

Joint Press Release calling on the Government to Conduct Thorough Public Consultation Prior to Right to Information (RTI) Act Amendment



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06 October 2024-

2024 marks 10 years since the ratification of the RTI Act in the Maldives. The RTI Act has proven instrumental in empowering communities, promoting citizen participation, and holding the government and public institutions accountable.

As the Act concerns a fundamental human right guaranteed to all by the Constitution of the Maldives, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, we believe that any amendments must be carefully considered prior to amendment. This includes the considerations of marginalized groups in our society, such as women, people with disabilities, individuals in state custody and migrant workers. We also highlight the importance of ensuring that any proposed amendments to the RTI Act are developed in consultation with civil society organizations, information officers, local councils, associations, media and the public at large. We highlight that considerations and observations from the lived experiences of RTI practitioners and civil society are vital for an effective information regime.

RTI Practitioners and civil society organizations have compiled various studies on the RTI regime in the Maldives and have invaluable knowledge and experience in the area. Findings from various studies indicate low levels of compliance under proactive disclosure of information. Furthermore, non-disclosure and delays from institutions were found to be common, indicating the need to strengthen the implementation of the law. Aside from the Act itself, other legislation and policies regarding the information management, data handling and communication from state institutions play a crucial role in ensuring our Right to Information. Without improvements in these areas, amendments to the RTI Act alone will not suffice.

We, the undersigned organizations, call on the Attorney General and the Office for Civil Rights to conduct thorough public consultations prior to submitting an amendment to the Right to Information (RTI) Act. We call on the State to ensure that any amendment of the Right to Information Act is made to bring clarity in providing information, and to strengthen the implementation of RTI. We also call on the state to ensure that none of the rights and freedoms currently granted by the Act are restricted.

We reiterate our calls to:

- Conduct thorough and meaningful public consultation with all relevant stakeholders including civil society organizations, associations, information officers, public authorities and local councils prior to any amendment of the RTI Act;
- Ensure that marginalized persons are included in public consultation prior to an amendment;
- Conduct a review of the current RTI regime, legislation and policies regarding information management, data handling and communications from State institutions prior to submitting an amendment to the RTI Act.
- Ensure that any amendment brought to the RTI Act considers the challenges faced currently and includes measures to strengthen the implementation and effectiveness of RTI.

-ENDS-

- Transparency Maldives (TM)
- Association for Democracy in the Maldives (ADM)
- Maldives Association for Persons with Disabilities (MAPD)
- Maldives Local Council's Association (MLCA)
- Project Thimaaveshi
- Maldives Nurses Association
- Save Maldives
- Zero Waste Maldives
- The Eco Org
- Women in Fuvahmulah (WIF)
- Uthema
- Maldives Journalists Association (MJA)
- Beleaf
- Maldives Resilient Reefs