

Maldives Govt Tells NGO to Stop Work Over 'Anti-Islamic' 2015 Report

Tuesday 17 December 2019, by [The Wire \(IN\)](#) (Date first published: 10 October 2019).

Maldives Democracy Network executive director Shahinda Ismail told 'The Wire' that the decision had not even been communicated to her.

New Delhi: The Maldives government has directed the nation's top civil rights group to stop work, bowing to a rising tide of complaints from clerics and opposition lawmakers over a 2015 report on radicalisation through school textbooks.

The Maldives government's youth, sports and community empowerment ministry issued a statement that the group had been suspended under authority given to the registrar of non-governmental organisations.

Maldives Democracy Network executive director Shahinda Ismail told 'The Wire' that the decision had not even been communicated to her. [pic.twitter.com/SPg5yHzGRy](https://www.pic.twitter.com/SPg5yHzGRy)

— Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment (@MoYSCEmv) [October 10, 2019](#)

The executive director of the [Maldivian Democracy Network](#) (MDN), Shahinda Ismail told *The Wire* that she had not been informed by the registrar about the decision.

“We have not been contacted by the registrar at all, so I don't know if we are suspended even. The registrar's statement does not say it's a suspension but openly orders us to stop work from today,” she said.

Last week, the [Islamic Affairs ministry directed the Maldivian police](#) to probe the contents of a report *Preliminary Assessment of Radicalisation in Maldives* released by MDN in 2015.

Earlier this month, there was a social media campaign which highlighted some text in the report that was claimed to be blasphemous and critical of Islam.

According to [Maldives Independent](#), one of the passages from the report that was deemed problematic noted excerpts in Maldivians' school textbooks which held forth on the Islamic belief that Prophet Muhammed travelled to heaven and returned to earth in a single night.

The 2015 report stated, “In an attempt to claim that this story is not merely a fable, the book claims that the tale would stand true 'even if subject to contemporary scientific analysis,' which is a highly questionable statement and does not entail such proof”.

As per section 27 of the [Maldives constitution](#), “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought and the expression freedom to communicate opinions and expression in a manner that is not contrary to

any tenet of Islam”.

Facing outrage, [MDN apologised](#) and removed the report from its website on October 3.

The new Maldives government’s step to suspend MDN is likely to appear surprising to external observers as it had been projected as a more progressive alternative to the Abdulla Yameen government, which had been accused of turning a blind eye towards rising extremism in Maldives.

However, the coalition government that won the presidential election in September 2018 also includes the Islamist Adhaalath party, which is also in charge of the Islamic affairs ministry.

The Adhaalath party had also called for criminal prosecution of MDN’s staff members.

“I think the government is trying to appease extremists and in doing so contradicting with due process and democratic principles by obstructing the legitimate work of a 14-year-old human rights organisation,” Ismail told *The Wire*. MDN has also expressed concern about the continued [death threats](#) against its members and employees.

On Monday (October 7), the [Maldives parliament debated](#) an emergency motion over the report, with both opposition and ruling lawmakers calling for a ban of the group.

The same day, Maldivian President Solih issued a statement promising to take legal action “in order to protect and maintain religious unity and public order and harmony”. He also stated that the language in the report was “unacceptable”.

The Wire Staff

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