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INTERNAL

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES** (This item is being sent to media in the Maldives by the research team)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Pakistan - 24/25/28 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 254/94

**** Sudan - 25 January **** - LAUNCH OF CAMPAIGN

**** Turkey - 8 February **** - Launch of section level action

**** Northern Iraq - 22 February **** - PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

India - 27 November - SEE NEWS SERVICES 256 & 257

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REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES: RECENT ARRESTS IN RUN UP TO ELECTION MAY BE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED

The Government of the Maldives may be arresting political candidates and their supporters who it sees as potential opposition in the run-up to the forthcoming parliamentary elections, according to Amnesty International.

Following the arrests, earlier this month, of several members of parliament and scores of their supporters, Amnesty International has written to President Gayoom requesting information on the legislation under which those arrested are being held and details of the charges against them.

There are no political parties in the Republic of Maldives; all those standing in elections do so as independent candidates. Amnesty International is concerned that those recently arrested may have been detained solely for the peaceful expression of their political views.

"If people are arrested solely for their political beliefs, we would consider them to be prisoners of conscience and will campaign for their immediate and unconditional release," Amnesty International said.

Among those reportedly detained earlier this month are Hassan Afeef, member for Thaa Atoll and Mohamed Shibab, member for Dhall Atoll and several of their supporters. Another member of parliament, Ahmed Ibrahim Didi from Addu Atoll, had reportedly been arrested earlier on 17 May and was kept in detention until 27 June.

This is not the first time Amnesty International has had such concerns about election-related arrests in the Republic of Maldives. Following presidential elections in November 1993, 23 people were arrested for their presumed support for Ilyas Ibrahim, a former government minister who was standing as candidate.

The Director General of the Department of Information and Broadcasting informed Amnesty International in November last year that those arrested had "been convicted and were awaiting their sentences to be carried out". To date, however, the organization has not received any further details about the precise charges against them or their conviction and sentence.

Among those arrested in November 1993 was Mohamed Saleem, a member of parliament, who is reportedly still under house arrest awaiting trial on charges of corruption. Amnesty International believes that his arrest and those of the 22 others may have been politically motivated.

The human rights organization is calling on the authorities to guarantee that all people, including candidates in the elections, will be given the right to exercise their right to peaceful political activities and freedom of expression in the run-up to the elections.

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