

## **Joint statement on behalf of the Maldives private media outlets – 23.08.14**

We, Maldives journalists, express grave concern over the disappearance of Minivan News journalist Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla. Abduction and disappearance of individuals does not stop with journalists. This is a threat to every individual, every family and all of the Maldives.

Article 27 and 28 of the constitution guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of press. Hence, we do not believe anyone should ever be threatened or assaulted over their words, thoughts, or gestures.

Efforts have always been made by various parties to silence journalists. Many journalists have been assaulted. Murder attempts have been made as well. TVM and DhiTV were vandalised while VTV and Raajje TV were torched. Now, a journalist has disappeared without a trace. Information we have gathered so far strongly suggests Rilwan was abducted.

As intimidation of press grows, and attacks against journalists, equipment and buildings continue, we are extremely concerned over the delays in bringing to justice those who commit these acts. We note that the investigation of Rilwan's case is slow and that information has not been adequately shared with the media and the public.

The right to live and work without fear and intimidation must be ensured to all. It is the state's responsibility to make relevant policies and laws to ensure this right for every Maldivian. However, sadly this worsening wound is festering without any treatment. As a result, extremism of all forms is becoming stronger, and the danger of gangs is growing.

Even though different media outlets have different editorial policies, we journalists are one family. And though we continue to face dangers from radical and extremist groups, this is not a danger we alone face.

We will not step back, or put down our pens, or silence our tongues, or hold our thoughts in the face of such threats. We will do whatever is necessary to secure our rights.