

Newsletter

Maldivian Democratic Party

15 - 30 April 2004

MDP in Geneva

MDP spokesperson Mohamed Latheef attended the Sixtieth Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights held in Geneva. In addition to the plenary meetings, Latheef attended (from sixth to ninth April) a number of NGO meetings focussing on civil and political rights.

At the meeting organised by the South Asian NGO's to appraise the human rights situation in the region, Latheef briefed the participants on the gross violation of civil, political, social and economic rights of the people of Maldives by Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. He also spoke about police brutality and torture that has been the hallmark of the Gayoom regime during the twenty-five years of his repressive rule. The participants expressed surprise and dismay at the

level of human rights violation in Maldives under the façade of peace and tranquillity projected by Gayoom. They further expressed solidarity with the people of Maldives and offered their support to help alleviate the situation responding to a question, Latheef said that he welcomed any bona fide initiative of Gayoom's regime to improve the human rights situation in Maldives. However, he pointed out, ongoing abuse of human rights - including civil and political rights guaranteed by the constitution - leaves one with no illusion that Maumoon's rhetoric of reform is merely a ruse to fool the international community.

In fact, Latheef pointed out, recent moves such as the reinstatement (with additional powers) of Adam Zahir - the symbol of torture and police brutality - as the Commissioner of Police clearly indicates that Gayoom is determined to continue to

run the country as a police state that would use fear, torture and state sponsored terrorism as the main tools of governance.

While in Geneva, Latheef also met senior officials of the ICRC, UNHCR and OHCHR to sensitise them of the human rights situation in the Maldives under Police Commissioner Adam Zahir and President Gayoom. Readers will be aware that Latheef now concentrates on working towards the improvement of human rights situation in Maldives and in combating torture and other inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment of prisoners and detainees by Gayoom's National Security Service. Latheef considers the Geneva meeting as a major step towards his role as a defender of human rights. The written statement to participants is attached as a supplement

Constitutional amendments: a ruse to buy time

Since the uprising and civil disturbances of September 2003 Mr. Gayoom's ways and methods are getting exposed to the international community. In his effort to wiggle out of this exposure, Mr. Gayoom has been setting up cosmetic commissions and giving lip service to political reform. Senior Ministers of the regime has been informing foreign diplomats and the international media that the question of legitimizing MDP remains pending as a constitutional reform process is underway. In 1990 when the Committee of the Special Majlis convened to draft the present Constitution, the current spokesman for MDP, Mr. Mohamed Latheef, probably worked harder than anyone else. Not surprisingly, about ten of the fifteen or so members of the Committee were Gayoom's cabinet members. Mr. Latheef concentrated on one issue - the separation of powers. In the last Committee meeting he attended he persuaded most of them that separation of powers was not incompatible with Islam - the skirt they like to hide behind. Within a month he was in solitary confinement. Gayoom's tailor-made constitution makes him - all very legally - the head of the judiciary, religious leader, the controller of the legislature in addition to being the chief executive. This would mean that the President of Maldives has more power vested in him than in any other head of state

including Saddam's Iraq, Libya, Cuba, and North Korea, or even in Kingdoms like Bhutan or Saudi Arabia. For good measure he is also the Defense Minister, the Commander in Chief of the NSS and, naturally, the Minister of Finance. Why would he also want to be the Governor of the Central Bank?

In 1995, the late Mr. Mohamed Latheef (no relation to MDP spokesman Latheef), a Prime-ministerial hopeful of the 1950's, cousin to the former Prime Minister Famuladeyri Kilegefaanu, and

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present MDP Councilor Mr. Mohamed Nasheed requested for the registration of a political party. In response to this, Gayoom wrote to them, saying that it will be timely when the new Constitution (the present constitution ratified in 1997) comes into effect. Soon after, he arrested Mr. Latheef and many of his close associates, all of them, respected elders of the Maldivian society. Among them were, historian, the late Mr. Hassan Ahamed Manik who then held the Chair for Male Municipality, Mr. Ahamed Shafeeq, who had practically filled all Maldives government positions, except that of the Head of State during the 40's and 50's, and writer Mr. Ali Moosa Didi, who is the father of Lt. Col. Moosa Jaleel. Of course, he arrested Mr. Nasheed. The new Constitution was finally ratified in 2000 after 17 years of, Mr. Gayoom dragging his feet. The president's own

nephew, who is one of the leading lawyers in the country, told the International Reports of Washington Post, that the present constitution is a document more draconian than the one we had earlier (1968). The 1997 constitution did grant the freedom of political association, which was also a feature of the constitution that replaced it. In 2001 MDP requested for registration of the party. Now again, Mr. Gayoom is saying that he has to amend the constitution before allowing political pluralism. Have we not been here before? The issue of the registration of MDP is not a constitutional issue. Its registration is only an administrative task. The constitutional amendment procedure is being initiated by a decree of the President. This decree has not even given the scope of the proposed amendments. His only indication as for the scope of the constitutional amendment has been, his statement saying that, "a new framework of governance is required. Meanwhile the government is conducting a relentless campaign to discredit the idea of pluralistic democracy. The MDP website is still banned, as well as all the other sites, critical of the government. The MDP Newsletter is a government-declared subversive material. The Home Minister has announced that it is illegal to be a member of the party or conduct any party activity. The Government should act now and legitimize the party, instead of continuing to play a delaying and deceptive game.

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Is Mr. Gayoom Serious?

Gayoom, while painting a picture of an administration brimming at the seams with a huge agenda for reform, is unashamedly proceeding to charge members of MDP for their part in trying to organize a peaceful demonstration. Readers will know that on the 13th of February just a day before the planned march, the government arrested an unconfirmed number of people and held them in solitary confinement for durations of more than a month. They were pressed to give statements, and MDP understands that these statements have now been submitted to the Attorney General. If Mr. Gayoom is seriously committed to reform, his actions must match his words. The government officials have repeatedly told foreign diplomats and international media that demonstrations are legal in the Maldives, and that they respect freedom of expression. MDP members are now being charged for distributing leaflets calling upon the people to join the party. It is with deep concern that MDP views such decisions of the government of Maldives. The party calls upon the government to drop all charges pressed against its members and to legitimise the party. When this is not the government's course of action, MDP will seek ways and means to bring elements of the regime to courts of law in what ever jurisdiction that may allow such an action.

Letters

The purpose of this email is to announce the formation of the Maldives Youth Movement. At present this movement has approximately 100 devoted Maldivian youths working for democratic change in the Maldives. The following are the changes proposed by the Movement.

1. Establish rule of law in Maldives by changing the constitution.
2. Establishing an independent supreme court in Maldives, with qualified lawyers to man the court.
3. To empower the parliament, so that the executive is made accountable to the representatives of the people.
4. Limiting the executive power through constitutional amendments. Limiting the

Statement by Ahmed Ziya

I am a Maldivian National currently residing in the United Kingdom. I arrived in the UK on the 28th of March 2004, following an arbitrary arrest by the police, detention in prison for two months. I was physically abused by the police, including beatings, blindfolding and solitary confinement. I was arrested on 20th September 2003 and was transferred to house arrest on the 18th of November 2003. I was to remain under house arrest till mid-January 2004.

The premise for my initial arrest on 20th September 2003 was taking part in a public demonstration against the Government of the Maldives, which was triggered by custodial deaths in Maafushi Prison. The deaths were the results of torture and shooting by the National Security Service, after a revolt by unarmed prisoners against the death of inmate Eavan Naseem from police brutality. Thousands of people took part in the demonstrations of 20th September 2003, in Male' the capital of Maldives. However, only around 500 people were arrested following the demonstrations. And within days the majority of them were released, detaining only about 20 people, including myself, in solitary confinement for two months, except for the first week, in which we were handcuffed and confined to a chair. (In an emotional event of expression by a mass gathering of the people, due to brutal killing of prisoners which has never happened during recent history of Maldives, this sort of selecting people to arrest are uncalled for.) From the 20 individuals detained, only six (including myself) were charged under the Anti-Terrorism law of the Maldives.

In the event of MDP's declaration in exile on 10th November 2003 and consequent transfer of myself to

house arrest on 18th November 2003, I became a member of the Maldivian Democratic Party, an organization activated partly in response to the events of 20th September 2003, to foster democratic principles and to campaign against the abuse of human rights in the Maldives. While MDP is banned and illegal in the Maldives, MDP has been recognized by the International Community, including the Government of the United Kingdom, as the voice of a growing opposition to the current regime, which has been in power for more than a quarter century.

Later I was released (relieved) from house arrest on the condition that I obtain the permission of police authorities if I were to travel outside the capital, Male', in which I live. I had planned to leave the country on the 30th January 2004 to Singapore for medical treatment, after obtaining all necessary permissions from relevant authorities. I was again taken in by the police for questioning in the afternoon and released after interrogation, on the second occasion I was taken while at the airport, and was detained for two days in solitary confinement. My interrogations focused on my activities in MDP.

I feel these charges have been brought against me because of my involvement with the Maldivian Democratic Party, and that these charges have no valid foundation. While I had not resorted to violent means of expressing myself on the day of the riots (20th September 2003), I am still being charged by the Government of Maldives under the Terrorism Act. This has been the normal way the regime acts to convict any person whom they feel are against their views. And the past records show that any person taken to police for investigation and has been punished for unfounded allegations has to be convicted by showing some reason.

term of the presidency for 2 five-year terms.

5. To elect the president directly by the people without involving the parliament in the presidential election process. The present set-up eliminates competition for presidency by multiple candidates and is designed to enable the incumbent to rule for eternity. The parliamentary seats are dominated by the regime in power through various means just because the members of parliament are important in every 5 years to select a presidential candidate. As such the parliament cannot carry out its law making function. If the parliament does not involve in the presidential election process then Maumoon or any body who is the president or who aspires to be president

wouldn't try to dominate the parliament. Maumoon has castrated the parliament just because he wants to fill the parliament with people who will nominate him for presidency. If we bypass this unnecessary stage of the presidential election a better democracy will function in Maldives. At Present the parliament does not function an independent body capable of nominating a person from among the people who files application with the commissioner of elections. As he has 8 members, his secretaries and his cabinet members, his brothers as MPs.

6. To prevent Ministers and civil servants to run for the parliament.
- Secretary / Ahmed Ismail

Dear MDP

I am a representative of a group based in the UK called The Friends of the Maldives. We are a mixed group of English people ranging in age from 12 years old to 84 years old, businessmen, students, sports personalities and even politicians. We started the organisation in November 2003 as a direct result of the horrible conditions in the Maldives that precipitated in the killing of Eevan Naseem and the prison uprising and murders that followed.

We will do whatever is necessary to put pressure on this regime to put a stop to these human rights abuses and harassment of members of the peaceful Maldivian Democratic Party.

Many of the members of Friends of Maldives have either been to the Maldives or are good friends of Maldivian people and there are still others who are simply interested in helping the people of the Maldives improve their lives. It is obscene to think of the Maldives as a Holiday Paradise when the people of the Maldives are intimidated in their daily lives, outspoken critics are imprisoned and tortured and the world turns a blind eye to this Secret Dictatorship.

Well we have news for Mr Gayooms regime. We are a dynamic group of people that are intent on seeing this through. As long as the people in power in the Maldives continue their subjugation of the people and continue with their corrupt, abusive and dictatorial regime we remain determined to stand by the people of the Maldives.

The Tourism business basking in huge revenues has to take an ethical approach to Tourism in these 'Paradise Islands'. We will work with them to bring about pressure on the regime to improve the human rights and encourage political responsibility and political pluralism. Not only this but we intend to work with them to encourage the development of the poverty stricken islanders who see nothing of these huge profits from Tourism.

We intend to bring the Maldives onto the international political map. It will no longer be ignored - we will not let that happen. We support the MDP in their peaceful efforts for a democratic, safe and more prosperous Maldives.

□

Yours faithfully

David Hardingham

GUIN BATTEN Friend of Maldives

Guin was educated at Dauntsey's School in Wiltshire. She completed a year at Southampton University reading Ship Science, but quickly moved onto Leeds Metropolitan University where she graduated with an honors degree in Human Movement Studies. In 1993 she completed a Masters in Sport Science from Loughborough University.

Guin burst into the International scene in the 1994 season. Coached by former international Roise Mayglothling, Guin made a remarkable jump from winning her first ever-sculling race to coming 8th in the World Cup in exactly 12 months to the day.

Later that season Guin made her Great Britain debut at the Indianapolis World Championships where she came 8th. 1995 saw Guin establish the current British record for the single scull (7:30.4) and qualify for the Atlanta Olympic Games at the Worlds Championships.

The defining moments in Atlanta for those that followed Guin's races were her trademark late finishes. Always just making the cut, Guin had to put out the reigning Olympic Champion just to make the final. This she did in the dying stages of the semi-final by rowing through the Olympic legend Elizabeth Lipa. In the final Guin produced another late surge to beat the American, claiming Britain's highest ever finishing place for a single and equaling the 5th place of the LA eight and the Barcelona Pair. The performance may not have been the glory of a medal but it was pushing the boundaries of women's international sculling in Britain onwards and upwards.

In 1997 and 1998 Guin consistently made the finals at the World Championships in her single, but by 1999 she was ready to move out of the single and into the Quad scull. With a total blank sheet a quad was formed, it showed promise but lacked the experience to realise that promise, but the seeds of the Sydney quad were being sewn. Just after dawn in the first race of the day at the 1999 World Championships in Canada, the Quad took the last available Olympic-qualifying slot by winning the B final. The die was cast for Sydney.

The Sydney quad made history by winning Britain's first ever women's Olympic rowing medal. It was an amazing achievement considering the crew had only been formed 5 weeks before and the Olympic Regatta was their first race together. The crew was a family affair as Miriam; Guin's elder sister sat in the stroke seat. The final was a thrilling race as Guin and the British crew took the silver medal by less than one hundredth of a second ahead of the Russians and less than a length behind Germany.

Guin retired from international rowing in April of 2003 after 18 months of battling against repeated viruses, but is still racing domestically this summer.



