



**Statement on behalf of
the HR/VP Mogherini**

**EP HR Urgency debate
Situation in the Maldives**
Strasbourg, Thursday 17 December 2015

Situation in the Maldives

Mister President, Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

I am speaking today on behalf of my colleague, the High Representative and Vice President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, who cannot attend today's debate.

We are here today to debate the human rights situation in the Maldives. Let me remind this House of the continued leadership of the Maldives in the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in the context of the COP 21 negotiations in Paris. What happened in Paris is an important example of the role the Maldives can play in the international community.

Honourable Members,

The last debate in the European Parliament on the Human Right situation in the Maldives took place in April. These last 8 months, the Government of the country is increasingly pursuing policies that will isolate it from the international community. Policies that are reversing the hard won advances in freedom and democracy. For which so many Maldivians have dedicated their lives. The increased intolerance for opposition and free speech breeds a climate of fear and anger, with the very real risk of radicalism emerging in the country.

The persecution and continued incarceration of opposition political figures undermine the credibility of the government. The lack of judicial independence raises serious questions about the rule of law in this country.

Serious concerns continue to be expressed - not only by the EU – about:

- the political interference with the judiciary,
- the unconstitutional interpretation of laws

- and the overnight changes to the constitution aiming to consolidate power.

It is essential that the government moves quickly to alleviate these widely shared concerns and restore the rule of law. Real independence of the judiciary is paramount in preserving trust in the system and equitable treatment of all Maldivians.

On the positive side, the Maldives apply a de facto moratorium on the use of the death penalty. We encourage the authorities to maintain it in all circumstances, particularly in cases that involve juvenile offenders, and to work towards abolishing the practice altogether. The EU wants to make it absolutely clear that there will be a serious setback in relations with the EU, if the Maldives restarts executions after more than 60 years of moratorium. It would be a backward step which would not go unnoticed by the European public at large.

The EU is increasingly concerned about the risk of radicalisation in the Maldives and the number of Maldivians joining Da'esh or other fundamentalist groups in Syria and Iraq.

The EU is ready to work with the Government of the Maldives to further the fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. But it is the responsibility of the Maldivian Government to ensure the safety of the hundreds of thousands of tourists who currently visit the archipelago every year.

The Government of the Maldives has accepted the offer of the EU to send a legal expert to assess the legislative framework, the procedures and practices of the judiciary and the implementation of the new Penal Code. We hope this will help highlight those areas where the respect for rule of law should be improved – in line with international standards. Progress in the rule of law can be an important step for the Government of the Maldives to show its willingness to cooperate with the international community on the critical issues of democracy and human rights.

Thank you for your attention