



International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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Summary record of the 3170th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 19 November 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Balcerzak

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States Parties under article 9 of the Convention *(continued)*

Combined thirteenth to fifteenth periodic reports of Maldives (continued)
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1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Maldives joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the Permanent Representative of Maldives and other members of the delegation to the meeting, explained that some members of the delegation would be participating via video link.
3. **A representative of Maldives**, responding to questions posed the previous day, said that the Government of Maldives had made efforts to ensure that civil society organizations and international partners had meaningful access to information on trafficking in persons and ongoing anti-trafficking measures. Under the recently endorsed Maldives Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan, the Anti-Trafficking Office would act as the national contact point and secretariat of the National Anti-Human Trafficking Coordination Committee, thereby establishing a unified, transparent platform through which civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international bodies could access national data, engage in consultations and contribute to policy development. In accordance with the Action Plan, an operational working group would be created to monitor implementation and serve as the technical coordination mechanism, facilitating regular information-sharing and follow-up with stakeholders.
4. The Government had established quarterly engagement forums with civil society organizations and NGOs, alongside awareness sessions, consultation workshops and public communication mechanisms, including a national hotline for reporting cases of trafficking in persons, and had prioritized the strengthening of data collection and evidence-based monitoring. Through the Maldives Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan, a nationwide research initiative would be undertaken to address trafficking trends, root causes and emerging risks, to be complemented by a comprehensive legal audit and the development of a new preliminary screening tool to support consistent data collection across front-line agencies. The relevant management systems were being upgraded to include biometric data capture and improve migrant registration with a view to ensuring more accurate and reliable information on vulnerable populations.
5. Transparency and accountability were further reinforced through quarterly progress reviews by the National Anti-Human Trafficking Coordination Committee, a public annual report and the designation of the Anti-Trafficking Office as the repository for trafficking-related information. Together, those mechanisms had created a stronger, more coordinated national framework that ensured reliable access to information for civil society, strengthened partnerships and supported the commitment of Maldives to combating trafficking in persons in accordance with its international human rights obligations.
6. **A representative of Maldives** said that the Maldives Police Service used a code-based system to classify reported cases of trafficking in persons. The system had been designed for operational use, with most codes created in response to trending issues. It had since been partially adjusted to link certain crime codes with relevant provisions of the Penal Code. However, that interim approach did not allow for efficient statistical reporting, in particular when responding to requests from external agencies. Accordingly, steps were being taken to standardize data collection, analysis and dissemination. Following a review, the Maldives Police Service was planning a full migration to the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes framework. The corresponding migration plan had been completed and discussed with internal stakeholders, and the existing codes had been aligned with the International Classification to facilitate the process. However, full implementation was pending to allow for upgrades in internal reporting and case management modules.
7. **A representative of Maldives** said that the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Act, passed in 2014, had provisions on sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace, which applied to institutions of various kinds. The Act required those with over

30 employees to establish a committee to act as a point of first contact for aggrieved parties. The committee was required to complete an investigation within 60 days of receipt of a complaint. If the committee determined that an act of sexual abuse or harassment had occurred, it could take measures against the perpetrator, ranging from issuing written advice to terminating his or her employment. Such measures were to be noted in the perpetrator's employment record.

8. Where the complainant was not satisfied with the committee's decision and fewer than 180 days had passed, or where the committee had failed to conclude its investigation within the established time frame, the matter could be submitted to the Employment Tribunal, which could issue written instructions to the respondent or to the employer or recover compensation for the aggrieved party. In determining such compensation, the Tribunal was mandated to take into account the psychological trauma suffered by the victim, loss of employment opportunities, material damage suffered by the aggrieved party and costs incurred to obtain medical services or psychological help. Penalties could be imposed on institutions that did not establish such committees. Since 2015, 50 cases involving allegations of sexual harassment in the workplace had been submitted to the Employment Tribunal. The Government had yet to undertake an assessment to determine the efficacy of those remedial avenues.

9. Sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace could also be dealt with as gender-based violence under the Gender Equality Act of 2016, under which an aggrieved party could file a complaint with the designated complaint committee established within an institution and have the matter escalated to the Employment Tribunal for compensation.

10. The 2021 amendment to the Anti-Human Trafficking Act had entered into force on 28 April 2021. Maldives had acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2013 and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing that Convention, in 2016.

11. With regard to the Committee's question concerning Sustainable Development Goals 1 to 3, there were no Indigenous communities in Maldives. Under the Constitution, there were no classes of citizens, and all citizens had equal rights throughout the country. Maldives continued to implement sectoral plans aimed at economic diversification and the improvement of social protection. Significant progress had been made in reducing poverty, improving nutrition and strengthening health services. The rate of extreme poverty was very low, and a national poverty rate of 5.4 per cent had been recorded in 2020. Although Maldives faced challenges with regard to service provision, owing in particular to geographical constraints, work was being done through sectoral plans and institutional initiatives to ensure equity across the country.

12. **A representative of Maldives** said that the Government was continuing to make efforts to provide comprehensive psychosocial support to the survivors of all forms of abuse. Accordingly, all cases of exploitation of foreign labourers that were reported to the Ministry of Social and Family Development were duly addressed and the necessary support services duly provided. In that context, the Ministry took a multidisciplinary approach, ensuring coordination and effective intervention across relevant sectors.

13. **A representative of Maldives** said that, under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and the Sexual Offences Act, the Family Protection Authority facilitated the provision of legal aid and counselling for victims of domestic violence and sexual offences. Under the Sexual Offences Act, financial aid was provided to victims of sexual offences to help with needs such as food, immediate shelter, transportation and medical care that were not covered under Aasandha, the national social health insurance scheme. Such services were available to all persons, including foreign workers, upon request.

14. **A representative of Maldives** said that, until 2021, quotas for migrant workers had been issued for two years, with the possibility of extension upon application by the employer. However, that system had made it difficult to accurately track ongoing worksites and confirm the completion of projects. Consequently, significant amendments had been introduced to the relevant regulation in 2021. The quota management framework had been modernized through the introduction of two categories of quotas, namely permanent quotas and project-based quotas. Project-based quotas allowed the authorities to verify the status of each project,

determine whether the work had been completed and ensure that workers were associated with the correct worksite throughout their employment period. Upon completion of a project, employers could request a change of worksite for the migrant workers, transfer them to another eligible employer or repatriate them and cancel the work permits in accordance with established procedures. The system ensured that labour mobility remained orderly, transparent and aligned with national regulatory standards.

15. **Mr. Sibande** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would appreciate a response to his request for an update on the status of the personal data protection bill, the bills on freedom of expression and freedom of the press, the bill on the right to strike, the bill on protection of vulnerable individuals, the mental health bill, the national registration bill, the legal aid bill and the bills to amend the Disabilities Act, the Social Protection Act and the Anti-Torture Act.

16. He wished to know what measures were being taken to ensure that racial discrimination was clearly recognized as a distinct offence with a view to facilitating the filing of complaints of racial discrimination and follow-up and investigations by the law enforcement authorities. He would be grateful if the delegation could indicate the steps being taken to improve the availability of mechanisms for filing complaints of racial discrimination, including complaints against the police, and whether the Government planned to draft any new rules and regulations in that regard. He wondered whether the Government planned to conduct a survey on the prevalence of racial discrimination in Maldives.

17. In the light of negative portrayals of migrant workers in the media and online, it would be interesting to learn what steps were being taken to enact legislation on incitement to hatred and cybercrime that led to racial discrimination and whether Maldives had the capacity to track cases involving offences against migrant workers and other foreign nationals. He would appreciate data on cases of violence against foreign nationals that had been registered and prosecuted. Data on cases of sexual abuse would also be welcome.

18. He would appreciate statistics on the number of foreign nationals in prison in Maldives. He wished to know whether Maldives was able to track criminal cases involving foreign nationals, including with regard to charges, prosecutions and outcomes. It was unclear whether the State Party was able to identify and follow up on cases in which foreign nationals had been unlawfully detained and whether those who had been detained unlawfully had access to remedies. He wondered whether legislation could be introduced to regulate the situation of asylum-seekers.

19. He wished to know what measures had been taken to deliver justice for the families of Ahmed Rilwan, Yameen Rasheed and Afrasheem Ali and, more generally, what steps were being taken to prevent similar cases in the future. It would be useful if the delegation could indicate the measures being taken to ensure that the findings of the Presidential Commission on Investigation of Murders and Enforced Disappearances were made available to the family members of victims and the general public. In that connection, he wondered what measures had been taken to ensure that the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime was incorporated into national law.

20. It was unclear what measures were being taken to reverse the decision to lower the number of members of the Supreme Court from seven to five, as that decision had not been conducive to public confidence in the judiciary. In the light of reports that judges sometimes faced politically motivated disciplinary proceedings, he wished to know what efforts were being made to ensure that judges were not subjected to threats and were able to work independently. He invited the delegation to indicate whether the State Party planned to ensure that the Judicial Service Commission did not include politicians among its members. Lastly, he wondered whether the State Party was prepared to incorporate the Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary into national law.

21. **A representative of Maldives** said that up-to-date information on the status of various bills, including the bills on personal data protection and the right to strike, would be provided to the Committee in writing.

22. The 2021 amendment of the Penal Code established the offence of causing and/or inciting injury to another person on the basis of race, country of origin, colour, political view

or religion. The Government considered that the amendment adequately incorporated article 4 (a) and (b) of the Convention into domestic law. The 2024 amendment provided a legal framework on cybercrime, covering offences such as making online threats, harming a person's dignity or reputation and disseminating compromising material for the purpose of personal gain or revenge. The amendment also criminalized cyberstalking, harassment and acts of cyberviolence. Such offences, if committed in the digital sphere against individuals within the Maldivian jurisdiction, would be investigated by the Maldives Police Service. Associated legislation such as the Criminal Procedure Act had been amended in order to facilitate investigation and evidence-gathering in cybercrime cases. Although the 2024 amendment did not specifically refer to racial hatred as a ground of discrimination, it worked to prevent threats, harm and incitement to violence against any person, on any grounds, in the digital sphere.

23. While the Government faced difficulties in compiling statistics in all sectors, the collection of disaggregated data on crime presented a particular challenge. Efforts were being made to ensure more coherent and cohesive coding of crimes for statistical purposes, allowing the authorities to better identify and address emerging issues.

24. The Presidential Commission on Investigation of Murders and Enforced Disappearances had been established by presidential decree on 17 November 2018, under the previous Administration. The establishment of such commissions was a prerogative of the President under article 115 of the Constitution. The Government's understanding of that article was that such commissions were established for a specific purpose to advise the President who established them, and their tenure should conclude with the term of that particular Administration. However, given the sensitivity of the work of the Presidential Commission on Investigation of Murders and Enforced Disappearances, its tenure had been extended until 31 May 2024 – after the Administration of President Mohamed Muizzu had assumed office. The Commission had since wrapped up its work and submitted final findings to the President. The Government was currently reviewing the Commission's observations and recommendations and considering which information could be published and would not hinder ongoing criminal investigations.

25. The Supreme Court was again fully constituted, with seven justices on the bench, following the dismissal of two justices and the resignation of another. In that regard, the Government had fully engaged with different United Nations bodies and had reiterated that the investigations into the two judges, and the measures taken thereafter, were in line with due process, the Constitution, the Judicial Service Commission Act and the international obligations of Maldives. The investigations had been conducted by the Anti-Corruption Commission in accordance with its constitutional mandate, and the decision to suspend the judges had been taken by the Judicial Service Commission in accordance with section 25 of the Judicial Service Commission Act. The authorities had therefore followed the legal procedure, in accordance with the Constitution, and the parliament had subsequently voted to remove the two justices, finding them guilty of judicial misconduct.

26. Maldives had been one of the first countries to sign the recently adopted United Nations Convention against Cybercrime. The Government recognized the importance of the Convention and planned to develop and adopt the legislation necessary to incorporate it into domestic law, in line with the steps already taken to address cybercrime under the Penal Code.

27. **A representative of Maldives** said that the Maldives Immigration Act regulated the entry and exit of nationals and foreigners and the issuance of permits and visas to foreign nationals. It did not contain specific provisions on discrimination, which was addressed under the Constitution, the Penal Code and the Anti-Human Trafficking Act. Migrant workers could lodge complaints of discrimination with the Maldives Police Service.

28. **A representatives of Maldives** said that, under the amendments to the Penal Code, the Maldives Police Service had investigated complaints of racial discrimination, threats and harassment, both online and in person. Acts of xenophobia and hate speech against individuals were treated as special cases and investigated by the Serious and Organized Crime Department of the Maldives Police Service. Security assessments were carried out in parallel with investigations to determine whether the targeted individuals needed protection.

29. In 2023, migrant workers in Maldives had reported 16 cases of domestic violence and 12 cases of sexual harassment. In 2024, 15 cases of domestic violence, 10 of sexual harassment and 3 of other harassment had been recorded. In 2025, there had been 19 cases of domestic violence and 9 of sexual harassment against migrant workers.

30. **A representative of Maldives** said that the detention of migrant workers by the immigration authorities was a measure of last resort and was subject to an official detention order. In any case, the migrant worker's permit would be revoked or suspended prior to detention. Migrant workers had the opportunity to challenge such decisions before the courts and the immigration authorities.

31. **A representative of Maldives** said that, because of resource constraints, the Government did not intend to become a party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families or the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Protocol thereto. Maldivian institutions had a mechanism for the coordination, on a case-by-case basis, of third-country resettlement and other measures to ensure the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees entering the jurisdiction.

32. **Mr. Sibande** said that he would be grateful if the delegation could address his question about Ahmed Rilwan, a journalist who had disappeared in 2014; Yameen Rasheed, a Government critic murdered in 2017; and Afrasheem Ali, a politician murdered in 2012. In particular, he would be glad to receive information on the steps taken to investigate those cases and ensure that the perpetrators were brought to justice.

33. He would also appreciate clarification of whether the State Party planned to incorporate the Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary into national law. In that regard, he noted that the Maldivian judiciary faced certain challenges, notably heavy caseloads and shortages of judges, prosecutors and court personnel, which contributed to excessive delays in trials and prolonged pretrial detention. As those challenges hindered access to justice and undermined public trust in the system, he wondered what strategies were being developed to address them.

34. Furthermore, the Committee had received reports that marginalized and vulnerable groups faced formidable obstacles in access to justice, including geographical barriers, inadequate legal aid and the high cost of legal representation – a situation that contradicted the principle of equal protection of the law. He therefore wished to know what steps, such as increasing the provision of legal aid for vulnerable groups, were being taken to ensure equal justice for all.

35. **Ms. Chung** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee was concerned about hatred against persons from specific nations. Public officials had reportedly participated in the “India Out” campaign, in which they had portrayed foreign workers as a threat to jobs, culture and religion, leading to increased hostility towards them. In that context, she would be grateful if the delegation could provide information on the implementation of Decree No. 5/2022, entitled “Banning movements under various slogans to incite hatred against specific nations”, and respond to the criticism that it failed to address the surge in xenophobic sentiment and hostility towards foreign nationals, particularly Indian and Bangladeshi workers.

36. **Mr. Yeung Sik Yuen** said he understood that the Supreme Court justices who had been dismissed had been removed from office pursuant to a parliamentary motion that had carried by an overwhelming majority. He would appreciate further details regarding that process, including on the role of the President and on whether the Attorney General had in fact given an unfavourable opinion on the legality of the dismissals.

37. **Mr. Sibande** said that the Committee was particularly interested to know whether the Government intended to conduct a survey on the prevalence of racial discrimination in the State Party, as it understood that no data had ever been collected on that subject.

38. The Committee had been informed that the Presidential Commission on Investigation of Murders and Enforced Disappearances had investigated 27 cases, but the families of disappeared persons had not yet received information on the Commission's findings. Given the delegation's statement that the Commission's establishment had been a “prerogative” of

the President, he wondered whether, as part of the ongoing review of those findings, the Government intended to inform the families of the fate and status of the victims.

39. **A representative of Maldives** said that, as she had stated previously, the Government was currently considering the observations and recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Investigation of Murders and Enforced Disappearances, including in relation to the unfortunate events that had occurred in the cases of Ahmed Rilwan, Yameen Rasheed and Afrasheem Ali. The Government intended, as was its prerogative, to publish the Commission's findings, insofar as they did not hinder criminal investigations. As the review unfolded, the Government would certainly inform the families about the fate of victims so that they received proper closure. However, it was not possible to give a time frame for that task.

40. The "India Out" campaign had specifically opposed the presence of Indian military personnel in Maldives, which had been perceived as detrimental to Maldivian sovereignty and territorial integrity, rather than the presence of Indian nationals per se. The Government had never sought to create a discriminatory environment against specific groups of foreign nationals. Indeed, the 2021 amendment of the Penal Code prohibited incitement to hatred or violence against specific groups of non-nationals on the basis of country of origin.

41. The delegation would respond in writing to the question concerning the Attorney General's opinion on the legality of the dismissal of the two Supreme Court justices.

42. **A representative of Maldives** said that the Department of Judicial Administration, the Supreme Court and the Judicial Service Commission had invested significant efforts in addressing resource scarcity in the judiciary. The Government had committed to ensuring the financial autonomy of the judiciary as from 2026. The Criminal Court had recently moved to a new building and was working hard to clear its backlog of cases, which it aimed to achieve by the end of November 2025. The judiciary was also taking steps to digitalize judicial business and embrace the latest technologies and advancements. The Department of Judicial Administration had recently put in place an integrated case management system in the Criminal Court, which it aimed to extend to other courts. The Government expected that, with financial autonomy, the problem of lack of resources would be overcome.

43. The Maldives Judicial Academy continued to enhance judges' proficiency through training programmes on human rights, judicial ethics, gender equality, child rights, sexual harassment and emerging issues, as well as specialized training on new laws and alternative dispute resolution, supported by international partnerships. With the help of international partners and donor agencies, the Academy had recently carried out a training needs assessment for the next 25 years to ensure that judges and justice personnel would receive the necessary training during that time.

The meeting was suspended at 11.20 a.m. and resumed at 11.40 a.m.

44. **Ms. Chung** said that the Committee noted that non-Muslim foreigners were only allowed to observe their religions privately and that criticism of Islam could have serious consequences, including prosecution. Popular writers had been targeted in religiously motivated attacks, and some had even been killed, while human rights violations committed in the name of religion included female genital mutilation and restrictions on freedom of speech. In that context, she would be interested to know what measures the State Party would take to protect human rights defenders and allow them to work free from restrictions, threats or coercion.

45. Furthermore, civil society actors faced numerous impediments to their ability to operate freely and effectively, including a legal environment characterized by vague and ambiguous laws that granted the authorities broad discretion to curtail civil liberties in the name of national security or public order. She would be interested to know what legal framework and policies had been put in place to address those impediments. She wondered what had been done to address the problem of impunity, which endangered civil society actors and exposed human rights defenders to attack, and how the legal system punished violations committed against human rights defenders.

46. United Nations experts were deeply concerned about rising religious fundamentalism, shrinking civic space and organized efforts to undermine women's participation in

democracy. Women human rights defenders and their allies faced harassment online and offline and misogynistic and sexist attacks that often went unreported amid a general environment of impunity and reprisals. She would therefore appreciate information on the current situation, in particular on measures to address the challenges that affected women belonging to religious or ethnic minorities. Information on the situation of those who advocated gender equality or the protection of LGBTIQ+ rights would be welcome. She would also like to know what had been done to counter violence resulting from fundamentalist ideology, including the disappearance and killing of human rights defenders who expressed liberal views about women's attire, music and apostasy. She would also welcome comments on reports of arbitrary arrests and intimidation of journalists and human rights activists.

47. The Committee noted that the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, after her visit to Maldives in 2019, had pointed out that urgent action must be taken to reinstate the teaching of culture, art, music and history in the mandatory school curriculum; to clearly respond to the reported rejection of such teaching in numerous schools by some teachers and parents; and to allow for the development of students' interest and skills in those important fields. In that context, the Committee would be interested to know what measures the Government had taken to promote human rights education and, in particular, to combat racial discrimination in school curricula, university programmes and teacher training.

48. The Dhivehi language and its dialects were a precious cultural resource for Maldives, yet a shortage of Dhivehi teachers throughout the country meant that teaching in Dhivehi could not be mainstreamed. It would therefore be useful to know what measures were being taken to preserve the Dhivehi language and Maldivian culture.

49. The Committee would be interested to know what progress the Government had made in its work with the International Organization for Migration and civil society actors to foster social cohesion and mutual understanding between migrant and host communities, including through efforts to educate the public on the importance of migrant health. It would also welcome information on measures to raise the awareness of the general public, civil servants, law enforcement and judicial authorities on the importance of religious and cultural diversity, tolerance and interreligious dialogue, and on the impact of such measures. It would be interested to hear about any measures to tackle discriminatory and sexist stereotypes of migrant workers, especially women.

50. Lastly, she recalled that United Nations experts had expressed concern that approximately 80 per cent of Maldivian historical and archaeological sites, including sites relating to the Buddhist, Hindu and Sufi past, had been destroyed for the construction of resorts and development projects, while many items in the National Museum's pre-Islamic collection had been smashed and in some cases damaged beyond repair. She therefore wished to hear about measures to promote knowledge and awareness of the cultural heritage, linguistic identities, histories and contributions to Maldivian society of the various communities that lived in the State Party, including groups of migrants and other non-citizens.

51. **A representative of Maldives** said that the Constitution allowed for the freedoms of expression and association insofar as they did not contradict Islamic tenets or the country's laws. The Government had always been in favour of providing the maximum space for human rights advocates, civil society organizations and NGOs to exercise their right to freedom of association. One key measure had been the adoption of the new Associations Act in 2022, which had made the internal governance of civil society organizations more predictable and enhanced their participation in policymaking. Moreover, the Whistle-blower Protection Act provided important safeguards for individuals within organizations and journalists who wished to report on systemic violations, including corruption and human rights violations, while maintaining their confidentiality. The 2021 and 2024 amendments of the Penal Code complemented the existing legal framework by ensuring that human rights advocates and civil society organizations were protected from reprisals, hate speech, threats and harassment. The Maldives Police Service was vigilant in investigating all such cases, whether offline or in the digital sphere.

52. The Maldives Police Service ran training and outreach initiatives such as “Project Guardian”, which focused on strengthening efforts to combat violence against women and children, including online. Law enforcement officers and other officials received human rights training which did not cover racial discrimination in depth but nonetheless instilled an understanding of human rights concepts and of the Government’s human rights obligations under different instruments, allowing trainees to recognize their essential role in promoting and maintaining social harmony. Training also covered the responsibilities of the Human Rights Commission and underscored the importance of protecting the rights of vulnerable groups. Human rights principles were also embedded in the content of refresher courses, particularly those provided to law enforcement, and in the teaching of professional ethics.

53. In 2011, Maldives had enacted a specific law that designated Dhivehi as the local language and mandated all government institutions to prioritize it in their public and inter-agency communications. The Heritage Act of 2019 specifically addressed the protection of Maldivian culture and traditions.

54. **A representative of Maldives** said that, under the Education Act, the Ministry of Education was responsible for developing and publishing a single inclusive national curriculum for all levels of education. Based on that legal foundation, the Ministry had included human rights topics in the official curriculum. The National Curriculum Framework explicitly listed human rights, democracy and justice as central principles and encouraged education providers to afford students the opportunity to explore human rights values. Civic and citizenship education had been developed as a new subject to foster a sense of identity and love for the nation among students; it had been taught in all schools since 2023.

55. The Ministry of Education periodically conducted anti-bullying campaigns aimed at developing tolerance and empathy. An international programme of socioemotional learning was being rolled out across the country for all students aged between 10 and 18 years with the aim of developing their emotional maturity. Continuous efforts were made to enhance such work; for example, a teachers’ activity book and anti-bullying materials had been developed and shared with all schools.

56. **A representative of Maldives** said that many higher education institutions, including Maldives National University, Islamic University of Maldives and Mandhu College, taught human rights-related modules or content as part of their programmes. Universities and colleges had published a number of research studies on social and human rights issues.

57. **Ms. Chung** said that she was particularly keen to know what the State Party had done to address impunity and to protect human rights defenders. She would also be grateful if the delegation could address reports that civil society organizations had been either co-opted or coerced into aligning with the Government’s agenda, thus undermining their independence and credibility as advocates for the public interest.

58. **Mr. Sibande** said that human rights defenders and civil society organizations faced a challenging situation. The Committee had received reports that human rights activists in Maldives were frequently subjected to arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment and other retaliatory measures and that the authorities used criminal laws and prosecutions to silence political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists, members of civil society and even lawyers. He would therefore appreciate up-to-date information on the environment in which human rights defenders and civil society organizations operated and on the current status of the 54 lawyers who had been suspended in 2017, apparently after calling for judicial reform and the independence of the judiciary.

59. The Committee had also been informed that the Maldives Media and Broadcasting Regulation Act of 2025 gave the authorities the power to fine journalists, suspend media outlets and block websites without a court order, leading to concerns that the Government was attempting to suppress dissent and muzzle free speech. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had called for the repeal of the Act, on the ground that it seriously undermined media freedom and the right to freedom of expression. The Committee would therefore like to know what efforts were being made to ensure that journalists could operate freely. Moreover, in the light of reports that the executive branch exerted influence over the composition of the Media and Broadcasting Commission, it would be interesting to know how the Commission ensured the independence of its activities. Lastly, the Committee

would welcome an explanation of how the authorities had addressed various cases in which the police had assaulted journalists and media workers who had been covering opposition protests in Male’.

60. **Ms. Chung** said that she would be interested to hear more about the implementation of the Associations Act and to know whether the situation of human rights defenders and associations had improved since its adoption.

61. **Mr. Diaby** said that the Committee had received numerous complaints that threats had been made against civil society organizations, some of which had reportedly been dissolved. He would like to know how many civil society organizations had been shut down and why. As the Human Rights Commission had been accredited with B status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions since 2008, he wondered whether any legislative initiatives had been proposed to bring the national human rights institution into full compliance with the Paris Principles. He would be interested to know whether the State Party planned to adopt a specific law on the protection of human rights defenders.

62. **A representative of Maldives** said that, following the suspension of 54 lawyers in 2017, the Government had introduced the Legal Professions Act of 2019 to ensure that lawyers’ affairs were managed by a specific professional body, the Bar Council of the Maldives. Since then, the legal sector had been self-governed.

63. The aims of the Maldives Media and Broadcasting Regulation Act included consolidating the Maldives Broadcasting Commission and the Maldives Media Council, which had previously operated separately; regulating broadcast, print and other media; creating a consolidated umbrella to govern the professional standards of journalists; streamlining the media registration process; addressing the challenges of misinformation and disinformation; and putting an end to the coordinated or systemic manipulation of content. The Media and Broadcasting Commission established under the Act would operate as an independent body. The executive branch had no role in appointing its members, three of whom would be selected, vetted and appointed by the parliament and four elected by media representatives. There was no provision under the Act to reprimand or fine individual journalists; however, fines might be imposed on media agencies and broadcasters. Safeguards were embedded in the Act to ensure that any investigations undertaken by the Commission were impartial and observed due process.

64. The Associations Act adopted in 2022 replaced a previous outdated law that had failed to address certain aspects related to the governance of civil society organizations. The Act had empowered civil society organizations and created a predictable landscape in which their operations were aligned with the country’s legal framework.

65. The Human Rights Commission faced two impediments to full alignment with the Paris Principles. The first related to its membership, which, as mentioned at the preceding meeting, was subject to a constitutional restriction that the Government currently did not seek to change. The other related to the Commission’s financial and technical resources. The Government was committed to ensuring that the Commission had all the technical and budgetary support necessary to execute its functions under the Constitution and the Human Rights Commission Act. As a reflection of that commitment, information on increments in the Commission’s budget would be provided to the Committee in writing on a yearly basis.

66. The Government did not envisage a specific law on the protection of human rights defenders, as it considered that the current legal framework, notably the 2021 and 2024 amendments to the Penal Code, adequately addressed the risk of reprisals, threats or intimidation against human rights advocates and civil society organizations. Law enforcement was empowered to use those laws to ensure accountability, including in the digital sphere.

67. **A representative of Maldives** said that, during protests, media personnel were given special access to areas designated as security zones and received special protection from the police. However, there had been protests in which media workers who had been granted passes to enter security zones had then decided to join the protest, which was contrary to the purpose for which the passes had been given. Like the police, media personnel were accountable for their actions when using the powers, authority and privileges conferred upon

them. The media personnel who had abused their privileges by protesting in a security zone had not been arrested but had been escorted out of the zone, after disregarding several verbal warnings and requests to leave. The use of force in all protests was reviewed internally by the police and by the National Integrity Commission and the Human Rights Commission. Regarding the cases in which the police had allegedly assaulted journalists, no institution had found that the use of force had been unjustified or disproportionate.

68. **Ms. Tlakula** (Follow-up Rapporteur) said that she appreciated the State Party's candour in admitting that it had not submitted a follow-up report on the Committee's previous concluding observations owing to its lack of a mechanism for following up on treaty body recommendations. As a national mechanism for reporting and follow-up had been established in 2020, she hoped that the State Party would submit a follow-up report within the framework of the current reporting cycle within one year. The Committee noted with satisfaction that the periodic report currently under review contained information on some of the issues that had been identified for follow-up in the previous concluding observations, including information on the adoption and entry into force of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act and on the State Party's accession to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

69. **Mr. Sibande** said that he greatly appreciated the contribution of the high-level delegation to the constructive dialogue. As some questions had not been answered in full, the Committee looked forward to receiving further information in writing.

70. **A representative of Maldives** said that the Committee's observations and guidance provided valuable direction for his Government's efforts to promote and protect the human rights of all and to strengthen equality and non-discrimination across all areas of life. The Government's commitment to strengthening protections and promoting social cohesion was unwavering. It had taken concrete steps to reinforce institutional safeguards, enhance access to justice and improve the protection of migrant communities, with the goal of ensuring that every individual in Maldives, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or background, could live with dignity and security. The Government's approach to its human rights obligations was framed by the Constitution, in which Islam formed a central pillar of national identity and governance. Within that framework, the Government remained committed to ensuring that all individuals under its jurisdiction enjoyed equality before the law and fair access to services.

71. Written information in response to certain questions would be provided within the designated time frame. The Committee's recommendations would be carefully reviewed and integrated into ongoing policy and legislative initiatives. The national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up would continue to play a key role in coordinating implementation efforts and tracking progress.

72. Looking ahead, the Government remained committed to strengthening safeguards, improving labour governance and fostering a society rooted in fairness, dignity and respect. It viewed the current dialogue as a renewed beginning that would encourage the authorities to ensure that the principles of the Convention would continue to guide the country's institutional reforms and broader development pathways.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.