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Pre Election Statement

Transparency Maldives expresses deep concern on the low level of voter education and the backtracking of transparency standards set by Elections Commissions in previous elections

Transparency Maldives is coordinating a nation-wide domestic election observation of the 2011 Local Council Election. The observation will cover, Male', Hulhumale', Villingili and 38 other islands, covering 14 atolls spread over all seven provinces. Twenty partner NGOs will be deploying over 105 accredited observers. The observation effort will cover more than a third of the ballot boxes, covering voting at more than two thirds of the electorate. As part of the larger election observation effort, Transparency Maldives will also be conducting media monitoring for the Local Council Elections. All three main TV stations, four radio stations and three print media will be scrutinized for bias, objectivity and quality of reporting. The domestic observation will assess the conduct of the election in accordance with Maldivian electoral laws and international standards for democratic elections.

Transparency Maldives believes that the pre-election environment of the first ever Local Council Elections to establish a decentralized system of governance is marred by mistrust between stakeholders and has resulted in deterioration of electoral integrity. Appallingly low levels of voter education combined with persistent media bias/propaganda, use of state resources by the ruling party, backtracking of transparency and accessibility standards previously set by the interim Elections Commission in the presidential and parliamentary elections are issues of concern for Transparency Maldives. An environment of mistrust between the election administration, the government, political parties, candidates and the media has contributed to a decline of trust in electoral systems.

Given the complexity of the election and the low level of voter education, Transparency Maldives anticipates a high percentage of invalid ballots. Transparency Maldives also believes that this will contribute to raising tensions as the margin for winning and losing will be low due to the small number of eligible voters spread over a high number of candidates. However, Transparency Maldives commends the Elections Commission for spearheading a meaningful, although a limited and delayed, voter education program in Male' and the atolls. Transparency Maldives also appreciates the readiness of the Elections Commission in preparing for the Election Day on 5 February.

Transparency Maldives conducted the pre-election environment assessment with emphasis on election administration and coordination, campaigning by political parties and candidates, complaints and redress mechanisms, use of state resources, voter education as well as the conduct of media. In addition to the general observation and monitoring, Transparency Maldives makes this statement based on information received from political parties, media, journalists, independent candidates, community-based organizations, individual observers and partner NGOs. Transparency Maldives will be

publishing a post election statement on 7 February and a complete report on the observation of Local Council Elections before 10 March.

For more information please contact Projects Coordinator Aiman Rasheed on +960 790 8967. Aiman Rasheed is also the media focal person for the local council elections. Feel free to call for updates, opinions or comments regarding this press statement as well as developments on Election Day.