

Statement at the Commonwealth Media Development Workshop

Holiday Inn, Male', 16 June, 2010

Participants and facilitators of the Commonwealth Media Development Workshop, distinguished guests; good morning!

- I would like to express my appreciation to the Maldives Journalist Association for inviting me to say a few words on human rights to this important audience. I think it is a very appropriate topic - none more so because the media is now viewed as the fourth organ of the state. In addition to the traditional branches of state power, the media has an increasing important role to play in protecting and preserving human rights in society. In fact, the Media, as an independent observer with a social responsibility, should value and have knowledge of human rights, more than anyone else. It is **therefore** vital for the media, as a watchdog and voice of the public, to act in the name of human rights to establish a genuine democracy
- A free and functional media is crucial for any democracy, especially a young one in a transitional phase such as the Maldives. I am proud to say that freedom of the press is a concept enshrined in our new democratic constitution. In addition to the right to freedom of expression guaranteed in Chapter 2 Article 27; Article 28 states that *"everyone has the right to freedom of the press, and other means of communication, including the right to espouse, disseminate and publish news, information, views and ideas. No person shall be compelled to disclose the source of any information that is espoused, disseminated or published by that person."*---This is the place given to the media in our new democratic environment. The constitution also ensures that this right would not be taken away, even during a state of

emergency. Admittedly, however, there is much work to be done to further improve the role of the media; this includes proper training (which we are seeing here) and making certain necessary laws, like the right to information act. I hope to see this happen in the near future.

- With rights also come responsibilities. I am sure all of you are aware of the social responsibilities of a journalist. Like any other freedom or right, we often see the freedom of press being abused and misused. For instance, false claims and accusations in complete disregard of the right to privacy, and reporting against the notion of innocent until proven guilty are matters for particular concern. Those operating in media work are under a special duty of care and carry a unique social responsibility. This social responsibility is of utmost importance in any democratic society. I am glad to say that most of the time our media outlets take this responsibility in to account when they report. The “Code of Practice” that was formulated by the editors of many major media outlets of Maldives, initiated by the Maldives Journalist Association in collaboration with UNDP and Democracy House, is an example that our local media are willing to take this responsibility very seriously.
- While using the right to freedom of press in a responsible manner is important, the media can do much more to strengthen democracy in the country. One is, to inform the public about this democratic system and create faith and trust in democracy as a system of governance. Reporting human rights related issues, taking a human rights angle in stories, helping civil society and even the human rights commission in publicizing events they organized to promote human rights, are but a few examples of ways in which you can contribute to creating a human rights culture here in the Maldives.

- As most of you will know, we at the human rights commission of the Maldives, invite and send news updates of our activities to the media, and try our best to keep a good and constructive relationship with the media in every way we can. Needless to say that we need the support and cooperation from the media to succeed in creating a democratic environment, where human rights of everyone are respected and honored. For this to happen, the media needs to be well informed of human rights. The basics of human rights, the international human rights system, human rights in our legal system, human rights situation in our country, what we can and are doing to improve the human rights situation - these are things which the media should be well versed in. Since it is our responsibility to inform and educate the public about human rights; the HRCM the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives is planning training workshops, for the local media so that they it will be familiar with human rights issues in its reporting on human rights related issues. I trust we will get the necessary cooperation from the Media when that happens.
- With the power to influence public opinion in their hands, the media can do so much more than anyone else to improve democracy and human rights in the Maldives, and play a crucial role in creating a culture of human rights in the country. It is not the sole responsibility of any one institution or group, but the responsibility of each and every one of us. I am confident media in the Maldives will continue to become more independent and effective in promoting democracy and human rights in the country.

Thank You