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18 October 2005
London and Geneva

Maldives: Human rights defender Jennifer Latheef should be released immediately and unconditionally

Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) today called on the government of the Maldives to order the immediate, unconditional release of Jennifer Latheef, who was sentenced earlier today to 10 years' imprisonment on terrorism charges.

Jennifer Latheef was sentenced for encouraging others to commit acts of terrorism. Amnesty International considers Jennifer Latheef to be a prisoner of conscience.

"If President Gayoom is genuinely committed to democratic reforms in the Maldives, individuals exercising their right to freedom of assembly and expression must not be detained, charged or sentenced for these peaceful actions," said Purna Sen, Asia-Pacific Programme Director at Amnesty International.

Amnesty International and the ICJ believe the sentencing of Jennifer Latheef is politically motivated and that she has not received a fair trial.

"President Gayoom is head of both the executive and the judiciary. This is highly irregular and compromises the independence of the judiciary," said Nicholas Howen, Secretary-General of the ICJ. "With the executive in charge it makes it very difficult to have a fair trial when politically sensitive charges of terrorism or acts against the state are being considered"

It is not known where Jennifer Latheef was taken after she was sentenced today. The ICJ and Amnesty International call on the government to inform Jennifer Latheef's family of her whereabouts immediately. In light of the fact that Jennifer Latheef was receiving treatment in hospital until last week, the organisations also call on the government to guarantee as a matter of urgency that she is receiving the medical treatment she requires.

Background

Jennifer Latheef was one of thousands of people who peacefully took to the streets in Malé in September 2003 to protest gross human rights violations in the country. Although some acts of violence occurred during the protest, there has been no strong evidence to suggest that she was amongst those responsible. Jennifer Latheef's trial ended in July 2004.

In late 2004 Jennifer Latheef was detained for over four months, during which time she was declared to be an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience. During her detention she was subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, for which no one has been brought to justice. She has also been the subject of harassment and intimidation in the past.

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The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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