

Killing of Yameen Rasheed Reveals Worsening Human Rights Situation in the Maldives

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*A courageous liberal blogger in the Maldives was murdered for his words.
The international community needs to act.*

The fight for freedom of expression is often abstract. On Sunday, it became personal for me: Yameen Rasheed, a courageous human rights defender and blogger in the Maldives, was brutally murdered just outside his apartment. Yameen ran the popular blog The Daily Panic in which he sought to "cover and comment upon the news, satirize the frequently unsatirizable politics of Maldives, and also provide a platform to capture and highlight the diversity of Maldivian opinion". In this blog he often ended up rubbing the powerful the wrong way, with politicians and religious bigots often finding themselves at the receiving end of his satire.

Yameen wasn't the first human rights activist to be attacked. He also led the campaign to force the police to conduct a proper investigation on the forced disappearance in August 2014 of journalist Ahmed Rilwan @moyameehaa, whom he counted as his closest friend. This campaign made him a target as well.

When there was a crackdown on the largest pro-democracy rally in Malé on 1st May 2015, Yameen became a political prisoner: he was remanded in jail for 17 days, and then moved to house arrest. Hundreds of others were also arrested then. Some opposition leaders continue to remain in jail. Sheikh Imran Abdulla, the leader of the [Adhaalath Party] who spoke at that rally, was convicted on charges of terrorism and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment.

As a result of his advocacy for freedom of religion and freedom of expression in the Maldives, Yameen received death threats on multiple occasions that he reported to the police, who refused to do anything about those complaints.

Why, despite receiving death threats did Yameen continue to voice his opinions fearlessly? When asked, "Do you have a death wish?", he replied: "No. I have a dignified life wish."

Amnesty International has called upon the Maldivian authorities to conduct a full investigation into this killing. I, however, believe that there is no hope for justice from the very police that refused to protect Yameen, and whom he

held to be complicit in the disappearance of Rilwan. As Yameen said in 2015, it is time for the international community to act. I hope each of you reading this contacts your external affairs ministry and asks them to apply pressure on the Maldivian authorities, and push for an international investigation into the breakdown of human rights in the Maldives.