as much information as possible regarding these corruption scandals to the public to increase trust,
- Amend and implement all policies and procedures to align with the Government's policy of zero tolerance to corruption,

- Ensure that independent institutions are free from political influences and are fully independent to undertake their legal obligations

Furthermore, we call on the Parliament to ensure that all institutions mandated to fight corruption are financially competent, trained, and well-resourced to discharge their responsibilities. We also call on the Ministry of Finance to ensure that all State institutions properly implement the public finance laws, regulations and policies, and take action against those who violate the public finance laws, regulations and policies hold them accountable.

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