



**International Convention on
the Elimination of All Forms
of Racial Discrimination**

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Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

**Combined thirteenth to fifteenth periodic reports
submitted by Maldives under article 9 of the
Convention, due in 2015***

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



List of Abbreviations

CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DJA	Department of Judicial Administration
DVPA	Law No: 3/2012 (Domestic Violence Prevention Act)
FPA	Family Protection Authority
HRCM	Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LGA	Local Government Authority
LRA	Labour Relations Authority
MED	Ministry of Economic Development
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOGFSS	Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services
MOT	Ministry of Tourism
MPS	Maldives Police Service
MRC	Maldivian Red Crescent
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NMRF	National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up
NRR	National Resilience and Recovery Plan 2020–2022
SAP	Government’s Strategic Action Plan 2019–2023
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
TIP	Trafficking in Persons

I. Introduction

1. Methodology, Consultation and Information Dissemination

1. Maldives is pleased to present the thirteenth to fifteenth periodic report under Article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (“CERD” or “the Convention”). This report covers the developments and efforts undertaken by the State from September 2011 to April 2022 in implementing the Convention articles in the Maldives. This report focuses on the implementation status of the recommendations issued by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (“the Committee”) in its Concluding Observations adopted in August 2011¹ following the consideration of the Maldives’ fifth to twelfth periodic reports, as well as the issues identified in the list of issues adopted by the Committee in July 2021.²

2. Maldives has been a party to the CERD since 1984. The Constitution of the Republic of Maldives³ which was adopted in 2008, sets out the starting point for the protections and rights afforded to people within the Maldivian jurisdiction. Article 17 of the Constitution states that everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms included in the Constitution, without discrimination of any kind, including race, national origin, colour, sex, age, mental or physical disability, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status or the native island.

3. This report strives to underscore the work done by Maldives in the context of the aforementioned Constitutional stipulation and the obligations under CERD, to ensure effective provision of Convention rights, and in particular, to implement the recommendations received from the Committee. This periodic report is a product of extensive consultations and information gathering processes to ensure that a true picture of the efforts, gaps and limitations in relation to the implementation of the Convention is portrayed.

4. Formulation of this report was undertaken by the Maldives National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up (“NMRF”) established on 5th November 2020 by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. The CERD Subcommittee of the NMRF was set up to prepare the report, and carry out any subsequent work in relation to the review, including follow-up and monitoring of implementation of the concluding observations. The CERD Subcommittee of the NMRF is a specialised subcommittee led by the Attorney General’s Office and comprising of all relevant Government and State stakeholders involved in the promotion and protection of the rights prescribed under CERD. The Subcommittee worked in accordance with specific Standard Operating Procedures (“SOPs”) to ensure timely delivery, and preparation of the report was carried through a participatory and consultative process.

5. Pre-drafting consultations were conducted with the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (“HRCM”) in its capacity as the National Human Rights Institution (“NHRI”) of the Maldives, and civil society organisations (“CSOs”)/non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”) in March 2022, to further enhance the information collection process. All CSOs/NGOs working for the protection and promotion of human rights in the Maldives were invited via public announcement and email, to give their views on the report and take part in a consultation meeting.⁴

6. Following the formulation of the final draft of the report, the report was submitted to the Subcommittee for a final validation, and further comments were sought from the HRCM and CSOs on the presentation of information included in the report

7. Educating the public and creating awareness on human rights is mandated to the HRCM by the 2008 Constitution. State party reports under international human rights instruments and concluding observations are published on the HRCM’s website.

¹ CERD/C/MDV/CO/5-12.

² CERD/C/MDV/QPR/13-13.

³ <https://presidency.gov.mv/Pages/Index/15>.

⁴ CSOs who responded to the invitation and were consulted are: Transparency Maldives, Maldivian Red Crescent, Mission for Migrant Workers Maldives and Public Interest Law Centre.

8. As a standing follow-up mechanism did not exist prior to the formation of the NMRF, Government has not carried out wide dissemination of CERD, the subsequent reports and Concluding Observations. However, with the establishment of the NMRF, and specifically the CERD Subcommittee within the NMRF, Government assures that dissemination of the documents will be carried out, to increase awareness amongst all stakeholders, CSOs/NGOs and the general public.

2. Political Landscape, National Planning and COVID-19 Pandemic

9. In November 2018, President Solih assumed office with a vow to foster a culture of respect for human rights, strengthen democratic norms and enhance the governance system. In its first 100 days, Government achieved 83% success in completing the 100-day pledges.⁵

10. Subsequently, a comprehensive Government's Strategic Action Plan (2019–2023)⁶ ("SAP") was launched, the first in over a decade, forming the basis of all development efforts. SAP focuses on 5 sectors; Blue Economy, Caring State, Dignified Families, *Jazeera Dhiriulhun* (the island life), and Good Governance. Promotion and protection of human rights is mainstreamed throughout these 5 sectors, and cross-cutting themes including climate resilience and sustainability, and gender equality are reflected. SAP sets out policies for equitable distribution of resources to achieve decentralised governance, and sets realistic and achievable priorities and targets for development. SAP is also aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and practices results-based resource allocation and budgeting.

11. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the symptoms of our volatile economy and social sector. With the complete closure of tourism in 2020, the economic shocks that we experienced caused us to be one of the worst hit in the world by the pandemic⁷. The gaps in our health and social sector were exposed, revealing an urgent need for addressing structural and systemic weaknesses.

12. It was crucial that our response to the pandemic was swift but holistic. President Solih in May 2020, established the National Taskforce on Resilience and Recovery, to manage the Maldives' response to the pandemic and devise a holistic and cohesive resilience and recovery plan. The taskforce operated through 4 working groups: finance, economic recovery, social sector and crime prevention and counter-terrorism.

13. The output was the National Resilience and Recovery Plan 2020-2022⁸ ("NRR"), which takes into consideration the key priorities identified in SAP, and incorporates new strategies to remedy the deficiencies highlighted by the pandemic. This reprioritised plan now forms the basis of our development and recovery efforts.

14. As we build back our economy and strengthen the social protection system, Maldives faces a multitude of challenges due to its limited resources. However, we remain resolute in the fulfilment of our international human rights commitments, and are pleased to report to the Committee, the results of this administration's determination and perseverance to restore rule of law, democratic norms and respect for human rights in the Maldives.

II. Replies to the list of issues prior to reporting

A. Reply to paragraph 1 of the list of issues (CERD/C/MDV/QPR/13-15)

15. Maldives has made remarkable progress in strengthening its legal and institutional framework pertaining to the promotion and protection of human rights. Below is a summary

⁵ <https://presidency.gov.mv/HundredDays/Index/>.

⁶ <https://presidency.gov.mv/SAP/>.

⁷ <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP-MV-Rapid-Livelihood-Assessment-Impact-of-COVID-19-Crisis-in-the-Maldives-2020-Part-I.pdf>.

⁸ <https://presidency.gov.mv/Pages/Index/224>.

of the most notable legislations enacted during this reporting period, in promotion and protection of human rights, in particular, those rights covered by CERD.

(a) Domestic Violence Prevention Act – 23rd April 2012

16. This Act determines the provisions for the prohibition and prevention of domestic violence, measures that will be imposed against persons who commit acts of domestic violence, protection and support for victims and the role of state agencies in the prevention of domestic violence.

(b) Act on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly – 10th January 2013

17. An extension of Article 32 of the Constitution which guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly without prior permission of the State, this Act elaborates the right and establishes the parameters of exercising this right. The Act specifically states that the right should be afforded to everyone equally and that any measures taken by the police or State authorities in regard to the freedom of assembly shall not appear to discriminate against certain people or that it gives preference to a certain group of people.

(c) Anti-Human Trafficking Act – 8th December 2013

18. This Act establishes the crime and punishment of human trafficking, with an aim to prevent the act of trafficking, and sets up a mechanism for victim protection. The Second Amendment brought to the Act in April 2021, seeks to align the definition of human trafficking with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (“UN TIP Protocol”) and introduces provisions which criminalise internal and cross border child trafficking for exploitative purposes.

(d) Anti-Torture Act – 23rd December 2013

19. This Act codifies the principles enshrined in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (“CAT”) and recognises torture as a distinct criminal offence. It provides mechanisms for civil redress and rehabilitation. The Act in defining torture, stipulates that any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person, by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence (knowledge) of a public official or any other person, in order to discriminate between two persons based on a reason which the law does not permit, will amount to torture.

(e) Penal Code of the Maldives – 13th April 2014

20. The enactment of the Penal Code of the Maldives paved way for a modern, rights-based and more cohesive criminal justice system in the Maldives. The Fifth Amendment brought to the Penal Code in November 2021, prescribes the offence of causing injury to another person and/or inciting injury to another person based on race, country of origin, colour, political view or religion.

(f) Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Act – 13th May 2014

21. This Act defines what constitutes sexual abuse and harassment and outlines the responsibilities of different parties and measures to be taken to prevent such acts, in an effort to prevent acts of sexual abuse and harassment in places of employment, and in institutions that provide educational services, health services and other institutions that provide social services.

(g) Health Service Provision Act – 7th September 2015

22. This Act determines the rules, procedures and conditions for operation, for both health service providers and individuals working in the health service sector, for maintaining a certain standard of operation and also determines the rights and obligations of health service providers and recipients of said services. The Act specifically stipulates that a recipient of a health service shall not be discriminated based on their race, nationality, colour, sex, age,

physical or mental disability, political or other views, financial standing, birth or other status, or native island, or any other factor.

(h) Maldives Sports Act – 7th September 2015

23. This Act which governs all sports in the Maldives, stipulates that in playing any sports or in conducting any cultural activities in the Maldives, there should be no discrimination based on sex, nationality, race, age or health condition.

(i) Gender Equality Act – 23rd August 2016

24. A notable achievement in solidifying women empowerment policies, this Act recognises gender-based discrimination, both direct and indirect, and enables measures to be imposed against all ideas and practices that promote gender-based discrimination. It further demarcates violence against women as gender-based violence, obliges public and private institutions to establish specific complaints mechanisms to address work place gender-based discrimination, and creates a positive obligation on all stakeholders to actively facilitate participation of women.

(j) Juvenile Justice Act – 20th November 2019

25. This Act creates a distinct track in the criminal justice system for children in conflict with the law, emphasises rehabilitation and reintegration, and introduces diversion mechanisms and targeted interventions to help children and youth at risk of offending. The Act states that in enforcing the Act towards a child in conflict with the law, no person shall discriminate based on race, colour, sex, language, political or other beliefs, country of birth, social standing, financial status, health condition, disability or any other aspect of the child or the child's parents or legal guardian.

(k) Child Rights Protection Act – 20th November 2019

26. This Act repeals the 1991 Act of Child Rights Protection, is compliant with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and expressly recognises the rights of children to education, adequate health care and to be protected from all forms of discrimination, mental and physical harm, abuse and exploitation, among a host of other rights. The Act specifically states that a child shall not be subjected to any form of discrimination by reason of race, colour, sex, language, political belief or any other belief, country of birth, ancestry, island of birth, social status the child may belong to, disability, wealth or any other reason with respect to the child or a parent of the child.

(l) Water and Sewerage Act – 5th August 2020

27. This Act specifically mandates the Utilities Regulatory Authority to ensure that there is no discrimination on the basis of race, nationality, colour, age, sex, physical or mental disability, or political or other beliefs, or wealth, or any other reason, in the provision of water and sewerage services.

(m) Second Amendment to the Human Rights Commission's Act – 22nd September 2020

28. Amendments were brought to the Human Rights Commission's Act to ensure their independence and accountability. Provisions have been inserted to ensure that the members of the Commission act independently and uphold strict ethics and standards.

(n) Sixth Amendment to the Employment Act – 22nd September 2020

29. The Employment Act enacted in 2008 specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of race in relation to employment. Amendments to the Act were brought in 2014 to introduce employment approval and deposit systems for the protection of migrant workers, and in 2016 to further require employers of expatriates, with valid work permits, to exercise added responsibility in paying wages and outlines actions to be taken in instances of failure to do so. Most significantly, the Sixth Amendment brought in 2020 sets a ceiling for the numbers of foreign workers from each country and details standards for accommodations and living conditions provided by employers.

(o) Education Act – 10th November 2020

30 This Act establishes a mechanism to ensure the right to education. It includes the rights of children and adults to receive education as well as the rights and responsibilities of parents and teachers with respect to students. The Act specifies that all foreign children residing in the Maldives, have equal rights as any Maldivian child, to pre-school, primary, secondary and higher secondary education. Free and compulsory education of 12 years have been defined through this Act for the first time in the Maldives.

(p) Transitional Justice Act – 17th December 2020

31 This Act established an Ombudsperson's Office for Transitional Justice, with a mandate to investigate systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms perpetrated by State institutions or senior officials of State institutions between 1st January 1953 and 17th November 2018.

(q) Climate Emergency Act – 18th May 2021

32. This Act stipulates actions to address climate emergency resulting from swift acceleration of the severity of repercussions from climate change.

(r) Tenancy Act – 18th November 2021

33. This Act governs the leasing of property in the Maldives for purposes of residing. The Act prohibits inclusion of clauses in any tenancy agreement, which prevents the residence of a person based on their nationality, region, race, sex, belief, or disability.

(s) Third Amendment to the Prevention of Terrorism Act – 15th December 2021

34. This amendment to the Prevention of Terrorism Act seeks to overhaul the legal regime addressing returnee combatants introduced in the Second Amendment to the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The Amendment seek to better define returnee fighters or combatants, and enhances the procedures relating to returnee fighters, especially children belonging to such families. The Act maintains a presumption that children are victims of terrorism unless otherwise established in a law mandated risk assessment conducted by a specialised committee. Rules pertaining to registration of children born in warzones are also covered.

(t) Associations Act – 9th May 2022

35. This Act governs the particulars of exercising the right to form associations provided for in Article 30(b) of the Constitution, including incorporation, registration, and regulation; general rights and obligations of such entities; and the duties of the Registrar of Associations. It seeks to establish a mechanism to ensure the accountability of associations and to provide a legal framework for associations to contribute to the development of society.

36. Additional laws have been passed to strengthen institutional frameworks or procedural safeguards in protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Maldives. As such, the Government notes the following.

(u) Prisons and Parole Act of Maldives – 23rd December 2013

37. This Act overhauls the entire prisons system in the Maldives, establishing the Maldives Correctional Service and mandating it with operating the Maldives prisons system as well as conducting rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

(v) National Integrity Commission's Act – 6th September 2015

38. This Act established the National Integrity Commission, mandated with strengthening the integrity of law enforcement agencies and employees of such agencies. The Commission is empowered to investigate cases of misconduct and unlawful acts carried out by law enforcement agencies and their personnel.

(w) Criminal Procedure Act – 2nd May 2016

39. This Act established a comprehensive set of rules for all the criminal justice sector institutions in investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating criminal offences in the Maldives. It also details the rights afforded to those accused of criminal offences under the Constitution. The Act in providing guidance to the Prosecutor General on prosecuting or issuing advices, states that if the crime was committed due to the victim's race, sex, nationality, or physical or mental disability, then it should be considered a case where prosecution should be pursued instead of issuing advices.

(x) Presidential Commissions' Act – 24th June 2019

40. This Act affords statutory powers to Presidential Commissions to conduct full-fledged criminal investigations, including powers to independently seek arrest and search warrants. It also demarcates the rules for operations as well as rules on independency and accountability.

(y) Legal Professions Act – 27th June 2019

41. Bar Council of the Maldives was established under this Act, enabling self-regulation of the legal profession for the first time in Maldives.

(z) Maldives Police Service Act – 27th December 2020

42. This Act overhauls the 2008 Police Act, introducing a number of much needed reforms to the governance of police. The new Act decentralises service provision, sets forth a human-rights centered policing approach and promotes professional standards within the police force.

(aa) Maldives Statistics Act – 20th July 2021

43. This Act establishes a national statistics framework, and entails processes for collection, analysis, usage and publication of national statistics, under an established national standard.

(bb) Civil Procedure Act – 16th December 2021

44. The first consolidation of such nature, this Act encompasses rules relating to pre-trial procedures, proceedings at trial, general rules of evidence applicable to civil cases, judgments, orders and enforcement of judgments in civil proceedings. The Act prohibits discrimination on any grounds in the trials of civil matters.

45. Government is resolute in implementing its Legislative Agenda (2018-2023) in order to strengthen the legislative framework pertaining to the protection of human rights and enhancement of the governance system.

46. In addition to the laws detailed in paragraph 15 above, enactment of a Personal Data Protection Bill, Bills on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Press, Bill on Right to Strike, Bill on Protection of Vulnerable Individuals, Mental Health Bill, National Registration Bill, Legal Aid Bill, and Bills amending the Disabilities Act, the Social Protection Act and the Anti-Torture Act are all in the pipeline.

47. In strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks, Government affords a special priority to ensuring that implementation can be achieved in a decentralised manner. The proposed National Development Plan and the National Spatial Plan will disperse services across all regions of Maldives in the core spirit of decentralization. Decentralization policies in SAP and NRR seek to address and eliminate the differences in basic services between the capital Male' and other islands. Government is investing like never before in scaling up services, such as health, education, waste management, etc. available at the island and regional level, to facilitate growth of urban centres in line with the National Spatial Plan.

48. Government policies on decentralisation have been legitimized to give more strength to the local councils and increase people's participation in local governance, with fiscal decentralisation at the forefront of these changes. This was achieved through the enactment

of the Eighth Amendment to the Decentralisation Act on 15th December 2019, which for the first time, also established electoral quotas for women, clearly defined roles and responsibilities of Women's Development Committees and enhanced their fiscal independence.

49. Government is confident that successful implementation of its decentralisation policies will empower local councils and increase efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery at local levels, resulting in meaningful development.

B. Reply to paragraph 2 of the list of issues

50. While the Maldivian population is largely homogenous, the resident population in Maldives composes of other ethnicities and nationalities primarily owing to the use of foreign labour in Maldives. Maldives Bureau of Statistics collects information on the population through census and other surveys. As per the last census that was conducted in 2014, Maldives has a resident population of 402,071 people. Until 2014, 63,637 persons amounting to 16% of the total resident population were found to be foreigners,⁹ which consisted of 58% Bangladeshis, 20% Indians, 11% Sri Lankans and 10% from other nationalities.¹⁰ This number would have largely inflated in the present time, which can be identified through the census that will be conducted in September 2022.

C. Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues

51. With regard to making the optional declaration under Article 14 of CERD, Maldives has yet to make a decision on recognising the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications from individuals subject to the Maldives' jurisdiction.

D. Reply to paragraph 4 of the list of issues

52. Maldives endorsed the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action over 20 years ago. Unfortunately, there are no action plans or programmes to specifically implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action at the national level. However, over the years, Maldives has improved its human rights records by working with CSOs/NGOs and international organisations, to ensure human rights reform complies with the very highest international standards. Maldives has also implemented a number of measures, as detailed throughout this report, to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

E. Reply to paragraph 5 of the list of issues

53. The Constitution sets forth non-discrimination as a fundamental right. Article 17 of the Constitution stipulates that everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms included in the Constitution without discrimination of any kind including race, national origin, colour, sex, age, mental or physical disability, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status, or native island.

54. Discrimination in relation to specific issues have been prohibited through relevant laws in the Maldives. As detailed above at paragraph 15 of this report, the Freedom of Peaceful Assembly Act, Anti-Torture Act, Health Service Provision Act, Maldives Sports Act, Criminal Procedure Act, Juvenile Justice Act, Child Rights Protection Act, Water and Sewerage Act, Education Act, Tenancy Act and the Civil Procedure Act, all have clauses prohibiting discrimination.

⁹ <http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/nbs/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Census-Summary-Tables1.pdf>.

¹⁰ <http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/nbs/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Statistical-Release-II-Migration-new2.pdf>.

55. Discrimination in relation to employment is prohibited in the Employment Act of 2008. The Act states that it is prohibited to discriminate among persons carrying out equal work either in the granting of employment, determination of remuneration, increase in remuneration, provision of training, determination of conditions and manner of employment, dismissal from employment or resolution of other employment related matters, based on race, colour, social standing, religion, political beliefs or affiliation with any political party, sex, marital status, family obligations, and in so far as it does not contravene the provisions in the Act regarding age or disability.

56. With regard to domesticating Articles 4(a) and (b) of CERD, Government is pleased to note that an amendment has been brought to the Penal Code of the Maldives on 28th November 2021, which stipulates that a person commits an offence if a person causes injury to another person and/or incites injury to another person based on race, country of origin, colour, political view, or religion.

57. With these provisions in place, and with Article 17 of the Constitution applicable to the provision of all rights and freedoms in the Maldives, Government does not have current plans to enact an Anti-Discrimination Act.

F. Reply to paragraph 6 of the list of issues

58. Article 10(a) of the Constitution states that the religion of the State of Maldives is Islam and that Islam shall be one of the basis of all the laws of the Maldives. Article 10(b) further states that no law contrary to any tenet of Islam shall be enacted in the Maldives.

59. Article 9, in describing Maldivian citizens, states that non-Muslims may not become a citizen of the Maldives. While the process of becoming a citizen has been made simpler in the recent years, the requirements have not changed. The Islamic faith is an uncompromisable tenet of the Maldivian identity. A review of the citizenship or naturalization processes will require broader consensus among the public, and would have to be an amendment to the Constitution.

G. Reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues

60. HRCM is an independent institution constitutionally mandated to investigate and report on the observance of human rights, and to take steps to secure appropriate redress where rights have been violated. Even though, at the moment there are no plans to amend the provision in the Human Rights Commission's Act which requires members of the Commission to be Muslims, the Government is committed to strengthening the functions and autonomy of the HRCM, in order to ensure its compliance with the Paris Principles.

61. In that regard, an amendment was brought to the Human Rights Commission's Act in September 2020, to enhance the autonomy in the execution of its functions. The Amendment seeks to remedy the result of *suo motu* proceedings initiated by the Supreme Court of the Maldives against HRCM in 2014, which restricted HRCM's ability to engage with international mechanisms. The amendment stipulates that the HRCM shall enjoy unfettered authority to establish bilateral and multilateral relations with law enforcement agencies, forensic investigatory institutions, NHRIs, regional organisations and other states in the effort to protect and promote human rights. The Amendment also states that the HRCM can submit reports and findings in the Commission's capacity as the NHRI, in relation to the various international treaty obligations of Maldives.

62. Furthermore, the Amendment mandates all appointed individuals to declare their assets, and prohibits them from obtaining undue benefit from their position or to exercise undue influence. Rules on conflict of interest and strengthened accountability to the Parliament have also been incorporated, and HRCM is also required to publish an annual human rights report. Powers have also been granted to HRCM to provide effective civil remedies in cases where human rights violations occur. To this end, the HRCM is working on a civil litigation and compensation regulation in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme.

63. Government notes the budgetary challenges faced by HRCM. To address this, the budget of the Commission was increased by 17.9% in 2021. However, the approved budget for the year 2022 is less and therefore, negotiations are currently ongoing with stakeholders to increase it.

H. Reply to paragraph 8 of the list of issues

64. The Government is committed to implementing measures to prevent xenophobia, hate speech and online abuse. As stated above, a significant amendment was brought to the Penal Code of the Maldives in November 2021. This Fifth Amendment to the Penal Code stipulates that a person commits an offence if a person causes injury to another person and/or incites injury to another person based on race, country of origin, colour, political view. The Amendment also introduces a criminal offence whereby a person alleges or portrays anyone in public of breaching a tenet of Islam, or publicly portrays any person as a non-believer.

65. With the assumption of office by President Solih in November 2018, Maldives has entered a new era of democratic rule, where the current administration has created safe spaces for CSOs, human rights defenders, journalists and individuals to prosper and exercise their rights and freedoms, without fear of reprisals. The Constitution guarantees the right to engage in any conduct or activity that is not expressly prohibited by Islamic Shariah or by law¹¹ and every individual has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law.¹²

66. There are constitutional¹³ and legislative¹⁴ protections to anyone exercising their right to freedom of thought and freedom to communicate opinions and expression, without being subjected to threats and intimidation by both State and non-State actors.

67. In terms of law enforcement, the Maldives Police Service (“MPS”) continues to counter threats and harassment, both on online platforms and in person. Investigation of xenophobia and hate speech against individuals are treated as special cases and are carried out by the Serious and Organised Crime Department of MPS. Furthermore, an array of sensitization practices covering human rights principles and laws which include areas of content inciting hate in the society leading to criminal activity, have been included by the MPS in its training framework.

68. Investigating and ensuring accountability for cybercrimes remains a challenge due to the lack of a legal framework governing this area. Work is underway to enact a Cybercrime Prevention Bill, and a new Evidence Bill was submitted to the Parliament in August 2021, enactment of which will overhaul the outdated 1976 Evidence Act.

69. In addition to criminal investigations carried out by the MPS, reports of human rights violations related to foreigners are investigated by the HRCM. Complainants are advised of the available legal recourses. HRCM also educated students by conducting information sessions throughout the year. Peace and tolerance have been covered in human rights awareness sessions to various groups such as youth and public officials. Topics of xenophobia and hate speech are addressed by the HRCM while conducting awareness raising through mass media as well.

70. With regard to steps taken to address spreading of xenophobia among young people, the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (“MOGFSS”) has carried out sessions on the topic of prevention of bullying, which covers hate speech to an extent. Sessions on the Child Rights Protection Act and the Convention on the Rights of the Child also covers topics such as non-discrimination.

¹¹ Article 19 – Constitution of the Republic of Maldives.

¹² Article 20 – Constitution of the Republic of Maldives.

¹³ Articles 18, 20, 21, 27, 28, 33, 42, and 65 – Constitution of the Republic of Maldives.

¹⁴ Associations Act, Act on Prohibition of Threats and Use of Dangerous Weapons and the Penal Code of the Maldives.

I. Reply to paragraph 9 of the list of issues

71. In addition to the aforementioned Fifth Amendment to the Penal Code of the Maldives criminalising hate speech, the Maldivian legal framework consists of multiple laws which prohibit and punish acts of harassment or violence.

72. As such, the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Act provides a mechanism to reprimand harassment against foreigners in employment in the Maldives. The Act enacted in May 2014, mandates all work places to establish a complaints committee with the mandate to hear complaints of sexual abuse and harassment at work places, along with a responsibility to enhance awareness for prevention. Actions which can be taken by such committees include serving warnings, serving written reprimands, suspending, demoting or dismissing the perpetrator from employment. If such a complaints committee has not been established in a victim's place of work, the victim has the right to submit the complaint to the Employment Tribunal.

73. Violence perpetrated by anyone, regardless of nationality, are prohibited by both the Act on Prohibition of Threats and Use of Dangerous Weapons, as well as the Penal Code of the Maldives. Under the Act on Prohibition of Threats and Use of Dangerous Weapons, the act of threatening to commit harm to life, body, or property of a person, their families or someone under their supervision is a crime with a penalty of 6–18 months' imprisonment. Threats to commit bodily harm which may amount to assault is also criminalised in addition to the criminalisation of the act of assault itself, under the Penal Code of the Maldives. The penalties vary depending on the grievousness of harm caused and use of dangerous weapons.

74. The MPS investigates all cases of violence committed against migrant workers and foreigners in the country. The Anti-Human Trafficking Wing and the Tourist Police Department of MPS investigates incidents that victimises and involve foreigners. MPS also has its own Victim Support Department which provides psychosocial support to victims of crimes.

75. Complaints of harassment can also be submitted to the HRCM for investigation. HRCM's investigation department offers a toll-free number, through which officers provide guidance and advice to complainants on procedures and steps to follow in reporting complaints of harassment or violence to respective authorities.

76. HRCM also conducts their own investigations into claims reported by the migrant workers regarding workplace harassment and violence issues, which have not been adequately addressed by the relevant workplace or committee. Where the investigation finds that any right of the migrant worker has been violated, the matter will be brought to the concerned authority's attention. Furthermore, if the HRCM finds that a right has been violated, the complainant can submit case to the relevant court of Maldives to obtain compensation.

77. HRCM continues to communicate with relevant Government and State agencies by conducting case conferences during specific case investigations, to ameliorate the situation of foreigners in the Maldives. Furthermore, HRCM provides recommendations to Government and State agencies where neglect or procedural violation is identified, or as a means to reduce and prevent situations which could lead to human rights violations.

78. Additionally, the Labour Relations Authority ("LRA") is empowered by the Employment Act to observe compliance of employers with the Act, raise awareness on adherence to the Employment Act and subsequent regulations, and impose administrative actions on contravening parties.

79. Preventing hostility aimed at foreigners, including migrant workers, is essential to preventing acts of harassment and violence. As such, fostering tolerance and promoting mutual understanding is key. Efforts of the Government to this end are detailed under paragraphs 156–160 of this report.

80. The HRCM has also conducted sessions with the purpose of increasing awareness on migrant workers' rights and the challenges they face. As such, penal discussions were held in 2017 and 2018, aimed at establishing a culture of awareness and respect for the rights of

migrant workers, to identify the challenges faced by migrant workers and to create awareness among the community on the rights of migrant workers.

81. Maldivian CSOs have also been conducting awareness raising sessions and condemning acts of hatred and hostility aimed at migrant workers through issuing statements. Furthermore, the Public Interest Law Centre, a Maldivian CSO, has initiated a project to identify the primary challenges faced by the migrant population in the Maldives. The project seeks to identify migrant workers' experiences with recruitment, employment and general experiences, including various forms of abuse and xenophobia. A report is expected to be published in mid-2023. The Maldivian Red Crescent ("MRC") is also in the process of conducting a Migration and Displacement Needs Assessment, which seeks to determine the needs and challenges of migrant communities.

J. Reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues

82. The legislative guarantee stipulating that in determining the conditions of employment, wage and other factors, employees should not be subjected to any form of discrimination stemming from their race, colour, nationality social status or any other factor, have been in place since the enactment of the 2008 Employment Act. However, Maldives acknowledges that the foreign labour management practices need to be modernised and reformed, to combat exploitation and ensure that the welfare of the migrant workforce is guaranteed.

83. Government considers the issue of welfare of migrant workers as a national priority and addressing the many issues prevalent within the system. As such, a National Taskforce on Issues Related to Migrant Workers was established in 2019 to formulate policy on all issues relating to migrant workers, with representation from key stakeholders at the policy level.

84. Furthermore, a significant amendment was introduced to the Employment Act in 22nd September 2020, setting forth primary aspects about migrant workers' employment in the Maldives. As per the new amendment, the Ministry of Economic Development ("MED") is empowered to determine the conditions for issuing migrant worker quotas to employers, issuing work permits and allowing foreign labour in the Maldives. To that end, ceilings have been set for the number of foreign workers that can be brought to the Maldives from any particular country. MED has carried out significant work in reforming the labour quota and employment approval system which has been prone to extensive abuse in the past. The amendment also mandates employers to maintain prescribed standards in foreign labour quarters, triggering the enactment of the Regulation on Employees' Accommodation Standards in January 2021.

85. The Employment Agency Regulation was revised in both 2019 as well as 2022. The current Regulation published on 18th April 2022, mandates employment agencies to establish service outlets accessible to the public, obligates recruitment of migrant workers through registered and regulated employment agencies in source countries, and affords authority to MED to take actions, including blacklisting, against agencies in contravention of the Regulation, employment and anti-human trafficking laws. Furthermore, the Regulation specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, amongst other factors, in provision of employment agency services.

86. The Regulation on Expatriate Workers has also been revised in 2021, governing matters such as issuance of work permits for the period of work in the Maldives, procedure for issuance of work permits, procedure for recruitment of expatriates, and other issues related to recruitment. The Regulation further includes provisions relating to the registration of migrant workers in the expat online system and the use of the system, quota issuance, quota fees, collection of deposit fees in favour of the migrant worker and deposit fee refund, provision of accommodation for expatriate workers by employers, absconding of expatriate workers, regularisation of migrant workers, as well as, disciplinary measures that will be imposed against employers for non-compliance. This revised regulation seeks to ensure, effective implementation of legislation protecting migrant workers from exploitation.

87. Furthermore, the LRA as the monitoring agency under the Employment Act, conducts routine and compliance inspections of employers, and implements a dispute resolution mechanism between employees and employers. The LRA also takes administrative actions against contravening employers such as imposing fines and blacklisting.

88. With regard to measures taken to prevent and punish violence against and mistreatment of non-citizens, and in particular of migrant workers by their employers, Government notes that the Fifth Amendment brought to the Employment Act in 2016 entails specific provisions empowering MED to impose administrative measures against employers violating requirements to pay salaries, allowances and other emoluments to migrant workers.

89. As such, in February 2019, 24 recruitment companies were blacklisted on the Expat Online System and remain blacklisted to date. Only limited access is given to pay visa fees, extend quota duration and work permit duration for the regular expats registered under these companies. Investigation and prosecution of these cases are ongoing.

90. Furthermore, the Employment Agency Regulation and the Regulation on Expatriate Workers have mechanisms to prevent violence and mistreatment against the migrant workers. These include the powers afforded to the MED to take actions, such as revoking or suspending the license, imposing fines and blacklisting.

91. It must also be noted that Section 29 of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act provides that withholding or confiscating the passport or any such identification document of an individual with the intention of committing an offence of trafficking as prescribed in the Act shall constitute a criminal offence.

92. Concerning migrant workers seeking to stay within the Maldivian jurisdiction to get legal redress, the Maldives Immigration Act allows for the issuance of a “Special Visa” until such a time as the legal proceedings conclude.

93. Government strives to implement a number of measures to strengthen the legal framework and its enforcement in relation to migrant workers’ working conditions. In that regard, the Regulation on Employees’ Accommodation Standards was published on 28th January 2021. Schedule 1 of the Regulation provides that the accommodation should be of reasonable standard providing protection from weather elements, clean space with adequate lighting and ventilation. The Regulation also provides the minimum floor space to residents’ ratio that should be observed by the employer. Penalties for contravention are also provided for in the Regulation.

94. In the tourism sector, an internal circular maintained by the Ministry of Tourism (“MOT”), Voluntary Minimum Standards for Tourist Facilities, mandates tourism sector employers to ensure provision of equal rights and non-discriminatory working conditions to all staff. This Standard is being updated to be published as a regulation mandating tourist resorts and hotels to maintain basic requirements. Furthermore, in 2012, MOT issued a circular to the industry to maintain a local and foreigner employment parity at a minimum of 45% (forty-five percent) and a maximum of 55% (fifty-five percent). The policy is currently in review to assess the challenges of not getting enough locals to the tourism industry based on the available and projected beds. All staff related complaints in tourist facilities can be directed to the MOT via a special email address, and a specialised staff portal “*Fahi Way*” is under development to enable maintenance of employee records and other information.

95. With regard to access to justice, Maldives acknowledges that while there are no legislative discriminations against migrant workers to access justice, there are multiple challenges which migrant workers may face in the process. Government has undertaken a massive judicial reform agenda, through which the Government seeks to address the major challenges faced by vulnerable groups in accessing justice.

96. To this end, as a measure to better provide translators to migrant workers, the Department of Judicial Administration (“DJA”) is working to develop a directory of court translators to be used by the courts in criminal cases involving foreigners. This directory will help to ensure that foreigners are provided with translators without delay.

97. MPS also provides paid translators to assist in investigations involving foreign victims and detainees. MPS is currently in the process of compiling a directory of foreign language

translators, to ensure that all foreigners on suspicion of a crime are afforded translators. Furthermore, SOPs of MPS mandates that the detention and release of all foreign detainees have to be informed without delay to the consular services of the foreigner's country.

98. While there is a lack of translated documents for foreign detainees, Government is working to remedy the issue, and as such, information packages for detainees have been translated to English and Bangla and is currently provided to foreign detainees at the initial admission of detention at the Dhoonidhoo Police Custodial as well as the Male' Police Custodial. While there is still more documentation to be translated, MPS is seeking assistance to get the documentation translated into Sinhalese, Hindi, Mandarin, Portuguese and Thai. Work is also underway to disseminate the translated documents to all MPS detention centres across the Maldives, and standardize its use in practice by incorporating relevant rules to SOPs.

99. With regard to access to State-funded legal aid, Government notes that it is available to all foreign adults who have been accused of a serious criminal offence and are unable to afford a lawyer, as per Article 53(b) of the Constitution. Requests for legal aid from adults are only rejected if the accused crime is not a serious criminal offence as stipulated in Section 22 of the Criminal Procedure Act, and/or if the applicant is able to afford a lawyer. Foreign children are eligible for State-funded legal aid, regardless of the type of crime committed or financial means. While no applications have been received from foreign children, State-funded legal aid has been provided to foreigners as detailed in the table below:

<i>Year</i>	<i>No: of applications from foreigners</i>	<i>No: of cases where legal aid was provided</i>
2011	6	2
2012	3	3
2013	1	1
2014	1	1
2015	2	2
2016	11	9
2017	29	23
2018	13	9
2019	32	20
2020	25	23
2021	40	27
2022 – Till April	12	9

100. Government also notes that CSOs in the Maldives such as the Public Interest Law Centre provides free legal advice and representation to migrant workers, while the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre of Transparency Maldives provides free legal advice. These include cases relating to employment rights, as well as human trafficking. The Public Interest Law Centre has operated 3 free legal advice camps in 2021, and 6 mobile legal aid clinics so far in 2022. The MRC provides translation assistance to the Public Interest Law Centre as well as Transparency Maldives. Resources are also available on CSO websites in different languages.

101. The LRA and the Employment Tribunal are avenues for relief for employment related issues. Aggrieved parties may file complaints online through the LRA website, through local councils, or through relevant embassies via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ("MFA").

102. At the Employment Tribunal, parties can choose to attend hearings online via video-conferencing as per Section 73 of Employment Act, even where the parties are not based in Maldives. Where a group of aggrieved employees are seeking relief, Section 18 of the Employment Regulation allows filing a single claim to ensure that their rights are secured speedily through the appointment of a single legal representation. The parties also have the option to submit the claim form to the Employment Tribunal and exchange relevant documentation via e-mail.

103. With regard to ratification of conventions, Maldives is currently not in a position to undertake obligations under the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. However, the Maldivian legal framework affords adequate protection to migrant workers and Maldives is committed to the provision of fundamental rights and basic necessities to all migrant workers within the jurisdiction.

104. Furthermore, currently, the Government is conducting an expensive nationwide regularization programme to provide a pathway for undocumented workers to return to their country as part of the Government's effort to extend adequate protection to migrant workers. This issue itself presents a huge challenge to the Government. Therefore, Maldives is currently not in a position to undertake obligations relating to stateless persons, refugees and asylum seekers due to resource implications and legal limitations.

K. Reply to paragraph 11 of the list of issues

105. Prison overcrowding is a critical issue faced by the Maldives. Government continues to implement policies to improve the detention conditions in prisons and detention centers, and strengthen the services available to detainees. In that regard, in 2019, the current administration initiated an extensive Prison Audit which highlighted the primary issues and put forth recommendations to remedy the deficiencies in the prison facilities. The SAP incorporates implementation of these recommendations as an activity that will be achieved within this term.

106. Furthermore, Government has prioritised and allocated resources to the establishment of a prison complex in Hulhumale', expected to be completed by end of 2023. This will enable relocation of the current Male' prison to Hulhumale' and increase the capacity from 200 to 600 inmates. Furthermore, construction of a new prison in the island of Neykurendhoo in Haa Dhaalu Atoll is expected to commence in 2022. Government is certain that the new prisons being built will enable the Government to meet the required standards.

107. Additionally, SAP includes the development of a detention facility for illegal and/or undocumented immigrants, which is being established in Hulhumale'. Following commencement of its operations, all migrant workers who are in conflict with immigration laws in Maldives will be housed at this facility until repatriation. The construction of a boundary wall around the facility is currently underway.

108. The Hulhumale' Detention Facility currently in operation is utilised to detain migrant workers who are in conflict with the immigration laws of the Maldives. This facility does not house migrant workers awaiting the legalisation process or those who have committed criminal offences. Foreigners who have contravened criminal laws of the Maldives are detained under the supervision of the Maldives Correctional Service at the same prisons as locals.

109. Foreigners detained at the Hulhumale' Detention Facility for violation of immigration laws are only detained at the facility until such time as they can be repatriated. While authorities strive to make this an expeditious process, inevitable delays in establishing and verifying identification, acquiring necessary documentation for travel and making travel arrangements often results in extended periods of detention.

110. All detainees, regardless of nationality, are provided basic requirements, access to the open yard area during the day, weekly phone calls (including international calls) and family visits, and are afforded with adequate relief avenues to submit complaints to the Inspector of Correctional Services, HRCM or other State entities.

L. Reply to paragraph 12 of the list of issues

111. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act ("DVPA") enacted in April 2012, forms the basis of domestic violence prevention efforts in the Maldives. The Act is implemented without discrimination, and Government prioritises minimising sexual harassment, domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence across all populations in the Maldives.

Several actions have been identified in SAP, to achieve this, including conducting a review of DVPA implementation, ensuring effective implementation of gender-based violence related laws, conducting sensitisation refresher trainings targeting enforcement agencies, formulating and operationalising SOPs for domestic violence shelters and establishing an emergency fund for survivors and families affected by domestic violence.

112. While domestic violence is yet to be criminalised under the DVPA, Government notes that various forms of violence are criminalised under the penal laws of the Maldives. Domestic violence cases are prosecuted under other laws such as the Penal Code of the Maldives and the Sexual Offences Act. However, even though a charge is raised through other legislations, protection and procedural rules in the DVPA apply in all such cases. Any forms of violence committed against female migrant workers are investigated by the MPS and sent for prosecution to the Prosecutor General's Office.

113. Legal framework providing redress mechanisms to sexual abuse and/or harassment at the work place is primarily encompassed in the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Act. Enacted in 2014, this Act outlines what constitutes sexual abuse and harassment, identifies responsibilities of parties and prevention measures. Section 3 of the Act expressly prohibits the commission of an act of sexual abuse and harassment against a co-worker. The Act also emphasises that submission of a complaint or giving witness statement in such a case shall not be the reason that the person is deprived of the opportunity for advancement at the place of employment. The Act also mandates the employer to take adequate measures to ensure that the work place is free of and the staff body are protected from violence.

114. Where an employer or co-worker commits an act of sexual abuse or harassment against an employee, the Act grants the right to any employee to submit a complaint to the Committee for Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment established under the Act. This Committee as per Section 18 of the Act, shall be established by the human resources section of the workplace, with the mandate to hear and adjudicate over complaints of sexual abuse or harassment committed at the work place. As per the Act, following adjudication of the matter, the Committee may: (a) issue a written advice to the perpetrator; (b) issue a written warning to the perpetrator of the act; (c) suspend the perpetrator from employment for a certain period; (d) prevent the perpetrator from performing his duties; (e) demote the perpetrator; or (f) terminate the employment of the perpetrator.

115. Where the decision of the committee is not favourable to the employee, the Act allows the employee to submit the case to the Employment Tribunal within 180 days from the issuance of such a decision. The Employment Tribunal in such cases may enforce once of the measures stated in Section 32 of the Act. The Tribunal may: (a) issue written instruction to the respondent to immediately cease in engaging such behaviour; (b) order the victim be reinstated with any rights they were deprived of as a result of the act and issue written instructions to the same; (c) issue written instructions to the employer to take measures to ensure that the respondent does not repeat the acts of sexual abuse and harassment and to ensure that the acts of the respondent is prevented; (d) recover compensation for the victim as a result of damages suffered due to the acts of sexual abuse and harassment of the respondent; or (e) any other measures which the tribunal may deem appropriate.

116. The Act also allows the tribunal to award damages accounting for: (a) the psychological trauma suffered by the victim; (b) loss of employment opportunities or appraisals as a result of the act; (c) loss of opportunities or material damages suffered by a person seeking services of an institution; (d) costs incurred to obtain medical services or psychological held for damages suffered as a result of the act; (e) and earnings of the respondent.

117. The MOGFSS undertakes efforts to provide psychosocial support to victims of all forms of abuse, and therefore, any cases of exploitation of female migrant workers reported to the Ministry are attended to by the Ministry and support is provided. The MOGFSS adopts a multidisciplinary approach in the work done to prevent the exploitation of female migrant workers.

118. The Family Protection Authority ("FPA") also undertakes efforts to create awareness on the reporting avenues. In that regard, FPA conducted a campaign titled "I spread a smile", in 2015, with the focus to encourage reporting of domestic violence. During this campaign,

FPA also conducted programmes in Bengali, Hindi and Nepali to enable migrant workers to learn about the reporting mechanisms. In 2016, FPA released a video spot depicting the role of the community in the prevention of domestic violence and exploitation against migrant domestic workers. The video spot formed part of a larger campaign run by the FPA titled, “*Mikan Huttuvaanee Aharen*” (I will stop this), focused on encouraging reporting. In 2021, FPA conducted sessions on the role of the community in the prevention of domestic violence in the community. The sessions targeted migrant teachers of Vaavu Atoll and Meemu Atoll.

119. FPA plans to carry out awareness and advocacy efforts in 2022, focused on the migrant worker population in the Maldives, highlighting the protection afforded to them under the DVPA. Advocacy materials will be developed in Singhalese, Tamil, Bengali, Hindi, Nepali and Filipino. FPA has plans to disseminate additional information at kiosks set up in public spaces, once every 3 months, starting from the 3rd quarter of 2022.

120. Furthermore, FPA plans to develop video spots focused on reporting domestic violence. This will be developed under the “Signal for Help” gesture, which would run under the FPA’s “*Heylaa Heylavvaa*” (be aware, make aware) campaign, focused on promoting a hand gesture for survivors of domestic violence to indicate that they are in need of help. One of the video spots will focus on migrant workers.

121. LRA also plays an important role in investigating cases, and where cases of harassment or exploitation come to light, LRA takes an initiative to direct the aggrieved party to the authorities with jurisdiction to adjudicate over the matter.

122. SOs in the Maldives are also active in addressing violence against migrant workers and providing the necessary support. As such, MRC has a toll-free helpline, which has provided services to over 2700 migrants since its establishment in May 2021. This helpline is supported by migrant volunteers who are trained in providing psychosocial support. Any reports of abuse or violence reported via the helpline are forwarded to the MPS.

M. Reply to paragraph 13 of the list of issues

123. As stated above, the sixth amendment to the Employment Act mandates employers to adhere to the employees’ accommodation standards. The Regulation on Employees’ Accommodation Standards was formulated and published in January 2021 to further elaborate on the standards stipulated in the Act. The Regulation determines the necessary amenities, and other general standards of the employee accommodations or sleeping quarters provided by employers. For a housing unit, the Regulation stipulates that an area of 3.78 square metres must be allocated for a single bed-based room, while an area of 5.13 square metres must be available for a single bunk bed accommodation. Further stipulations include the maximum number of people who can use one bathroom. Any contravention of the Regulation will be penalised through imposing fines.

124. With regard to professional sectors, a living allowance is provided to expatriate teachers and health professionals. Within the education sector, food, accommodation and ticket allowance are provided in accordance with agreements between the employees and the Ministry of Education. Rights of the teachers are further protected in accordance with the Employment Act and regulations governing the civil service in the Maldives.

125. Migrant workers have access to public services, such as health, public transportation as well as education and recreation without discrimination, subject to the relevant laws and procedures.

126. In relation to health services, as noted above, the Health Service Provision Act specifically stipulates that a recipient of a health service shall not be discriminated based on their race, nationality, colour, sex, age, physical or mental disability, political or other views, financial standing, birth or other status, or native island, or any other factor.

127. Public healthcare interventions are made available free of cost irrespective of nationality, such as tuberculosis and HIV treatment, as well as child immunisation services. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health conducts health education and targeted screenings for general health conditions, non-communicable diseases and tuberculosis free of cost. This

effort is undertaken in coordination with CSOs across Maldives. In light of the pandemic, dissemination of COVID-19 information and vaccination have been added to the screening camps. As per the rules of expatriate labours in Maldives, health insurance is mandatory for all registered migrants. That said, all migrant workers will have access to emergency healthcare services, even without the mandatory insurance.

128. CSOs also conduct health camps to facilitate health check-ups for migrant workers. As such, the Mission for Migrant Workers Maldives in collaboration with other CSOs, has conducted 4 camps so far, with 1 of them being held at the island of Fuvahmulah in Gnaviyani Atoll. During these camps, health screening, counselling, consultation and legal aid services are provided. A health camp solely dedicated for women migrant workers was conducted on the occasion of Women's Day 2022 where health screening, counselling and consultation was provided including breast cancer screening. Furthermore, as a measure to promote wellness for women migrant workers, especially domestic workers, Mission for Migrant Workers Maldives has begun a wellness campaign, with the purposes to provide a safe space for women migrant workers to take part in curated fitness programmes by certified instructors to promote an overall health and active lifestyle.

129. Furthermore, MRC conducted a health camp in 2021 in collaboration with HRCM and other CSOs, which gathered 1100 migrants, whereby COVID-19 vaccination as well as other health services were provided with the support of the Health Protection Agency.

130. With regard to recreation, local sports facilities can be commonly utilised by local and expatriate workers. As mentioned above, the Maldives Sports Act specifically stipulates that in playing any sports or in conducting any cultural activities in the Maldives, there should be no discrimination based on sex, nationality, race, age or health condition.

131. As for education, the Education Act specifically stipulates that all foreign children residing in the Maldives, has equal rights as any Maldivian child, to pre-school, primary, secondary and higher secondary education. It also creates an obligation on all education providers in the country, to ensure that this right is available to foreign children. Higher education is also accessible to migrant workers without discrimination.

N. Reply to paragraph 14 (a) and (b) of the list of issues

132. The Academy of Dhivehi Language provided assistance to foreigners who were willing to learn Dhivehi language in 2019 and are working to begin constant Dhivehi Language classes for foreigners. The Academy also provides opportunities to foreigners to showcase their respective cultures and history. In this regard, the World Poetry Day has been marked since 2016, and Iqbal (Poet of the East) Day was marked in 2017, 2019 and 2021. These events were held in collaboration with the respective embassies and High Commissions. In 2019, the Academy initiated a South Asian Literature Festival and a Dhivehi Oratory Competition for Foreigners was conducted in 2022. For foreigners working in the education sector, MOE provides opportunities as per the schools' activity calendars.

133. The Ministry of Arts, Culture and Heritage with the primary mandate to promote cultural activities, collaborates with embassies, cultural centers and friendship associations to conduct activities to promote the cultural aspects of foreigners in Maldives. While there are budgetary challenges, the Ministry along with the National Centre for Arts has hosted arts and culture related events throughout the reporting period, providing an opportunity for migrant workers to participate and contribute to their culture.

134. As such, in 2014, a cultural music festival and a cultural event to celebrate the Independence Day of India was held in collaboration with the Indian High Commission. In 2015, an Indian – Maldives Film Festival was also conducted in collaboration with the Indian High Commission. In 2016 cultural shows were conducted in collaboration with the Indian High Commission, Pakistan High Commission and Chinese Embassy. Similarly in 2017 and 2019, an orchestra and shows to celebrate the Chinese New Year was held in collaboration with the Chinese Embassy. A Sharjah Heritage Week was also conducted in 2021, where cultural practitioners and artists participated.

O. Reply to paragraph 15 of the list of issues

135. As part of Maldives' commitment to preventing and combatting human trafficking, Maldives acceded to the Protocol to the UN TIP Protocol on 14th September 2016.

136. Maldives' efforts in this area were bolstered by the enactment of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act in December 2013. The Act establishes the crime and punishment of human trafficking, with an aim to prevent the act of trafficking, and sets up a mechanism for victim protection. The Act clearly defines the act of exploitation including sexual exploitation. Furthermore, the law stipulates that the exploitation of a vulnerability of a person because of the person's status as a migrant worker, or any other reason will be an unlawful coercive measure. The Act also further dictates that if a foreigner entered the Maldives illegally as a result of being a victim of trafficking, such foreign nationals shall not be an illegal immigrant.

137. Following the enactment of the Act, a National Steering Committee on Human Trafficking was established in 2016, which held regular meetings until 2017. During that time, the Committee formulated a National Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan, and convened a multi-sectoral technical level committee to monitor its implementation. The Committee also adopted and published Victim Identification Guidelines, initiated a number of awareness raising programmes and established a National Victim Support Hotline.

138. However, staff shortages, issues in composition and a lack of commitment rendered the committee defunct after 2017, until it was reconstituted and reconvened in 2019. The first amendment brought to the Anti-Human Trafficking Act in March 2020, streamlined the Steering Committee.

139. The Act was further enhanced by the second amendment brought to the Act in April 2021, which aligned the definition of human trafficking with UN TIP Protocol. The amendment further introduced provisions which criminalise internal and cross border child trafficking for exploitative purposes.

140. Despite unprecedentedly challenging circumstances bred by the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, the Government undertook a number of key initiatives in this area, notably, the establishment of an Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office ("Anti-TIP Office") along with the appointment of a Director of Anti-Human Trafficking at the Ministry of Defence, the allocation of funds from the State budget for anti-human trafficking activities and the setting-up of a victim shelter in Gulhifalhu in Kaafu Atoll. This temporary shelter setup will become permanent once the Victim Assistance and Shelter Service Regulation has been endorsed. The Anti-TIP Office will work with an international consultant provided by the International Organisation for Migration ("IOM") to review the draft Regulation and to review the existing SOPs on Victim Identification and Referral passed by the Steering Committee in 2016. The Anti-TIP Office also hired a consultant for Policy and Outreach in September 2021.

141. Government continues to take measures to implement the Maldives National Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan (2020–2022). The plan was endorsed in February 2020 by the Cabinet and is being implemented and monitored by the Anti-TIP Office. It is aligned with SAP and carries forward unfinished tasks and activities of the previous National Action Plan (2015–2019). The new plan also signifies a greater commitment to transparency, progress-reporting, information-sharing, engagement with international partners and awareness-spreading.

142. Government recognises the importance of studying the root causes of trafficking and the extent of its existence in our communities. As such, Government hopes to conduct a baseline study when inter-atoll travel becomes feasible. The Anti-TIP Office is also working with IOM on a series of activities, including the organization of workshops and language training for frontline officers. Additionally, the Anti-TIP Office is collaborating with United States Department of Justice to conduct an Anti-Human Trafficking Workshop in the Maldives.

143. The MPS conducts operations in cooperation with the Maldives Immigration, to identify criminal activities related to human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. Work is also underway to formulate a Bill on Smuggling of Migrants.

144. Combatting human trafficking is included as a priority activity under the SAP as well as the NRR, demonstrating, Maldives' commitment to reform and strengthen the current policy frameworks to prevent human trafficking, and assist the victims of human trafficking.

145. Charges were raised for the first time under the Anti-Human Trafficking Act in 2016. The MOGFSS records indicate a single report of a child being trafficked. The number of cases that have been addressed, including investigations, prosecutions and convictions are detailed in the table below.

Year	No: of Cases	Type of Exploitation	No: of Victims				Victim Status	Total Suspected	Total Prosecuted	Case Status	Remarks
			Male	Nationality	Female	Nationality					
2011	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Before law was enacted
2012	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Before law was enacted
2013	1	Sexual	-	-	4	Thai	Repatriated	1	-	-	No data
	1	Sexual	-	-	1	Bangladesh	Repatriated	4	-	Convicted	Suspect deported
2014	1	Sexual	-	-	2	Sri Lanka	Repatriated	2	-	Closed	Closed
	1	Sexual	-	-	1	Bangladesh	Repatriated	1	PG decided not to prosecute due to lack of sufficient evidence	Closed	Suspect deported
	1	Sexual	-	-	1	Bangladesh	Repatriated	3	3	Convicted	3 accused sentenced for 10 years imprisonment
	1	Labour	6	India	-	-	Repatriated	1	-	Closed	Suspect deported
	1	Labour	1	India	-	-	Repatriated	1	-	Closed	Suspect left Maldives
2015	1	Labour	1	India	-	-	Repatriated	2	-	Closed	Suspect deported
	1	Labour	1	Bangladesh	-	-	Repatriated	2	-	Closed	Suspect deported
	1	Labour	1	Bangladesh	-	-	Repatriated	1	-	Closed	Suspect deported
	1	Labour	2	Bangladesh	-	-	Repatriated	6	5	Acquitted	Insufficiency of evidence
	1	Labour	3	Bangladesh	-	-	Repatriated	3	2	Acquitted	Insufficiency of evidence
2016	1	Labour	1	Bangladesh	-	-	Repatriated	2	1	Court	Ongoing
	1	Labour	1	Bangladesh	-	-	Repatriated	3	1	Sentenced	Convicted
	1	Labour	3	India	-	-	Repatriated	1	-	Closed	Closed
	1	Sexual	-	-	1	Kenya	Repatriated	2	1	Acquitted	Appealed in HC
2017	1	Labour	1	Bangladesh	-	-	-	2	PG decided not to prosecute due to lack of	Closed	Closed

Year	No: of Cases	Type of Exploitation	No: of Victims				Victim Status	Total Suspected	Total Prosecuted	Case Status	Remarks
			Male	Nationality	Female	Nationality					
2018	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2019	1	Sexual	-	-	1	Bangladesh	Repatriated	5	2	Sentenced	Suspect 1–15 years' imprisonment / Suspect 2–7 years' imprisonment
	1	Trafficking of a child	-	-	1	Maldivian (minor)	-	2	2	Court	Ongoing
2020	1	Labour	2	Bangladesh	-	-	Repatriated	3	1	Court	Ongoing
2021	1	Sexual	-	-	3	Thai	Repatriated	10	4	Court	Ongoing

146. With regard to education measures and awareness-raising campaigns, in particular among migrant workers, about the risks and the criminal nature of human trafficking, Government notes that the MPS conducts training and awareness programmes targeted to frontline officers, investigation officers, public staffs and general public. Furthermore, Government notes that the majority of the reported cases relate to sexual exploitation.

147. HRCM plays a major role in raising awareness on the rights of migrant workers. As such, a booklet titled “Know Your Rights” have been prepared in 3 different languages and have been distributed in different occasions and fairs. This booklet on fundamental rights and freedom were provided for migrant workers as well as their families. Furthermore, an information card was also launched in 3 languages and distributed at fairs as well as airports, which contain essential information for migrant workers and contact numbers for those who need assistance.

148. Government is also in the process of developing a mobile application, to disseminate information to migrant workers. This is expected to be launched in mid-2022, in phases. The application would have information regarding avenues for filing complaints and will act as a platform for empowerment of migrant workers. Future developments will incorporate different languages.

149. With regard to measures taken to cooperate with other countries in order to counter trafficking in persons, MPS has several police-to-police cooperation mechanisms established within the law enforcement agencies via memoranda of understanding. MPS also utilises the resources available through the INTERPOL mechanism to establish avenues of coordination and assistance on several issues relating to law enforcement.

150. As for steps taken to systematically collect information on trafficking in persons, a number of efforts are required to maintain a comprehensive database of information on victims of human trafficking. The Anti-human Trafficking Department of the MPS has just recently begun work on a similar database. However, progress is slow due to the manual work required for data entry.

P. Reply to paragraphs 16 and 17 of the list of issues

151. The limited resource envelope of Maldivian authorities greatly hinders Maldives' ability to undertake any obligations relating to refugees, asylum seekers and persons rendered stateless. In terms of practice, MFA does not have written internal regulations, procedures, or administrative mechanisms to address asylum seekers or refugees and the cases are dealt in an ad-hoc manner with due regard to domestic law and treaty obligations, and in coordination with respective agencies such as the President's Office and the Maldives Immigration.

152. In recent days, MFA has attended to cases of persons who have transited in Maldives or become stranded in the Maldives due to adverse political conditions in their nations of origin. In some cases, MFA has received requests from their respective Embassies, International Organizations as well as third Countries, to assist these persons in various ways, until such time when they are able to return home or are able to acquire visas from other Countries. Assistance sought typically includes, special consideration visas, accommodation, stipends, temporary employment among other things. Maldives Immigration has aided in some cases by extending Tourist Visas and in other cases by granting Special Visas pursuant to the powers of the Controller of Immigration.

153. Following the change in Government in Afghanistan, Government of Maldives received several requests in this regard. The current crisis in Ukraine has also given way to similar cases. In both cases, urgent attention was required with respect to cases of tourists who were already in Maldives.

154. Government assures the Committee that Maldives fully respects the principle of non-refoulement in practice and complies with its international and national obligations to that end.

155. The Anti-Torture Act incorporates Article 3 of CAT, and prohibits the extradition of a person from Maldives to another country or returning to the person's native country, if there are substantial grounds for the relevant Government authorities to believe on the basis of reasonable proof or evidence that they would be in danger of being subjected to torture.¹⁵ Furthermore, in cases where extradition or exchange of convicted person to another country is governed by a treaty, obligation to prevent torture and any other inhuman or degrading punishment under international conventions may be implied in the treaty, in the absence of such an express provision thereto.¹⁶

156. In the absence of legal frameworks and resources to deal with refugees, asylum seekers and persons rendered stateless, Government carries out third party resettlements. As such, 2 successful third country resettlement processes have been carried out so far with the assistance of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and IOM.

157. Both the 2015 Extradition Act and the 2014 Transfer of Prisoners Act also prohibit repatriation of a foreign national if it would put them at risk of torture, and/or any other inhuman or degrading conduct. Moreover, all cases of extradition are subject to judicial review.

158. Maldives also confirms that detention of foreigners for expulsion by Maldives Immigration has always been used as a measure of last resort. Any decisions of expulsion and deportation, can be appealed at the courts of Maldives.

Q. Reply to paragraph 18 of the list of issues

159. The newly enacted Child Rights Protection Act in its Section 14, stipulates that every child upon birth has the right to be registered and given a name acceptable under the law. The law further clarifies that the right to birth registration includes the registration of a name acceptable under the law, gender, date of birth, place of birth, information of the parents, nationality and other relevant information with regard to the birth of the child. The law applies equally to every child born in the Maldives.

160. In practise, all are required to fill in a midwifery form and submit this information to the Department of National Registration. Birth registration is carried out in all the three hospitals in the Greater Male' Region, 6 regional hospitals, 13 Atoll Hospitals, 168 Health Centres, 189 Island Councils and 19 Atoll Councils. While home births are rare at the time, all health facilities and birth attendants are required to fill this form.

161. Furthermore, Government has submitted a Bill to the Parliament on birth and death registration, whereby the Act makes it compulsory on the parents of all children born in the

¹⁵ Section 42 – Anti-Torture Act.

¹⁶ Section 41 – Anti-Torture Act.

Maldives to submit within 7 (days) to register the birth in accordance with the Act, failing which, a fine of MVR 10,000 (approximately USD 648) will be imposed. If the child has no parents, the obligation falls onto the child's guardian.

R. Reply to paragraph 19 of the list of issues

162. Article 10 of the Constitution provides that the religion of Maldives is Islam. Section 4(c) subsection 5 of the Religious Unity Act of Maldives stipulates that building places of worship of religions other than Islam, selling, possessing and advertising material that promote slogans of religions other than Islam are prohibited in the Maldives. The Islamic faith is intrinsic to the Maldivian identity and the Maldivian population, as it also forms a fundamental tenet of the Constitution.

S. Reply to paragraph 20 of the list of issues

163. The COVID-19 pandemic presented nearly unsurmountable challenges to the Maldivian health sector, economy and social welfare. While the Maldivian health sector already experienced a shortage in technical labour and facilities, the rapid rise in infections and the requirement for quick and thorough testing stretched the available resources. However, the Government made swift decisions to ensure equity in testing, treatment and the availability of vaccines to the resident population of Maldives.

164. Migrants are identified as a key vulnerable group in COVID-19 prevention and response. During the initial wave of community spread in the Greater Male' Region, migrant workers, especially those of Bangladeshi nationality working in the construction sector, were disproportionately exposed to the virus. Many of them, several of whom are undocumented immigrants, had been living in cramped and unsanitary accommodation which precluded the possibility of social distancing. Health Screenings of migrants living in congested accommodations were carried out by the Ministry of Health, the Maldives National Defence Force and MRC.

165. As a measure to protect them, a separate facility for migrant workers was established within social housing units. Measures to shift approximately 12,000 expatriate workers from highly congested accommodation quarters to Government facilities in the capital Male' and Hulhumale'. These shelters provided food, accommodation and basic health needs. Male' City Council, MRC and MED provided assistance to the MOGFSS in running these shelters. Undocumented workers were also provided shelter and food by the Government which were run by the MPS.

166. CSOs such as the MRC worked together with State authorities in providing meal packs and hygiene kits, conducting rapid assessments, and facilitating documentation for health screenings as well as registering migrants for vaccination. A Migrant Support Helpline has also been established at the MRC, with a helpline whereby migrant can request for meals, hygiene kits, repatriation assistance and information.

167. The Government made a concerted effort to ensure that every single resident in the Maldives had their healthcare needs attended to. In that regard, designated free flu clinics and mobile health clinics were set up and the infected were kept in isolation at designated facilities to prevent further spread among migrant worker communities. COVID-19 testing and treatment is provided free of charge to all migrants, in addition to isolation facilities and quarantine facilities free of charge. All migrants who tested positive for COVID-19 was placed in isolation facilities, to enable them to receive appropriate medical treatment.

168. Further, all COVID-19 related Health Protection Agency announcements and advices translated to all the popular languages in Maldives and distributed, and printed for expatriate use. They were also transmitted on national TV channels and social media. Special portals were made for foreigners online to enable them to access available lockdown services, such as obtaining movement permits.

169. CSOs also conducted multiple activities to ensure that all information related to the pandemic was reaching the migrant communities. As such, the Public Interest Law Centre

hosted a community Viber group where messages from the Health Protection Agency and other relevant authorities were translated to Hindi, Bangla, Tamil, Nepalese, Sinhalese and English. The MRC also translated and disseminated materials in different languages and used pick-up audio on the streets of the capital Male' as well as Addu City.

170. The lockdown period also saw instances where migrant workers in certain businesses had not received wages for their work and took to protesting in response. The Government, while sympathetic to their concerns, was forced to halt some of these protests in the instances where they turned violent or violated necessary social distancing guidelines. Maldivian CSO, Public Interest Law Centre, took the initiative of advising and/or representing 199 migrant workers affected in one of such instances. A court case was also filed on their behalf regarding non-payment of wages and other employment rights. The MRC provided translation support to these migrant workers.

171. Government has been working to address the underlying issues that contribute to the violation of migrant workers' rights, with MED leading the efforts. In addition to revising Regulations relating to migrant workers, a nationwide regularization program was initiated in early 2019 to provide a pathway for undocumented workers to register within the system and transition to legal work. The Government is assisting workers that approach for regularization through job matching facilities with potential employers and to aid their re-entry to the labour market as smoothly as possible. This programme continued during the pandemic.

172. Furthermore, the Government facilitated migrants to voluntarily repatriate, free of charge, during the pandemic. In that regard, about 8775 Bangladeshi migrant workers were transferred back to Bangladesh. 8000 undocumented migrant workers in the Maldives were repatriated back to their homes on upon their request.

173. Under the NRR, the Government will continue to work towards addressing migrant workers' issues, which entails continuing the regularization and repatriation programme, developing proper accommodation, facilitating targeted relocation to avoid congestion, and legislating and implementing policies on occupational hazard and safety.

174. Following the initiation of the vaccination campaign to combat COVID-19, vaccines were provided to everyone living in Maldives, free of cost, without any discrimination, including undocumented migrants. Efforts were also undertaken in coordination with CSOs who work with migrants, to create awareness and generate demand for COVID-19 vaccine among migrants.

175. Although the imposition of restrictive measures was necessary amid the pandemic, Government put in every effort to minimize its adverse impacts on human rights. In this respect, the Public Health Emergency Act 2020 was enacted, which provided for special measures to protect persons facing economic hardships, as well as protection of the rights of the vulnerable population during the COVID-19 pandemic. These included measures to protect the rights of employees from reduced or delayed remuneration, forced furloughs and resignations; measures to protect tenants from forced evictions; and measures relating to provision of food, shelter and income support for vulnerable groups, especially women, children, persons with disabilities, and migrant workers.

T. Reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues

176. Government recognises that while all the avenues for justice mentioned at paragraphs 67–74 above are available to foreign workers in the Maldives, there are challenges.

177. In order to ensure non-discrimination in access to justice, and specifically to address language barrier issues, MPS provides paid translators to assist in investigations, while DJA provide paid translators to assist in trials involving foreign perpetrators as well as foreign victims. Both the MPS and DJA are currently in the process of compiling a directory of foreign language translators.

178. HRCM, with the mandate to investigate and reprimand human rights violations, provides information of all available legal recourses with regard to accessing effective

protection and remedies against any acts of racial discrimination that violate their Convention rights. Wherever possible, the HRCM also plays a role in mediating with related State agencies and private parties to derive an amicable solution before imposing dire sanctions. Migrant workers or foreigners may lodge complaints at the HRCM in any language and HRCM acquires the services of translators when necessary.

179. The HRCM also conducts multiple programmes to create awareness on the rights of migrant workers, through various means including mass media, social media, training programmes, public events such as fairs, and by distributing information cards in four languages targeted for migrant workers. Employment forum with employers, employees, NGOs and regulatory bodies was held in 2019 to discuss the issues including the rights of migrant workers. A paper was compiled with the proposed solutions which was shared with relevant Government institutions.

180. CSOs actively conduct multiple awareness raising programmes to ensure effective dissemination of information on rights of migrant workers. As such, Maldivian CSO, Transparency Maldives, has carried out 2 online sessions on employment rights and human trafficking in March 2021, and social media posts, campaigns and live sessions on employment rights.

U. Reply to paragraph 22 of the list of issues

181. Since racial discrimination is not specifically coded in the statistics maintained by the MPS, it is a challenge to obtain a specific number of cases that might have been investigated by MPS. As a result, no cases have been filed at the courts nor has the Prosecutor General's Office raised any charges in a matter concerning racial discrimination.

182. With the fifth amendment to the Penal Code specifically criminalising acts of violence or incitement of violence based on race, the MPS will be able to identify acts of racial discrimination in the future.

183. As for civil matters, at the Employment Tribunal, till date, two claims relating to racial discrimination in employment were filed and adjudicated.

V. Reply to paragraph 23 of the list of issues

184. As the Maldivian community gets more diverse, the Government is conscious of the need to enhance tolerance and mutual understanding among different groups to achieve social harmony. It is a primary goal of the Government to ensure that Maldivian communities are resilient to discrimination based on race or any other factor, and maintain mutual dignity and respect.

185. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs works to raise awareness from a religious perspective, by enlightening the population on the rights of foreign employees, rights of non-Muslims, responsibility of individuals in maintain social harmony, importance of caring for each other and on eliminating all types of discrimination. This is achieved through Friday sermons and other religious awareness sessions conducted by the Ministry.

186. Additionally, the Ministry of Home Affairs is conducting a social media campaign titled "*Badhahi*" in collaboration with UNDP, to promote tolerance and social cohesion. The Ministry also has plans to conduct programmes for island communities to promote dialogue and mutual understanding and tolerance. This programme will emphasize on preventing violent extremist ideologies.

187. The HRCM also strives to instil a human rights culture by establishing and assisting human rights clubs to promote human rights at school contributing to build a more tolerant society. The HCRM conducts numerous awareness programmes through media and other means have focused on importance of tolerance and dialogue in ensuring human rights for all.

188. Following the recent amendment to the Decentralisation Act to enhance the autonomy of local councils, the councils form a very significant part of the governance mechanism in

reaching out to the communities in islands. The Local Government Authority (“LGA”) has been conducting training and advocacy programmes since 2011, focusing on promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and dialogue among different groups of the community. LGA has conducted programmes titled “*Amaan Veshi*” (peaceful environment) in 2016, “*Zinmaadhaaru Rayyithen Binaa kurun*” (building responsible citizens) in 2019, “*Tharaggee Enmenah*” (development for everyone) in 2020, “*Baaruveri Rayyitheh*” (empowered citizen) in 2021 and “*Vilunveri amaan badhahi mujuthamaeh binaakurun*” (building a peaceful, cohesive society) programme conducted in different atolls in collaboration with the National Counter Terrorism Centre in 2021. In addition to this, LGA conducts routine orientation programs and refreshers for councillors and members of the Women’s Development Committees.

189. CSOs also play a huge part in information dissemination. The Public Interest Law Centre ran a “Migrants Matter Campaign” on all popular social media avenues, with the purpose of promoting mutual understanding and disseminating information on their rights. The Mission for Migrant Workers Maldives has also launched a book titled “Migrant workers are just like us” aimed at children.

W. Reply to paragraphs 23 and 24 of the list of issues

190. A new national curriculum was rolled-out in 2015, which consists of components of civic education, including human rights perspectives and importance of respecting and promoting human rights. Work is ongoing to review the school manuals and curricula, to better incorporate gender equality perspectives. Teaching learning materials for foundation stage and key stage 1 have been revised, while revision of materials for key stage three is ongoing.

191. Both the Ministry of Education and the HRCM, continue to undertake efforts to integrate human rights related learning into the education system. An Education Act was enacted on 10th November 2020. The Act stipulates that social harmony, peaceful co-existence and promoting respect for human rights shall form the cornerstones of the education system.

192. Human rights topics have been incorporated in school curriculum for key stages 1–3, and efforts have been made to incorporate human rights topics in courses in tertiary education. Every year, HRCM conducts sessions on human rights awareness for higher secondary students in Male’ as a part of their orientation programme and sessions are conducted for higher education institutions located in Male’.

193. Furthermore, HRCM conducts human rights sessions for lecturers, school teachers and students, and awareness programmes are also conducted targeted for journalists, prison officers, police, civil servants, businesses, local councils, Women’s Development Committees, NGOs, etc.

194. From 2018–2021, HRCM maintained an online Human Rights Resource Centre to enable the general public to obtain information on rights and freedoms. The information disseminated via the resource centre is currently being migrated to the main HRCM website (<https://hrcm.org.mv/en/haqquthah>). Furthermore, information leaflets are distributed to general public to create awareness on human rights.

III. Conclusion

195. Maldives is pleased to present the number of efforts that were undertaken by various State institutions in collaboration with CSOs and multilateral partners, to strengthen the human rights provision in the Maldives, particularly in relation to the rights enshrined in CERD. It is an undeniable fact that migrant workers comprise a large percentage of the resident population in Maldives, and Maldives acknowledges that stronger mechanisms are required to ensure the maximum protection of their rights.

196. The biggest challenge faced by the Maldives is the limited number of resources and technical expertise available to remedy the systemic gaps. Despite these challenges, Maldives

remains resolute in the efforts to end discrimination, mandate better working conditions for the migrant workers, establish even stronger dispute resolution mechanisms and make the Maldivian communities a safe place for foreign workers.
