

Statement by Mr. Ahmed Mujuthaba, Chairperson, Human Rights Commission of Maldives, at the 8th Annual Meeting of Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, 16-18 February 2004, Katmandu, Nepal.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives was formed on December 10, 2003 in response to the sad and ugly incidents that took place on September 19 and 20, 2003 in the prison, sparking riots in Male', the capital.

We have 9 members, including me, in the Commission.

Presently it's functioning under regulations formulated by the President. A brief on the Commission and a rough unofficial English translation of these regulations are with you, or will be with you shortly. We have given our comments to the draft bill to the relevant authorities so that the enabling legislation will comply with the Paris Principles. We hope that the bill will go to the very next session of the Majlis, which is our Parliament. We further hope, that it will have all the suggestions we have given incorporated in it.

During the brief period of our existence, we have formulated a code of ethics for the Commission members and rules of procedure. We have also started to use a standardized form to lodge complaints. We have received, up to February 15, twenty nine complaints. This would be equivalent to India receiving 100,000 complaints during this period! We are investigating them as speedily as possible, given that we have presently only 4 staff members.

We have received assistance from the UNDP, Canada and the United Kingdom. These funds will be used mainly for creating awareness and consultancy in strengthening the Commissions work. I thank these donors for their generosity.

For early March, we have scheduled, with UNDP funding, a workshop to explain the Paris Principles, our regulations and the salient features of the human rights related conventions and treaties that we have ratified. A workshop in April or May will also be held, with the assistance of the British Council, to sensitise the press on human rights issues.

We have a long list of responsibilities and a long road ahead to bring human rights situation in our country to an internationally acceptable standard and I hope that this community will give the needed support in every sense of the word.

On behalf of our delegation, I thank the Asia Pacific Forum for letting us participate as an observer in this meeting, and the UNDP and the UK government for enabling us financially to participate.

I hope that in the next meeting we would be participating as a full member.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the host country, Nepal for the excellent arrangements and the warm hospitality.

Thank you.