

M A L D I V E S INDEPENDENT

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A Tribute to Yameen Rasheed – And a Call for Justice and Accountability

By Jared Genser

Yameen Rasheed, age 29, was an outspoken journalist and political satirist who frequently criticised the Government of the Maldives and the country's trend towards radical Islam on his blog *The Daily Panic* and on Twitter. He began his blog to report on, in his own words: “Nothing but the unfiltered truth, the sickening facts, the gruesome details, and – because this is the Maldives – the painfully obvious.”

As the Maldives returned to authoritarian rule under President Abdulla Yameen, Rasheed was the proverbial candle in the dark room, lighting up the truth for all to see, but in so doing he also attracted a relentless stream of death threats. Despite the obvious danger and even the disappearance and murder of his friend and fellow journalist Ahmed Rilwan, he refused to be intimidated into silence. And for his fearless commitment to restoring freedom, democracy, and human rights to the Maldives, he paid the ultimate price.

In the early morning hours of April 23, 2017, Rasheed was found unconscious from severe blood loss in the stairwell of his apartment building in Malé, Maldives. He was rushed to Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, where he was pronounced dead a short time later. The family, who were present at the hospital, reported that his throat had been slit, he had been stabbed 35 times, and part of his skull was missing.

There are no words of consolation for Rasheed's family, who I have only unfortunately gotten to know during their darkest hours. It breaks my heart as an international human-rights lawyer whenever I am asked to assist after a brilliant life has been extinguished. But this is a solemn duty that is both an honour and an enormous responsibility for me personally. At such moments of remembrance, when all that is left to be done is to bring perpetrators to justice, I focus on the essential truth that each person has a name and an identity and is interconnected with their family, friends, community, and country. This is why the Koran says “Whoever kills a soul, it is

as if he has slain mankind entirely . . . And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely.”

In Yameen Rasheed’s memory and on behalf of his family, I have today filed an urgent appeal to the United Nations requesting that it demand the Government of the Maldives allow for an independent, international investigation by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights into his murder. Such an investigation is critical because the Maldives Police Service directly harassed Rasheed, it arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned him, and it repeatedly failed to investigate the stream of death threats directly against him.

Given this background, a serious question must be raised as to whether any investigation by the MPS could be regarded as credible. In the absence of a viable domestic investigation, there is an urgent need for the international community to apply all means of pressure necessary on the government to allow access for an independent international investigation. Unless Maldives Police Commissioner Ahmed Areef immediately and unconditionally agrees to such an international investigation then he should resign, as the conflict of interest in Rasheed’s case is as glaring as it is self-evident.

In May 2015, Rasheed was arbitrary arrested at the scene of an anti-government protest, and detained for 21 days. Rasheed was charged with “attacking” the police, and given less than one minute to meet with his lawyer before his seven-minute hearing. He was held in deplorable, unhygienic, and overcrowded conditions at Dhoonidhoo Island Detention Center for 17 days, then held under house arrest for four days.

But it isn’t merely that the MPS itself directly harassed Rasheed and arbitrarily imprisoned him. It also willfully ignored numerous complaints lodged by Rasheed to the MPS against identifiable individuals who had threatened his life. He kindly pointed this fact out to the MPS on numerous occasions. For example, on January 4, 2015, he tweeted:



And on March 16, 2016, he tweeted:



By December 2016, the threats against Rasheed were increasing. On December 18, 2016, for example, Rasheed received the following threat:



Translation: “Irreligious asshole. You are becoming a real nuisance. Go mess with people you can afford to mess with. Motherf**ker, you fuck with us, you will suffer . . .”

So Rasheed filed another complaint to the MPS on December 22, 2016. Although that complaint was recorded with Reference No. 341474, no action was taken to investigate the threats or to protect him.

Beyond the MPS's unequivocal record in intimidating and harassing Yameen Rasheed and refusing to offer him any protection against the relentless stream of death threats he received, it has actively sought to protect those responsible for the murder. In an extraordinary breach of basic investigative techniques, the police prohibited anyone from taking photographs at the scene of the murder, and the walls were quickly cleaned and repainted before any evidence was gathered. And on May 2, 2017, Rasheed's father attempted to deliver more than 800 letters to the MPS demanding it conduct a credible investigation into his murder, but he was forced to remove the letters.

The Maldives Police Service has on its website a set of what it says are its "Core Values." The MPS proclaims it will "preserve highest standards of character to maintain public trust and confidence," it will "make tough decisions valiantly to protect the people," and it will "make ethical decisions and accept responsibility for our actions." It is essential that those who murdered Yameen Rasheed be brought to justice. But it is equally important that Maldives Police Commissioner Ahmed Areef accept an independent international investigation or resign from his position immediately as he is ultimately responsible for the MPS's egregious misconduct in engagement with Yameen Rasheed over so many years, that ultimately resulted in his murder.

While there is no solace for Rasheed's family and the impact of his loss on his community and country is profound, the best way to honour his legacy is to bring to account all those responsible for his murder.

Jared Genser is an international human-rights lawyer who has represented such clients as former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed, former Czech Republic President Václav Havel, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Aung San Suu Kyi, Liu Xiaobo, and Desmond Tutu. He serves as pro bono counsel to the family of Yameen Rasheed.