

## **Press statement on the closing of polls for the 2024 Parliamentary Election**

21 April 2024 - Transparency Maldives appreciates and thanks the nearly 270 observers and volunteers in our observer network, deployed across the country and abroad in Colombo, Sri Lanka and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at 206 polling stations. Without them this domestic observation would not have been possible.

Transparency Maldives believes that an independent observation effort at this scale promotes greater levels of trust in our electoral processes. Our observers played a crucial role in ensuring the transparency of electoral processes in the Maldives.

The methodology used for this observation was based on systematic random sampling. Our observers collected both qualitative and quantitative data and our approach allowed us to generate results generalisable to the entire population.

The following are the key findings we would like to highlight:

### **1. Polling day**

The election day processes were transparent and generally well-administered. We are happy to report that the election has been peaceful. TM congratulates Maldivian citizens for their spirited engagement in the democratic process.

The following are key findings which we would like to highlight from our observation:

- 99.5% of polling stations closed before 6.00 PM.
- Voter registry was overall well managed, with a very few cases where people were not able to vote because their names were not on the voter registry or their details did not match.
- Assisted voters were spread across 78.6% of the polling stations.
- Voting was temporarily halted in 3.4% of the polling stations. 70.5% of the cases were interventions at the direction of the Presiding Officer.
- We note that police entered 11.7% of polling stations. However, in 66.6% of such cases, interventions occurred at the invitation of the Presiding Officer as rules allow.
- Candidates were represented during the counting, making the process transparent and adding to its credibility. 1 or more candidate representatives were present at 96.1% of the polling stations.
- Disputes relating to the validity of ballot papers were only reported at 12.6% of the polling stations.

However, TM calls on all actors to take immediate measures to address wider issues, including vote buying, lack of transparency in political finance, abuse of state resources, barriers for women's equal participation in the electoral processes, and bring long overdue reforms to the electoral legal framework.

### **2. Abuse of State Resources**

Abuse of state resources and authority by successive regimes allow those in power to campaign at the expense of the state coffers. TM continued to observe the abuse of state resources through the campaign period, including the inauguration or completion of projects, including;

- Ceremonies held to mark the awarding or inauguration of at least 6 development projects, worth over MVR 680 million, posted on the official social media accounts of State-Owned Enterprises and Government Ministries with 48 hours to go for Election Day
- Amendments to at least 3 administrative areas of islands, transferring the jurisdiction of different lagoons and uninhabited islands made in 4 days ahead of the election. Similar amendments were brought on Election Day to 2 administrative areas by Presidential Decree.

- With less than 20 hours to go for the opening of polls, the Ministry of Housing, Land and Urban Development released a press statement announcing that the current government will be providing housing and supporting the securing of housing loans to those who were “deprived of” securing housing under the previous government’s social housing projects. Specifically, to those that did not secure housing under the TATA housing flats in 2010.

Introducing critical changes to key policies and announcements of new development project often related to essential services and basic rights fulfilment, during the campaign period and especially in the run up to the election day, can hinder voters’ right to choose a candidate without influence.

Relevant actors, including the ACC and the MPS, should strengthen monitoring, investigation, and submission for prosecution, of incidences of vote buying and misuse of state resources. The Parliament must also review and incorporate into law, provisions in the ACC guidelines on the use of state resources by the incumbent government during the election period.

### **3. Vote Buying**

All stakeholders interviewed for TM’s pre-election assessment raised concerns over vote buying taking place in the current election cycle. TM also received information of widespread allegations of vote-buying during the campaign period and on election day.

However, lack of monitoring of vote buying and weakness in speedy and successful investigation and enforcement remain key challenges.

### **4. Lack of political and campaign finance transparency**

Deep flaws in the standards, practices and poor oversight have led to the lack of transparency in political and campaign financing in elections, including the parliamentary election. When political parties and individual candidates do not fully disclose their source of funds, their potential conflict of interests are unclear, and thereby allows vested interests to override public interest when elected as MPs.

TM recommends addressing the gaps in the electoral legal framework and implementation of existing provisions to facilitate public scrutiny, ensure periodic reporting and an effective oversight mechanism for political finance. We also reiterate our calls for the Parliament to expedite the passing of the Asset Declaration Bill.

### **5. Women political participation**

Only 43 women out of 368 candidates contested the Parliamentary Election, out of which only 3 were elected according to the provisional results. Maldives is ranked at 175 out of 184 countries highlighted in the [Inter-Parliamentary Union’s index of parliaments](#) in terms of gender balance and scores the lowest in the South Asia region.

It is imperative that relevant authorities identify and address the barriers for women’s equal political participation. Political Parties must work proactively to review internal mechanisms and policies to address challenges to women’s representation and work increasing women’s representation in elections.

### **6. Other issues**

Additional issues that need to be addressed are:

1. Constituency delineation legal framework and processes that result in assignation of voters to constituencies based on permanent address, robbing voters of effective representation. Relevant actors, including the Parliament, should debate and review constituency allocation based on the permanent address system. Such a review should also consider the issue of equity between urban centres, especially Male, and the rest of the country.
2. Lack of effective long-term voter and civic education on issues such as vote buying, political finance transparency and equality of women in political participation.

Transparency Maldives congratulates all winning candidates and urges all relevant actors to reform the electoral systems to improve and increase confidence in electoral systems in the Maldives.

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