

BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Country Reports on Terrorism 2015 Report

MALDIVES

Overview: Since 2010, concerns about a small number of local extremists, who support violence and are involved with transnational terrorist groups, have increased. Young Maldivians, especially those within the penal system and otherwise marginalized members of society, are at risk of becoming radicalized and some have already joined violent extremist groups. Media reports from January 2015 cited then Maldivian Police Service (MPS) Chief Hussein Waheed, who estimated that at least 50 Maldivians had opted to become foreign terrorist fighters, while the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party placed the figure as high as 200. Waheed's comments followed reports in early January of at least 13 Maldivians traveling abroad with the intent of becoming foreign terrorist fighters. In late January, four Maldivians reputed to be members of Male's Kuda Henveiru gang were arrested in Malaysia under suspicion of attempting to travel to Syria to fight with terrorist groups. The incident illustrated a pattern of Maldivian nationals having the intent of becoming foreign terrorist fighters transiting through third countries.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: President Yameen Abdul Gayoom signed a new "Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism Act" (PMLFT), which repealed the Anti-terrorism Act of 1990, on October 28. The PMLFT defined acts of terrorism and set forth penalties of between seven to 25 years imprisonment for those convicted of these acts or inciting others to do so. The Act's other provisions extended the state's writ to hold accountable those who may have perpetrated such acts outside Maldivian territory; called upon the president to publish a list of proscribed terrorist organizations or persons; granted the government permission to suspend certain constitutionally guaranteed rights for persons detained or arrested on suspicion of committing acts of terrorism; established legal procedures for handling terrorism-related cases; and granted permission for the issuance of a monitoring and control order by court order upon reasonable suspicion, which was defined as the Minister's belief based on logical or reasonable evidence or reasoning that one or many of the acts transpire or may occur. A monitoring and control order would permit the government to determine a suspect's place of residence; search him/her and his/her residence; disclose, inspect, and seize a suspect's assets; monitor his or her telecommunications; and impose a travel ban. As of the end of the year, President Yameen had not yet published the mandatory list of terrorist entities, as required by the legislation.

The government also used the PMLFT to arrest political opponents and restrict political and media activity unrelated to terrorism. The government's Human Rights Commission issued a statement on October 29 calling for the PMLFT to be reviewed due to its narrowing constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights.

The Maldivian Parliament (Majlis) passed a new penal code in April 2014, which was implemented in April 2015. Neither Maldivian law nor the penal code permitted restrictions on the travel of would-be foreign terrorist fighters or the detention of those who have been turned back on suspicion that they were headed to a war zone, both of which were gaps the PMLFT was designed to address.

Maldives uses the Terrorist Interdiction Program's Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES) to provide traveler screening and screening list capability.

Maldives continued to participate in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program, which provided training to the MPS, Maldivian Coast Guard, and port and border control officers. The Department of State also supported capacity building for Maldivian investigators and prosecutors, improving their understanding of techniques to handle counterterrorism cases. Training in all aspects of police work related to counterterrorism was also provided to officers by numerous other Western countries. The leadership of the MPS recognized the need for improvement and continuously sought assistance to bring its abilities up to international standards.

Responsibility for Maldivian counterterrorism efforts is divided among the MPS and National Defense Force (MNDF), the latter of which has Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard branches. Information sharing among the agencies is limited. In April, the MPS began randomly questioning Maldivian citizens traveling by air to Turkey as to their reasons for flying and planned dates of return. This effort represented the government's attempt to stem the number of citizens traveling to Iraq and Syria with the goal of joining violent extremist groups to fight.

Maldives participated in a regional conference (May 26-29) in New Delhi, co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT); the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the Department of State in cooperation with the Government of India's National Investigation Agency. The program invited police, prosecutors, members of the judiciary and civil society to share expertise and experience on how best to address issues generated by foreign terrorist fighters including on the effectiveness of terrorism and border security legislation.

Personnel from the Financial Intelligence Unit, MNDF, MPS, and the Prosecutor General's Office participated in a series of trainings led by DOJ/OPDAT from May 31 to June 4. Topics included the effective investigation and prosecution of terrorism cases, terrorism financing, and money laundering.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Maldives is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body. Maldivian authorities believe funds were being raised in Maldives to support terrorism abroad, but lacked reliable information regarding amounts involved. The Maldivian Central Bank believes criminal proceeds mainly come from domestic sources, since a large percentage of suspicious transaction reports the Central Bank receives are connected to Maldivians. The Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) reported informal money transfer networks (hawala) are used to transfer funds between the islands, although the extent to which these systems are employed to launder money is unclear. While the new PMLFT legislation passed in October did not contain provisions specifically targeting terrorism financing, the Maldivian Prosecutor General's Office was confident it would enable police and prosecutors to better identify links between suspected extremists and their finance networks based upon the very wide investigatory powers authorized by the PMLFT.

The Maldivian government monitors banks, the insurance sector, money remittance institutions, and finance companies, and requires the collection of data for wire transfers. Financial institutions other than banks and intermediaries in the securities sector, however, are not subject to current anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) obligations. Insurance companies and intermediaries, finance companies, money remittance service providers, foreign exchange businesses, and credit card companies therefore operate outside the

AML/CFT framework. The MMA had earlier established an FIU, which lacked the technical capacity to analyze vast amounts of new data flowing in on financial transactions. The FIU's director position was vacant as of June; it is operating under an interim director deputed by the MMA until a new one is appointed. For the period of October 2014 to April 2015, the FIU reported receiving six STRs, of which five were analyzed and closed. Insurance companies and intermediaries, finance companies, money remittance service providers, foreign exchange businesses, and credit card companies therefore operate outside the AML/CFT framework.

The Maldivian government implements relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, and monitors and regulates alternative remittance services, despite the fact that they lie outside the AML/CFT framework. The Maldivian government did not report any efforts to seize terrorist assets in 2015.

According to the Maldivian government, capacity building of relevant supervisory and regulatory authorities such as the MMA and the Capital Market Development Authority, the MMA's FIU, law enforcement authorities (the Anti-Corruption Commission, Department of Immigration and Emigration, Maldives Customs Service, and MPS), and the judiciary is needed to properly counter money laundering and terrorism financing.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the 2016 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Countering Violent Extremism: The Maldivian government continued to recognize that counter-radicalization efforts are a critical component to long-term success against violent extremism. Since 2011, the government has sought to counter the influence of extremist ideology by actively intervening in religious life. These interventions include mandating persons wanting to serve as mosque leaders (imams) to undergo a six-month state-approved training, as well as disseminating government-approved sermons, which the imams are required to use for Friday prayers. A government-sponsored Islamic university in the capital city of Male opened in the last quarter of 2015. The university's key objective will be to promote the academic study of religion and "moderate Islam" as a counterweight to extremist discourses and messaging. The Fiqh Academy, a group of religious scholars under the government's Ministry of Islamic Affairs, issued a *fatwa* on August 25 which proclaimed participation in foreign wars is not a religious obligation for all adult Muslims.

International and Regional Cooperation: Maldives is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and is a party of the SAARC regional convention on the suppression of terrorism. Topics discussed included security force capacity building and increasing cooperation in maritime domain awareness. The MNDF and Indian military completed an annual joint training exercise in August and September designed to improve cooperation and inter-operability between the two countries' armed forces.