



December 14, 2025

President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu
The President's Office
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Republic of Maldives

info@po.gov.mv

Re: Arrest and Detention of Trade Unionists

Honourable President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu

On behalf of the International Lawyers Assisting Workers (ILAW) Network, the world's largest association of labour lawyers uniting over 1,400 members in more than 100 countries, I express my deep concern over the recent arrest of nearly 30 workers, including members of *Bodu Kanneli Masveringe Union (BKMU)*, who had engaged in peaceful industrial action to improve their wages and working conditions.¹ This action constitutes a serious violation of ILO Convention 87, which the Maldives ratified in 2013. We therefore urge you to immediately release all those in jail and to take the additional measures outlined below.

Beginning on December 10th, yellowfin tuna fishers organized by BKMU began a protest demanding that the government make good on its previous commitments to 1) raise the floor price of yellowfin tuna; 2) improve access to ice, and 3) provide fuel at base rates. These demands are necessary to ensure the economic viability of environmentally sustainable, small-scale, pole-and-line fisheries – particularly in light of rising costs, market volatility and worsening climate impacts. Their methods stand in stark contrast to large-scale industrial fishing fleets, which have a documented track record of overfishing, ecosystem destruction, high carbon emissions, and labour exploitation. As such, these fishers of BKMU are both literally and politically holding the line against the expansion of destructive industrial fleets.

On December 11th, at least 28 people were detained by Maldivian police in what appears to be a serious violation of their right to freedom of association. Others were reportedly detained simply for observing. Those detained include Mauroof Zakir, a leader of the Maldivian hospitality workers' union TEAM and a sitting Member of Parliament. We understand that he

¹ Notably, fishers staged a similar protest last year without incident. The severity of the present response therefore appears intended to send a warning to them and to wider Maldivian civil society against exercising rights protected under international law.

has been hospitalized for injuries he apparently sustained during his arrest. Several other Maldivian trade union leaders and labour activists were arrested alongside him.

Among those arrested were four migrant worker union members. At least 20 undocumented migrant workers have also reportedly been arrested, detained and transferred to an immigration detention centre. To be clear, while a government has the right to determine who may enter their territory, migrant workers, regardless of their immigration status, possess rights under international law, including fundamental labour rights, which cannot be denied due to domestic immigration policies. States must protect these workers from exploitation, including decent work and due process, treating them the same as documented workers once an employment relationship starts. The government cannot on the one hand knowingly benefit from a large migrant workforce (documented and undocumented) and then provide them no rights.

According to the latest information, Maldivian authorities remanded those not held in the immigration detention centre for five days. There is no clear information regarding the status, treatment, or legal situation of the undocumented migrant workers in immigration detention. Consistent with the international legal obligations of the government of the Maldives, we urge you to:

- immediately release of all those detained for exercising their fundamental rights;
- disclose the whereabouts and legal status of all of those detained, including the undocumented migrant workers in immigration detention, so that they can have access to counsel;
- regularize the status of undocumented workers so that they may continue to work, or be eligible to return to the Maldives to work; and
- end to the criminalisation of peaceful protest, including by trade unions.

We also note the recent advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on “Obligations of States in respect of climate change”, states must ensure that human rights principles guide implementation of climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Full respect for the right to freedom of association is necessary for a just and sustainable transition in the fisheries sector.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Vogt
Chair, ILAW Network

CC:

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