

Press release: Maldives continues to be named a Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 'Human Rights Priority Country'

On [20th July] the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) made public its annual Human Rights Report for 2016. Maldives is one of 30 'Human Rights Priority Countries' (HRPCs), countries with which the UK looks for positive engagement that contributes to addressing human rights concerns.

The Report notes that democratic space, political and civil freedoms continued to deteriorate in Maldives during 2016. It sets out concerns at anti-democratic legislation that was passed during 2016, particularly the Defamation and Freedom of Speech Act which seeks to clamp down on freedom of expression, and the Freedom of Assembly Act which restricts the right of assembly.

The Report raises concern at the intimidation of and threats to journalists, noting that during the year journalists were arrested and news organisations raided, threatened or closed down. It draws attention to several long prison sentences handed out to high-profile political figures, including opposition leaders, at the end of trials that lacked transparency and judicial independence, and that failed to follow due process.

The report mentions the UK's disappointment at Maldives' decision to leave the Commonwealth in 2016.

British Ambassador to Maldives, James Dauris, said:

"The purpose of our Annual Report is to draw attention to human rights issues of concern in countries around the world, to encourage progress and recognize achievements made. As a friend of Maldives the UK is concerned by the lack of an effective separation of powers and the continued use of anti-terrorism, defamation and other legislation to silence and discourage opposition voices and journalists. We will continue to engage with Maldives and raise concerns alongside our international partners."

The Report underlines the UK's desire to work positively with countries facing human rights challenges to help them improve their human rights performance.

The 30 HRPCs are: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

Promoting human rights is a central foreign policy objective of the British

Government. The FCO began publishing the Annual Human Rights Report in 1998 and it is now [published online](#) As well as the Annual Report, twice-yearly updates on the 30 HRPCs are also published.