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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Maldives Elected Vice-Chair of UN Torture Prevention Forum**

*21<sup>st</sup> October 2010, Geneva;* The Maldives was today elected Vice-Chair and representative of the Asia Region at an international meeting of countries committed to the prevention of torture around the world. The Meeting of States Parties to the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT) will take place at the United Nations in Geneva on 28 October 2010 and will elect 15 new members to the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT), the UN system's primary torture prevention mechanism.

The OPCAT, which came into force in 2006, has 55 States Parties and establishes a network of national bodies, in each State Party, called "National Preventative Mechanisms" (NPMs), mandated to prevent all forms of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in prisons and other places of detention. The NPMs do so by conducting unannounced visits to places of detention, making the findings public and submitting reports and recommendations to relevant government and international authorities. The NPMs also conducts training sessions for prison and police personnel to ensure that they comply with tough international standards designed to prevent the ill-treatment of detainees. The OPCAT also established a 20-person, international-level, expert Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT) which coordinates torture prevention work at the global-level, conducts unannounced visits of its own, works with governments to improve their conduct, and supports the efforts of NPMs.

The Maldives ratified the OPCAT in 2006, becoming one of the original 20 States Parties, and the first in Asia. In the Maldives, the Human Rights Commission (HRCM) acts as the NPM, and has already conducted a large number of prison visits and training sessions. Indeed, the Maldives NPM is seen as a model for NPMs elsewhere, and is often invited to speak at torture prevention workshops around the world. The Maldives NPM also works closely with the SPT, the latter having conducted a mission to the Maldives in 2007. The SPT's recommendations from that visit are being implemented by the Government, with many of them reflected in the new Prison and Parole Bill.

Being elected Vice-Chair of the OPCAT meeting will be the first-time the Maldives has been on the Bureau of a meeting of States Parties to any of the major UN human rights conventions.

Speaking ahead of the meeting on 28th October, the Foreign Minister, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, noted the importance of torture prevention as a priority issue for the Government. "Because of the Maldives' recent history, it is right and proper that we should take a leadership role at international level to ensure that this, one of the worst forms of human rights violation, is confronted and eventually eliminated. There is now no place for torture in the Maldives; and there should be no place for it anywhere in the world.

Although it is a new treaty, the OPCAT has already proved an effective vehicle for preventing torture, and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Nowhere is this more clear than in the Maldives where the NPM has been very active and has worked with the Government to improve conditions and conduct at numerous places of detention; and where the recommendations of the SPT are being actively incorporated into national law".

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