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Maldives Parliamentary Inquiry Unearths *Coup* Cover-up

A parliamentary inquiry conducted by the Maldives Parliament's Oversight Committee has unearthed evidence of a systematic government cover-up designed to subdue testimonies from key witnesses to the *coup d'etat* in the Maldives in February last year. Due to its close involvement in the government's Committee of National Inquiry (CoNI) report which found that February's transfer of power was entirely legal and that no-one in the then opposition or security forces was guilty of any wrongdoing, the Commonwealth Secretariat is implicated in the cover-up.

In August 2012, the CoNI published its final report into the events surrounding 7th February 2012, when the Maldives' first-ever democratic government, led by President Mohamed Nasheed, was forced from Office and replaced by the-then Vice-President, Dr. Mohamed Waheed, at the head of a coalition of parties associated with the country's former political and economic elite and Islamic extremists. This coalition was and remains dominated by the party of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the country's former autocratic leader who controlled the country for three decades prior to his defeat in the 2008/2009 elections and was accused of widespread human rights abuses.

The CoNI, established by Dr. Waheed shortly after he came to power, was originally made-up of three people – all well-known sympathizers of former President Gayoom – and chaired by President Gayoom's former Minister of Defense. After an international outcry, the government was forced to agree to reform the CoNI. The Commonwealth Secretary-General's special envoy to the Maldives, Sir Donald McKinnon, was subsequently sent to the Maldives to mediate an agreement, but eventually gave-in to government demands that President Gayoom's former Defense Minister must remain as Chair, and that the other two members must remain in-place. Unsurprisingly, the CoNI's final report claimed that there was absolutely no wrong-

doing on the part of the opposition or Gayoom loyalists in the police and military. This was despite widespread evidence to the contrary.

As per the CoNI's terms of reference, after the publication of its report, the document was transmitted to key national institutions for their review and necessary action. This included the People's Majlis (parliament)'s Executive Oversight Committee (EOC).

The EOC's task was to review the main conclusions of the CoNI report (namely that there was no police mutiny or any other wrongdoing on the part of the police or army, and that President Nasheed's resignation was entirely voluntary), and to assess whether the Executive has implemented the report's key recommendations (such as holding those police and army personnel guilty of beating and torturing protesters accountable).

After the review had begun, the Committee's work was given new urgency by the resignation and subsequent allegations made by the Coalition Government's Minister of Human Rights, Ms. Dhiyana Saeed. In a personal memoir recalling the events of early 2012, Ms. Saeed claimed that in the months preceding February 7th, a well-organised and well-financed plot had emerged among key opposition politicians (now ministers in the Coalition Government), religious hardliners and parts of the army and police loyal to former President Gayoom. Shortly before February 7th, key members of this group met the-then Vice-President, Mohammed Waheed, to convince him to join them. Immediately after the meeting, those involved in the plot publicly swore loyalty to Vice-President Waheed.

As per its mandate and the Constitution, in January 2013 the EOC invited a number of prominent individuals, involved in the events of last February, to appear before the Committee. Despite government attempts to block these testimonies and all Executive cooperation with the EOC, the Committee was able to secure hearings with the heads of both police and army intelligence on 7th February, namely Superintendent Mohamed Hameed and Brigadier General Ahmed Nilam, as well as the-then Commissioner of Police Ahmed Faseeh and former Chief Superintendent of Police Mohamed Jinah. And finally, Ms. Saeed also agreed to appear before Members.

After giving evidence to the Committee (in-line with their obligations under the Constitution), Brigadier General Ahmed Nilam and Chief Superintendent of Police Mohamed Jinah were summarily suspended and dismissed from the army and police respectively. No explanation was given by the government.

During the first-half of January, these individuals presented information to the Committee. Based on their testimonies, on 12th January, the Chair of the Committee, Ali Waheed MP, issued a statement claiming that it appears that the CoNI report is “flawed” based on the Committee's findings “so-far”. Those findings, he claimed, suggest that “a crime against the State” has been committed involving individuals, leaders of political parties and senior figures within the police and military.

Moreover, Mr. Waheed MP noted that many of those who have information claimed that the CoNI report lacked “key information they had given [to the CoNI panel]” and even that “some of their information was wrongly presented”.

The testimonies of all the main witnesses summoned to the Committee demonstrate a remarkable degree of consensus about what happened in early 2012, and a common understanding of the legality of the change in government. All witnesses stated, unequivocally, that the change in government bore all the hallmarks of a *coup d'etat*. All named the same individuals as being central to the *coup* – with foremost among these the current Commissioner of Police and the current Minister of Defense. All made clear that following a meeting between opposition leaders and the-then Vice President, Mohamed Waheed, in the weeks preceded 7th February, those planning the coup swore their loyalty to him and thereafter he was fully implicated in the plot. All saw widespread evidence of collusion between elements of the police and army loyal to former President Gayoom and the main leaders of the *coup*. All had seen evidence that the plot to remove President Nasheed included the possibility that he would be assassinated if he did not leave willingly. And all claimed that the evidence and testimony they presented to the CoNI was either ignored or misrepresented.

ENDS

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