



**Press Statement - For Immediate Release - February 20, 2004**

The regime of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in the Maldives is the world's only secret dictatorship. Gayoom has been in power for the last 25 years and has no intention of relinquishing power or reforming his brutal methods. Human rights groups, including the Amnesty International have frequently raised this issue of Mr. Gayoom's methods and practices. The international media has also highlighted these concerns but to no avail.

Key characteristics of this tyranny are, rampant nepotism, suppression of any form of political opposition, complete control of media and communication, arbitrary arrests, torture and killings in custody, endemic corruption and misuse of public funds, no respect for the rule of law, idolism of his self, intimidation of the parliament reducing it to a rubberstamp body, ballot rigging and total mismanagement of public services. In 2001 an eminent group of 42 people that included members of parliament, a former cabinet minister, leading businessmen, academics, feminists and popular sports

stars came together to form a political party under the name of Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). However the Gayoom regime refused to grant this fundamental right of political association, in blatant violation of the constitution.

After this refusal and the September 2003 uprising, following the torture, shooting and murder of inmates by the National Security Service, a number of people from the original 42 and many other new comers investigated other possibilities for political association as a Party.

Having decided that the only viable option was to declare the Party as an entity in exile, on 10th November 2003 the Maldivian Democratic Party started its operations. Since then MDP have made much progress. Membership has increased while it has received international recognition and financial contributions from members, supporters and sympathizers.

Soon after the online voting ended for the MDP Council on the 13th February 2004, the regime conducted a brutal

clampdown. Many members of the council, their families and supporters were blindfolded, handcuffed, manhandled and arrested.

The Party planned a peaceful demonstration to deliver a letter to Mr. Gayoom on the 14th of February 2004, to inform him of the new developments of the party. However this was pre-empted by the wave of mass arrests. MDP will now endeavour to work with tour operators and travel agents to encourage the government of Maldives to allow political pluralism and respect human rights in the country.

In view of the desperate situation of the people of the Maldives, we believe that the international community will lend their support and assistance.

Presently two councilors of the party, Mr. Mohamed Nasheed and Mr. Ahmed Shafeeq Moosa are in the UK for the purpose of seeking support and assistance for the party from the UK government, foreign diplomats and NGOs working in the United Kingdom.

**Stability as the foundation for Development**

In a TVM interview leading figures in the tourism industry reiterated that the development of the country was due to peace, tranquility and stability prevalent in Maldivian society. Peace and stability are indeed required for development. However, it need not be the peace brought through torture, cruelty and human suffering that our homogenous society of only 300,000 is subjected to. Furthermore, businessmen and industrialists need to show some sensitivity to the fact that such peace is only skin deep, as shown by the unrest that erupted on 20th September, 2003. Two of the members who appeared in the panel, Mr. Hussein Afeef (Champa) and Mr. Abdullah Saeed, were arrested by Gayoom in his first term as president purportedly to maintain "stability".

Businessmen need to understand that their investments can best be secured out of stability based on such fundamental concepts as freedom, justice, the rule of law and social equity. The business establishment needs to appreciate that torture; cruelty and inhuman treatment of people have limits. The development that Gayoom likes to boast about has brought him multi-million dollar yachts and a state-of-the-art palace, and has made a few individuals, rich beyond imagination. However, 42% of the country live below the poverty line.

Under Gayoom's patronage system the business community are victims without any real security for their freedom or for their investment. To survive in business they are forced to pay obeisance to Gayoom and his regime. How vulnerable the business community is borne by the fact that the former president of SAARC Chamber of Commerce (and also the biggest investor in Maldives) Mr. Gasim Ibrahim and other leading businessmen were kept in custody about a year back for allegedly having dealings with Amnesty International.

**Conspiracy theory or fact?**

Maldives has one of the highest youth drug abuse problems in the world. Heroin has become the drug of choice. Once addicted it becomes next to impossible to shake off the habit. The abusers are driven to committing crimes to support their habits. Robberies and muggings in the Maldives are at an all time high.

Friends and families are unable to help the drug addicts as government sponsored rehabilitation facilities are designed to

isolate and lock up these addicts instead of helping them. If help was sought privately, doctors are advised by the government to report all cases or risk losing their jobs and livelihood. Going abroad for help is not an option for many poor working class Maldivians. The youth gets locked away in jails and make-believe rehabilitation centers, struggling to shake off the bad habit of drugs.

It is my belief and of many others, that it is part of a government-endorsed

propaganda to shut up a potential threat to the regime. As the government realizes that education and awareness among the youth would end their reign of terror.

Drug abuse could very well be just one more of the ever increasing list of "National Security Secrets" of the Gayoom regime. The public should request an independent probe to find the root cause of our most dreaded problem, not the type of independent inquiry that went into the deaths of inmates at Maafushi jail.

Muzaffar M. Naeem

e-mail

■ I was a teacher in Maldives in 2003 and found out a lot about the darker side of Maldives. I have seen corruption from the katebs of tiny islands all the way up the heirarchy. One of my closest friends and sponsors from Maldives was arrested in the recent raids by NSS. I am concerned for him, and the other political prisoners, imprisoned for having an opinion and for wanting democracyDavid webb

■ I am truly frightened at the level of lawlessness in Male'. The recent troubles with NSS exacerbated the problem. Now I am even more frightened because with the return of that wicked man Adam Zahir people will suffer even more. When will the country become normal Mariyam Ali

**Letters**

■ I was truly glad when President Maumoon formed a committee of inquiry (headed by the noble Mr.Sattar) to investigate the custodial death of unarmed prisoners. I even believed him when he claimed on national TV that the government was forced to shoot the unarmed prisoners. Now he does an about turn claiming that some lowly NSS personnel were acting alone in that incident. I doubt very much that there is a single person in the whole country who would believe such a lie. No sane Maldivian would believe that, given our socio-political situation, such an order would come except right from the very top - from the Commander-in-Chief Maumoon Abdul Gayoom himself.

**Clarification**

In our article "MDP meets Japanese Embassy Official" we stated that "...MDP members were reassured that the Japanese Government will continue to assist Maldives and will take necessary steps to ensure that Japanese assistance will be used to help the people of Maldives and not corrupt individuals in Gayoom's regime."

The official did not either state or imply that the present regime is corrupt or that Japanese aid is siphoned off by corrupt officials of this regime. However, MDP participants did raise the issue of official corruption.

maldiviandemocraticparty@hotmail.com  
secretariat@maldiviandemocraticparty.org  
www.maldiviandemocraticparty.org



