



Attention:

H.E. Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, President of the Republic of Maldives
Hon. Abdul Raheem Abdulla, Speaker of the People's Majlis
Hon. MP Abdul Hannan Abubakr

RE: Maldives Media and Broadcasting Regulation Bill

Dear Dr. Mohamed Muizzu,

We, the undersigned organisations, write to strongly condemn the Maldives Media and Broadcasting Regulation Bill, submitted to the People's Majlis by Member of Parliament Abdul Hannan Abubakr. This Bill poses a grave threat to press freedom and media independence in the Maldives and should be withdrawn immediately in the interests of democracy and the public's right to know.

It is critical that the country and its government support the creation of a self-regulatory, independent framework for the media - a commitment pledged by President Muizzu. If passed, this Bill would lead to the formation of a new super media regulator, the Maldives Media and Broadcasting Commission, vested with excessive control over the news and broadcasting sector. Its sweeping powers include the authority to suspend media outlets during investigations, block newspaper websites, and halt broadcasts. The Bill further provides for punitive fines of MVR 5,000–25,000 for individual journalists and up to MVR 100,000 for media outlets for non-compliance with yet to be developed commission rules, inviting arbitrary enforcement and a chilling effect on reporting.

The proposed governance structure compounds these risks. A seven-member commission with three presidential appointees and a chair appointed by the President, alongside provisions allowing parliamentary no-confidence removal of members nominated by media outlets, cannot be considered independent. Such a model undermines public confidence in impartial oversight and diminishes the incumbent government's credibility, considering its previous commitments to press freedom.

The process by which the Bill was developed is equally serious. The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) has documented the absence of meaningful consultation with journalists and media outlets. The prominent involvement of senior parliamentary figures despite formal submission by an independent member further clouds the Bill's origins and intent. On August 19, MJA members protested the Bill as a grave threat to press freedom, warning that its vaguely defined terms are ripe for abuse and its penalties would effectively criminalise journalism. On August 27, parliament accepted the Bill after it was fast-tracked through preliminary debate, again without consultation.

A substantially similar bill tabled in November 2024 was withdrawn after widespread opposition. Reintroducing ostensibly the same legislation, again without genuine engagement, contradicts



freedom of the press enshrined in Article 28 of the Maldives' Constitution, freedom of expression as guaranteed by Article 27 of the Constitution, and the Maldives' international obligations, including Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Regulating the media requires genuine consultation with the media industry and other stakeholders and engagement and bypassing such engagement shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate purpose of such a body, that is to strengthen journalism and safeguard democracy and press freedom.

We therefore call on the Hon. Abdul Hannan Abubakr to withdraw the bill immediately, with the support of the government and the parliamentary majority, and for the latter to initiate an inclusive, transparent consultation process with journalists, unions, and media outlets before tabling any media-related bills.

We stand ready to engage constructively to help deliver reforms that strengthen, not silence, independent journalism in the Maldives.

Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJU)
Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF)
Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD)
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
Ecocare Maldives (Ecocare)
Free Media Movement (FMM)
Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions (FMETU)
Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ)
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
Indian Journalists Union (IJU)
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
Internews
Maldives Journalists Association (MJA)
National Union of Journalists India (NUJI)
Nepal Press Union (NPU)
Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ)
Project ThimaaVeshi (PTV)
#SaveMaldives Campaign
South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR)
Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA)
Transparency Maldives (TM)