Bridge The Gap: A dialogue on women’s rights in the Maldives

The EU Delegation, in collaboration with local women’s rights organisation Uthema, conducted a panel discussion on Thursday 25 April 2019 at Maagiri Hotel in Malé City.

The discussion, titled Bridge The Gap: A dialogue on women’s rights in the Maldives, focused on some of the linkages and disconnects between policy and the lived experiences of women, specifically the socio-cultural barriers to women’s participation in public life.

Head of the Political, Trade, and Communications Section of the EU Delegation, Thorsten Bargfrede, said, “The European Union is delighted to support this event as human rights, including women’s
rights, have been described as the silver thread that runs through our foreign policy. Across the world, we advocate for reforms to ensure women’s fair political and public access. When women’s political representation increases, we see those representatives putting issues that matter to women on the agenda.”

The panel discussion was attended by stakeholders from diverse sectors including civil society, State institutions and members of the public. The guest of honour at the event was Madam Moominah Haleem, the first woman cabinet minister of Maldives who was appointed as the Minister of Health in 1977. She is also the first elected woman member of parliament in the country. The panel, which was moderated by lawyer and women’s rights advocate Dheebanaz Fahmy, consisted of Uthema Co-Founder Humaida Abdul Ghafoor, UNFPA Assistant Representative Shadiya Ibrahim as well as lawyer and women’s rights advocate Aisha Shujune Muhammad who is among the first women judges in the Maldives.

The event was live-streamed on the Uthema social media platforms and is available for viewing on YouTube. The event is also featured as a satellite event of the Women Deliver Global Conference on Gender Equality and Women’s Rights.

In the run-up to the event, Uthema produced a series of short clips which highlight the kind of gender inequality gaps that exist in the Maldives, some of which are significant. The recent results of the parliamentary elections of the 19th People’s Majlis shows the further decline in women’s representation in the country’s legislature to 4.6%, a drop from 6.5% in the 17th People’s Majlis two terms ago.

The Bridge the Gap panel discussion will be followed by a position paper to support further debate and public discussion on the issues and will propose suggestions to address concerns. It will be produced with the objective of achieving policy coherence to address the perennial issue of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination experienced by women in social, economic and political life in the Maldives.

Women's rights panel discussion in the Maldives