
amnesty international

The Republic of Maldives

Prisoners of conscience should be released

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Despite mounting concern worldwide and within the country, the Government of Maldives has not released any of the prisoners of conscience which it has kept in detention for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

These prisoners include **Fathimath Nisreen** who remains detained since February 2002 on accusation that she worked for the production of a clandestine internet e-mail magazine critical of the government. She was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment after a grossly unfair trial in July 2002 and was until recently held in detention in Maafushi prison, 18 miles south of the capital, Malé. In addition, she was reportedly sentenced to be banished for one year on charges of defaming the president.

Prisoner of conscience
Fathimath Nisreen
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On 13 November, Fathimath Nisreen was transferred from prison to house arrest in preparation for the government's plans to banish her to a remote island. House arrest is a practice used by the Government of Maldives in which a prisoner's own house is turned into his/her detention centre with severe restrictions imposed on family visits and access to the outside world.

Banishment is a form of punishment in the Maldives whereby the prisoner is sent to live on a remote island with the local inhabitants. It is then left to the prisoner to earn money - usually through hard labour - to top up the meagre daily allowance given to him or her by prison authorities. This allowance is a very small amount of money hardly sufficient for one meal a day. Prisoners who cannot find work have to rely on the financial support of their relatives for subsistence. Women banished suffer most as they become easy targets for harassment and sexual abuse by the village men.

Prisoner of conscience
Jennifer Latheef
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Amnesty International is urging the Government of Maldives to release Fathimath Nisreen and other prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally. They should not be held in any form of detention whether in prison facilities, under house arrest or banished to a remote island.

Another prisoner of conscience, **Jennifer Latheef**, has been held in detention since 22 September 2003 following unprecedented civil protests in Malé a few days earlier. The protests were sparked off when a prisoner was beaten to death by the National Security Service (NSS) personnel and, later, other prison inmates who were protesting his death were

shot at by the NSS resulting in several more deaths and critical injuries. Several days after the civil protests, the government launched a wave of arbitrary arrests of more than 100 people, including children. Many of those detained were subsequently released, but over a dozen people, including Jennifer Latheef, remain in detention. Amnesty International has sought information from the Government of Maldives about the identity of those detained and the reason for their detention but has received no response. It is therefore not possible to establish the exact number of those currently held in connection with the September 2003 civil protests.

Jennifer Latheef is an artist and video film producer particularly focusing on the prevalence of sexual abuse in the country. She is known for holding views critical of the government and against censorship, and this is believed to be the main reason for her continued detention. She is currently detained under house arrest in Malé. In addition, it is believed that Jennifer Latheef's continued detention may be a measure by the government to limit the activities of her father, Mohamed Latheef, a Maldivian politician currently living in exile in Sri Lanka where he is engaged in a campaign of peaceful political opposition to the Government of Maldives.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the continued imprisonment of other prisoners of conscience in the Maldives who have been detained for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression. They include **Mohamed Zaki** and **Ahmed Ibrahim Didi** who, together with Fathimath Nisreen, have been detained since February 2002 because of their involvement in the production of the Internet e-mail magazine, *Sandhaanu*. They were sentenced to life imprisonment following grossly unfair trials. Recent reports suggest that the terms of their imprisonment may have been reduced by 10 years, but Amnesty International seeks their immediate and unconditional release. Another prisoner of conscience, **Naushad Waheed**, a businessman, artist and outspoken critic of the government, has been detained since December 2001, and is currently serving a sentence of 15 years' imprisonment following a grossly unfair trial. He is suffering from loss of weight and has become mentally unstable but the authorities have not provided him with adequate medical treatment. **Ibrahim Fareed**, an Islamic scholar with moderate religious views who commands considerable respect in the Maldives, has been detained since June 2002 after a speech in a mosque in which he raised the issue of corruption in the government administration.

What you can do: Please write to President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the President's Office, Malé, Maldives, urging him to:

1. a) Stop banishing Fathimath Nisreen to a remote Island; and b) release her immediately and unconditionally.
2. Release Jennifer Latheef immediately and unconditionally.
3. Release all other prisoners of conscience, including Mohmaed Zaki, Ahmed Ibrahim Didi, Naushad Waheed, and Ibrahim Fareed immediately and unconditionally

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