

## BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

### [Country Reports on Terrorism 2017](#)

#### **MALDIVES**

**Overview:** The Government of Maldives' counterterrorism efforts concentrate on countering violent extremism and limiting the flow of foreign terrorist fighters. Marginalized Maldivians, especially those within the penal system or involved in criminal gangs, are at heightened risk of radicalization to violence, with some joining terrorist groups. On April 23, assailants stabbed to death blogger Yameed Rasheed, whom some in Maldives perceived to espouse anti-Islamic views. Maldives Police Service (MPS) arrested two Maldivians accused of conspiring with ISIS in a suicide attack plot. MPS investigated 12 cases of Maldivians intending to participate in foreign wars and charged four in two separate cases for leaving to fight in Syria. The government claims 49 radicalized Maldivians were fighting with terrorist organizations, whereas the UN and media estimated approximately 200. These incidents illustrate a pattern of Maldivians transiting through third countries to become foreign terrorist fighters.

MPS reported no confirmed cases of returning foreign terrorist fighters, but it was developing strategies and procedures to monitor, assess, and take actions against any returning fighters.

Social media users continued to spread radical ideologies and target moderate and secular individuals and organizations characterized as "insulting Islam." Maldives participated in the U.S. Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program training on interview techniques and aviation security.

**2017 Terrorist Incidents:** On April 23, blogger Yameen Rasheed, a critic of the political establishment who had received repeated death threats for his allegedly anti-Islamic views, was found murdered with multiple stab wounds in the stairwell of his apartment building in Malé. Some suggested Rasheed may have been killed for his criticism of the government, but police asserted that perpetrators believed that Rasheed had "mocked" Islam. Police arrested eight suspects and filed charges against seven. Legal proceedings, which were closed to the public, had not concluded at year's end.

**Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security:** The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) is the primary legislation for preventing and prosecuting terrorism. Maldives also continued to use the PTA to suppress criticism by detaining and prosecuting journalists, political opposition figures, and other activists. It released some, but also made new arrests during the year, including of an individual who wrote social media posts critical of President Yameen. The PTA criminalizes joining or fighting in a conflict abroad. MPS reported investigating 17 cases involving 40 Maldivians under the PTA during 2017: five with intent to commit violence in Maldives and 12 with intent to participate in a foreign war. In November, the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) charged two Maldivians for allegedly conspiring with IS to launch a suicide attack in Malé. In August, the PGO charged four others with possessing improvised explosive device (IED)-related items and conspiring to commit an act threatening national security. Media reported a separate incident in November in which authorities arrested two other men for making bombs. Authorities refused to comment publicly on these reports.

Maldives enacted a new Criminal Procedures Act (CPA), which introduced, codified, and harmonized the practices of the criminal justice system. The Attorney General's Office reported the CPA does not apply in terrorism cases and that the PTA outlines procedures for arrest, detention, search, and seizure in terrorism cases. MPS is responsible for counterterrorism investigations and

transfers cases to the PGO for the duration of the trial. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has the mandate to coordinate interagency policy on counterterrorism and countering violent extremism and to liaise with international security partners. The NCTC falls under the MNDF, with participation from MPS, customs, immigration, and other agencies. Responsibility for counterterrorism operations, including investigations, primarily rests with MPS. MNDF, including the marines and coast guard, is responsible for counterterrorism response. Information sharing between agencies remains limited. Resort security managers and diplomats were unaware of specific government plans to prevent or respond to terrorist attacks.

The appointment of partisan personnel to independent institutions impedes interagency cooperation and creates distrust. Similarly, an inadequately trained judiciary unfamiliar with counterterrorism legislation impairs adequate prosecution of terrorism cases. In October, the courts acquitted three men detained in 2016 at the Turkey-Syria border and charged with attempting to travel to Syria to fight with terrorist groups. MPS did not arrest two returned Maldivians charged on suspicion of planning to travel to Syria from Kuala Lumpur. Corruption, lack of political will, and misuse of counterterrorism laws against political opponents obstruct cooperation.

Maldives uses a U.S.-provided border security system, the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES), to process passengers at Maldives' main international airport and at Malé seaport.

The Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program provided Maldivian law enforcement units with training on interview techniques and aviation security best practices.

**Countering the Financing of Terrorism:** Maldives is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group (APG) on Money Laundering, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body.

Maldives has authority to criminalize money laundering and terrorist financing under the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Act, although authorities have not investigated or prosecuted any cases since it became law in 2016. Authorities previously reported that individuals transferred funds through informal money transfer networks (*hawala*) between islands, but they did not report the extent to which these systems were employed to transfer illicit funds. Maldives introduced a new Remittance Business Regulation that prohibits conducting domestic and international money transfer activities without a Central Bank-issued license. The Central Bank's Financial Intelligence Unit was unaware of any *hawala*-type remittance activities in 2017, but it increased terrorist financing-related information sharing with MPS and the NCTC. MPS established an internal financial intelligence unit to collect intelligence on terrorist financing. Maldives implemented the UN Security Council ISIL (Da'esh) and al-Qa'ida sanctions regime, but it did not seize any terrorist assets in 2017. For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the [2018 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report \(INCSR\), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes](#).

**Countering Violent Extremism (CVE):** In November, the NCTC launched a National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. The NCTC identified islands prone to radicalization through a nationwide study. It intends to launch community-based programs and awareness campaigns throughout the country.

The government launched national campaigns to raise awareness about religious extremism and promote moderation. The campaign targeted schools, Friday sermons, and public fora held at the Islamic Centre in Malé, which is a member of the Strong Cities Network.

Government actions at times led to threats of violence against secularists and activists. We refer you to the State Department's [\*Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and Report on International Religious Freedom for 2017\*](#) for further information.

**International and Regional Cooperation:** The NCTC, with UN support, held a regional counterterrorism conference in Maldives for 46 experts from 16 countries. In December, Maldives co-sponsored UN Security Council resolution 2396 on returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

The Ministry of Tourism, with MPS and British counterterrorism experts, held a conference for more than 100 resort security managers to discuss challenges to security planning. MNDF was a member of the Global Special Operations Force network, which collaborates on common security challenges and actively supports multilateral and regional security cooperation efforts, such as global programs focused on counterterrorism and de-radicalization.