

Press Statement - Concerns regarding the violation of Personal Information and Fraudulent Practices in Political Party Membership Registration

20th January 2025

Transparency Maldives expresses concerns over the ongoing use of fraudulent practices through misuse of personal information, abuse of power and resources in the submission of political party membership forms to the Elections Commission. The recent events related to illegally accessing public records to obtain personal information, including that of Members of Parliament and ordinary citizens, are deeply concerning. These actions violate the Political Parties Act as well as the fundamental right to privacy and the right to participate in political activities of citizens as guaranteed under Articles 24 and 30 of the Constitution. The right to participate in political activities, including the choice to join a political party, is a personal decision of every citizen and must be a conscious and free decision.

Using personal data by accessing national databases, or even private databases, is a clear breach of privacy. An urgent and independent review is required to identify the gaps in the systems that allow these abuses and required disciplinary and regulatory actions taken against all individuals and parties involved in these fraudulent actions.

Fraudulent registration of members and changes to political party membership are a recurring issue that has been reported by media and individuals. It is concerning that despite repeated reports no action has been taken against any institutions, including the parties, for these fundamental violations.

Political parties play a crucial role in a representative democracy serving as a bridge between government and citizens. As a result, political parties are entrusted with upholding ethical conduct and transparency. It is also imperative that strong internal mechanisms are set in place within political parties, especially when handling personal information and sensitive data.

Independent commissions, through their autonomous functioning, play a crucial role in oversight of government activities, safeguarding fundamental rights and ensuring transparency. The Election Commission, having the mandate to ensure free and fair electoral procedures, must ensure that any membership of political parties is free from coercion or misrepresentation. Proactive measures must be taken to address public concerns and hold the parties responsible accountable for these violations. By addressing existing concerns, the Election Commission not only strengthens the credibility of political institutions but also protects individuals' rights to freely associate with the political party of their choice.

We call on relevant parties including the Government of Maldives, Election Commission and political parties to:

- Conduct a thorough, independent and transparent investigation into the matter and take strict action against those responsible for these fraudulent activities including the misuse of personal information.
- Expunge the records of those citizens whose memberships to political parties were submitted fraudulently and without their consent. In doing so, the Election Commission must exercise impartiality, fair treatment and prioritize safeguarding fundamental rights.
- Take measures to strengthen the internal mechanism of political parties with adequate checks and balances to ensure accountability and transparency. These mechanisms must be regularly monitored and reviewed.
- The Election Commission must enforce robust verification mechanisms to confirm the authenticity of forms to join political parties.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing safeguards of central databases containing critical and private information of citizens.
- Conduct inclusive and collaborative awareness sessions to promote democratic values among political institutions, educate the public on the misuse of personal information, and mechanisms in place for complaints and redressal.
- Enforce robust data protection legislation containing standards and protocols that must be followed by State and Non-State institutions that maintain personal information of citizens. Such legislation must also include comprehensive transparency and accountability frameworks to ensure that critical data is not misused.

To maintain trust in the government and political parties, citizens must be guaranteed their fundamental right to privacy and must be allowed to make decisions with their informed consent. Through enforcing safeguards, improving data privacy, enhancing data security and implementing strong accountability mechanisms, democratic values can be upheld.

-ENDS -