

Appendix III: Information for Human Rights Watch Provided by the Maldives Death and Disappearances Commission, February 20, 2022

The Commission's inquiry into the murders of religious scholar and Member of Parliament, Dr. Afrasheem Ali, blogger Yameen Rasheed and the disappearance of journalist and human rights defender Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, indicate that all three cases are interlinked.

At the request of the families of Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla and Yameen Rasheed, the Commission engaged an external investigation expert in September 2020 with assistance from international human rights organization, Justice Rapid Response. This international senior crime investigator has provided us with mentoring support regarding strategic decision making, intelligence development, major incident room management, improved crime analysis and interviewing of victims, witnesses and suspects, as well as enhancing our communication with the media, and giving access to specialist tactical support and advances in forensic opportunities. We have implemented a comprehensive investigative analytical process to identify intelligence/evidence gaps, illustrate complex criminal association and activity, and chart a timeline of key events. The Commission is following new lines of enquiry suggested by the expert including liaising with expert forensic analysts.

The investigations of the Commission are now progressing better and faster. With the specialist's assistance we have restored and rebuilt positive relationships with our key partners – the Maldives Police Service, the Prosecutor General and Attorney General. We have also enhanced our operational security and management of confidential information by identifying, configuring and implementing an information and case management system used worldwide to investigate complex and large, serious and organized crime. The Commission is working with a designated Prosecutor to minimize issues faced at prosecution stage in the murders of Dr. Afrasheem Ali, Yameen Rasheed and disappearance of Abdulla Rilwan. We also have embedded Maldives Police Officers working as part of our Investigation team.

In July 2021, the President designated a Steering Committee to assist the Commission in expediting its investigation. The composition of the Steering Committee includes a representative from the President's Office, the Minister of Home Affairs, Attorney General, Prosecutor General and the members of the Commission. The designation of the Steering Committee has expedited the processes of the Commission and has been steadfast in providing any requested assistance.

One of the main challenges the Commission is facing is the reluctance and refusal of witnesses and informants to give evidence to the inquiry. This situation was due to lack of confidence and trust in the relevant state institutions and the non-existence of a witness protection program in the Maldives. To mitigate these challenges, the Commission is assisting Maldives Police Service in establishing a formal witness protection program in March 2022.

We are working towards completing our investigation into Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla's case by mid-2022. Following Criminal Court's verdict on Yameen Rasheed's case on 19th January 2022, the Commission is able to proceed with our investigation into the case.

Our findings indicate that the cases we are investigating took place at a time where there was widespread criminality, corruption, misconduct and obstruction of justice among the high-level government officials which contributed to a culture of impunity for crimes committed by both religious extremists and criminal gangs.

The ultimate goal of the Commission is to prosecute persons at all levels for the offences they have committed from misconduct in public office, attempting to pervert the course of justice, murder, attempted murder, kidnapping, threats to kill, corruption, and accomplices whom we identify during the course of our inquiry. The Commission is also considering how to address systemic issues identified during our work and develop recommendations to ensure non-recurrence of these crimes in the future.