

## MEDIA STATEMENT

### **Sentencing of flogging a 15-year-old sexual abuse victim is deeply concerning: Government of Maldives**

*Malé, 28 February 2013:* The Government of Maldives is deeply concerned by the prosecution and the Juvenile Court's sentence to flog a 15 year-old girl on the charges of pre-marital sex. Though the flogging will be deferred until the girl turns 18, the Government believes she is the victim of sexual abuse and should be treated as such by the State and the society and therefore, her rights should be fully protected. The Government is of the view that the case merits appeal. The girl is under State care and the Government will facilitate and supervise her appeal of the case, via the girl's lawyer, to ensure that justice is done and her rights are protected.

The rights of children are protected under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and corresponding domestic legislation in the Maldives. Protecting the rights of the child, particularly that of the girl child, has always been a top priority of the Government, not only in this Administration, but previous Administrations as well. The Juvenile Court's verdict has brought home the critical and severe need to review existing mechanisms, especially legal framework, available for protecting the rights of the children in the Maldives.

Although the Maldives heralded a modern new democratic Constitution in 2008, much of the corresponding legislation aimed at reforming the criminal justice system and the juvenile justice system remains. While the Act on Special Measures for Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse was enacted in 2009, a large number of Bills remain pending that are essential to reform the criminal justice sector. This includes the Criminal Procedure Code, the Amendments to the Child Rights Act as well as the revised Penal Code and the Juvenile Justice Bill. The Government therefore calls on the Parliament to pass these Bills urgently.

The Government also calls on all stakeholders to view cases of child abuse and child-sexual abuse through a human rights lens and to base each case on the best interest of the child.

In view of the urgent attention required for protecting the rights of the children, the Government has established a Committee to review the existing child protection mechanisms, particularly the legal mechanism, in view of the universally accepted norms and principles, and recommend to the State areas that require urgent changes. The Committee comprises the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Human Rights, the Attorney General's Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and the Family Protection Authority of Maldives.

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