

## Preliminary Assessment of Radicalisation in the Maldives

This is a preliminary assessment of religious radicalisation in the Maldives. The report looks at the religious ideologies predominant in today's Maldivian society and compares it with the values, principles and ideals it is officially said to have embraced with the adoption of the new democratic Constitution of 2008. The analysis is conducted in five separate sections which comprise primary source material analysed from printed and published material such as school textbooks and sermons; materials published online on popular social media platforms by popular disseminators of religious ideologies; religious activities conducted by various NGOs and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs; informal discussions with selected focus groups; and surveys and interviews conducted with the general public and selected representatives of public and state institutions. Together, these analyses provide a snapshot the 'big picture' depicting the current Maldivian religious landscape and society.

**MALDIVIAN  
DEMOCRACY  
NETWORK**

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# Introduction

This project is the first baseline study to assess level of radicalisation in the Maldives. The assessment is a project undertaken by the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) with the assistance of the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), for the period December 2014 to February 2015. In order to identify prevalence of radical narratives in mainstream discourse, the study has reviewed school textbooks, published material, religious sermons and online Islamist activity. Additionally, public forums were held in different island communities to ascertain whether the public sees human rights and Islam as compatible or not. Interviews were also conducted with officials of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and principals of various public schools across the country. The primary aim of the project is to ascertain whether or not the official interpretation of Islam is in line with the recent project of democratisation of the Maldives that began in 2008 with the country's first multi-party elections.

The Maldives adopted Islam as the state religion in 1153. Although said to have been introduced to the Maldives by a Moroccan traveller, Islam in the Maldives did not stay true to its origins as its teachings merged with the nation's unique culture long influenced by centuries of Buddhism and habits unique to small-island life. Everybody adhered to the five tenants of Islam without question or fuss but day-to-day life did not revolve around God. Apart from the core values of Islam taught in primary and secondary schools, there were no dedicated institutions of Islamic theology or places of learning and debating Islamic jurisprudence. This does not in any way mean people did not believe in Islam as their religion – Maldivians took it for granted they are born Muslims without feeling a constant need to prove the degree of their 'Muslimness' to each other or to visitors and observers from the outside. A person's faith was for God to know and judge, not for the world to examine and admire or criticise.

For hundreds of years, there were very little outside influences on the Maldivian faith, and much of the world's religious conflicts as well as changes in how Islam is practiced in different parts of the world remained largely unknown in the Maldives. The Maldivian road from Islam to Islamism is a long one, which is beyond the scope of this report, and has been documented in detail elsewhere<sup>1</sup> (Naseem and Mushfique 2014). In the last decade, Islam in the Maldives has undergone a 'religious revival' led by Salafists, Wahhabists and other strands of what is often described as 'fundamentalist Islam'. The spread of such ideology has been aided vastly by the availability of the Internet; this has been true to the Maldives, also, as is discussed in detail in this report.

Starting from the 1970s, for the rest of the world, the Maldives has been a luxury tourist destination void of its populace. Until recently the tourism industry was

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<sup>1</sup> Naseem, Azra and Mohamed, Mushfique 2014, Maldives: The Long Road from Islam to Islamism, A Short History', Dhivehi Sitee. Accessed online at <http://www.dhivehisitee.com/religion/islamism-maldives/> on 26 February 2015

only allowed to operate on uninhabited islands leased to developers. However, given the revival of fundamentalist Islam throughout the world – spread exponentially through modern technology and globalisation – the Maldives is no longer the eternally peaceful, seemingly desolate ‘island paradise’ it once was. Decades of authoritarian rule and centralised governments have resulted in a deeply polarised community that has brought one third of its population to the greater Malé area in search of public services, jobs and higher education. Malé, the capital of the Maldives is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. Its congestion has produced inevitable societal ills such as gang culture, drug abuse, unemployment, radicalisation, political violence and a widening socio-economic gap. Political unrest, fuelled with religious rhetoric has been the norm since the Maldives began its transition into democracy. When religious revival, in the form of fundamentalist ideas and radical ideologies are brought in, a potentially explosive mix is created in which these ideas—when steered in that direction—clash dangerously with those of some of democracy’s core values: freedom, human rights, equality, and rule of law. This report explores the potential for, and the existence of, these clashes by analysing the religious ideologies currently taking hold in the Maldives and exposing how they clash or complement the country’s nascent democracy.

## Defining Radicalisation

A ‘conceptual fault-line’ between notions of radicalisation that emphasize extremist beliefs – ‘cognitive radicalisation’ - and those focusing on extremist behaviour - ‘behavioural radicalisation’ - has formed the basis for ambiguities in what is meant by ‘radicalisation’ (Neumann 2013). This ambiguity has led to differences in how radicalisation is defined, how scholars debate the term, and also in how policies are formulated to address the phenomenon. There is, however, broad agreement that ‘radicalisation’, or ‘becoming extremist’, is a process that takes place over time comprising a range of factors (Moghadam 2005, Baran 2005, McCauley and Moskalenko 2008).

What has proven contentious is defining what ‘extremism’ is. The *Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought* (2007) states that it can mean either political ideas diametrically opposed to a society’s core values or it can mean the methods by which actors seek to realise their political aims. As Neumann (2013) elaborates, this means that while for some radicalisation is ‘a purely cognitive phenomenon that culminates in ‘radically’ different ideas about society and governance, others believe that it ought to be defined by the (often violent or coercive) actions in which those ideas result.’ Differences in how academics and policymakers understand and approach radicalisation are thus based on distinctions between ‘cognitive’ radicalisation on the one hand and ‘behavioural’ radicalisation i.e. ‘violent radicalisation’ on the other.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, for example, view radicalisation as a purely cognitive phenomenon whereby individuals move from moderate mainstream beliefs to extremist views. This view—that adopting extremist belief systems, without necessarily resulting in violent action, amounts to radicalisation—is one shared by several US government departments. The British government, however, places more emphasis on explicitly connecting radicalisation with violent action (Neumann 2013: 875). For the latter, radicalisation is ‘the process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to participate in terrorist groups’.

Is there a connection between extremist ideas and extremist action? Many analysts and policymakers agree that extremist belief systems form the precondition for the willingness to use, support and/or facilitate violence. Neumann argues that this makes instinctive sense: ‘terrorists become cognitive extremists first, and then—for whatever reason—decide to pursue their extremist aims by violent means’ (2013:876).

There are, however, many who argue that focusing on cognitive radicalisation has been counterproductive (Horgan 2001, Borum 2011). Horgan is of the view that assuming a unidirectional relationship whereby in all probability a cognitive radical will go on to become a terrorist is fundamentally flawed (Horgan 2001). Borum describes as false the implication that ‘radical beliefs are a proxy—or at least a precursor—for terrorism’ (Borum 2011: 8). Their suggestion is that there are no inevitable links between extremist political beliefs and violent political action, thus the two phenomena should not be studied together. Neumann describes both these arguments as ‘problematic’ (2013: 879). If the role of political beliefs and ideologies are overrated or irrelevant to understanding behavioural radicalisation, he asks, how is it possible to understand the differences in how, for example, the Irish Republican Army fought the British occupation of their homeland and how the Tibetans have fought for the same goal peacefully? How is it possible to know what commands political and ‘quietist’ Salafists to pursue their faith peacefully while ‘jihadist’ Salafists join terrorist organisations? ‘[W]ithout reference to beliefs, none of these behaviours make sense’ (Neumann 2013: 880). Thus, Neumann puts forward the case that, in practice, it is impossible to separate political beliefs from political action, and that attempting to do so obstructs a holistic understanding of radicalisation; that not every ‘true believer’ is an ideologue; [...] and that any attempt at understanding individuals’ ‘action pathways’ without looking at social movements and counter-cultures from which they have emerged is bound to be shallow.

Based on the arguments above, therefore, for the purposes of this study, radicalisation is a process that includes *both* the acceptance of political ideas diametrically opposed to a society’s core values *and* the methods by which those who adopt such ideas seek to realise their political aims. That is to say, the focus of this study is not restricted to individuals in the Maldives who support violent Jihad, or have chosen to join the Jihad in foreign countries, but also the

individuals who are seen to be undergoing a process of accepting beliefs that are diametrically opposed to the core values of the Maldivian society.

According to the Constitution of the Maldives (2008)<sup>2</sup>, the Maldives 'is a sovereign, independent, democratic Republic based on the principles of Islam' (Article 2). A non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives (Article 9.d); the religion of the State of the Maldives is Islam (Article 10.a); and no law contrary to any tenet of Islam shall be enacted in the Maldives (Article 10. b). At the same time, the Constitution also describes the Maldives as 'a free and democratic society' where justice will be implemented 'in accordance with democratic norms' where each citizen has a duty and responsibility 'to promote democratic values and practices in a manner that is not inconsistent with any tenet of Islam'; where in interpreting the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, courts and tribunals are obliged to 'promote the values that underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom; and where even the security services are obliged to protect democratic institutions. Core values of the Maldivian society today can, thus, be described as ones that balance the core tenets of Islam with the principles of democracy, freedom and human rights.

Beliefs that challenge these core values and upset that fine balance can, therefore, be viewed as 'radical', and the process by which individuals come to adopt these beliefs can be described as 'radicalisation'.

## Structure

Within the framework outlined above, this report looks at the increasing number of Maldivians who promote and/or support Salafist and Wahhabi ideologies that challenge traditional Islamic practices in the Maldives; dismiss or denigrate democratic values, freedoms and human rights as 'un-Islamic'; and/or support and encourage violent Jihad in the name of a global Holy War for Allah against Infidels. This is examined by looking at five different type of primary source materials: printed publications in wide circulation such as school textbooks and sermons; widely disseminated online material and disseminators of such material popular on the Internet; activities conducted by religious NGOs and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs; and discussions with schools, and general public through focus groups, interviews and surveys. The methods and findings of these inquiries are laid out in the following manner:

### 1. Review of published materials

#### 1.1 Islamic Studies textbooks

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<sup>2</sup> The Constitution of the Maldives, 2008. For full text visit: <http://www.majlis.gov.mv/en/wp-content/uploads/Constitution-english.pdf> Accessed online 28 February 2015

1.2 Magazines, leaflets and other printed materials

1.3 Prayer sermons

**2. Observation of online material**

2.1 Islamist websites or blogs

2.2 Facebook

2.3 Twitter

**3. Activities conducted by Islamist NGOs and the Islamic Ministry**

3.1 Special events

**4. Informal information gathering**

4.1 Focus Group discussions with men and women on the Chapter of Rights of the Constitution

4.2 Discussions with schools management regarding the practice of Islamic culture inside the schools.

**5. Interviews**

5.1 The Minister for Islamic Affairs, Dr Mohamed Shaheem Ali

5.2 Phone survey in the capital city Malé



# 1. Review of Published Material

By Mushfique Mohamed, Leevan Shareef, Shahindha Ismail

This section of the study is a review of the Islamic textbooks used in Maldivian schools, from grades one to twelve, in order to identify ideas that contribute to promulgation of radical worldviews. In addition, normative qualities invoked in the books are also highlighted. Each book has been reviewed in light of the definition of radicalisation mentioned in this report's introduction. This report did not measure how often and to what extent teachers deviate from the syllabus when teaching. Many students claim teachers are prone to conjecture, and often provide their own views regarding certain aspects of the lessons.

## 1. Islamic Text Books

All the Islamic studies textbooks under the syllabus contain four main chapters - Quranic elocution (*Tajwid*); Islamic creed (*Aqidah*) submission to Allah through worship (*Ibadah*); lessons from the Prophet's life and ascension to paradise (*As-Sirat*); and Islamic etiquette (*Islami Akhlaq*). The textbook guarantees that once the student has completed these books, he or she would have attained Islamic education in accordance with the national syllabus.

### Grade 1

The first chapter explains the Arabic script through seven lessons, followed by the chapter named Quran. The Islamic creed chapter comprises nine lessons: meaning of the Islamic creed; "absolute power" of Allah; Allah's creations; Allah's resources; Allah's mercifulness; Islamic prophets; Prophet Muhammad; Holy Quran and Islamic faith. Lesson on 'Islamic Prophets' under the *Aqidah* chapter includes an excerpt about Moses on page 56. Since these books are intended for six year olds, the book has a lot of artwork and colouring activities. In this particular page, the illustration shows a snake, the text-box next to the illustration reads, "Moses received miracles regarding sorcery. When Moses threw his cane, the cane turned into a snake upon Allah's command, rendering the sorcerers' hexes void."

In the same chapter, the textbook mentions that Jesus Christ or Isa Ibn Maryam, as he is represented in Islam, was "born in Palestine." Jerusalem is hotly contested to this day; the Israel-Palestine conflict is graphic proof of it, in a region that Judaism and Christianity considers its historical birthplace, and Islam considers its holiest site after Mecca and Medina. Palestine only emerged in its modern form after a series of bilateral agreements beginning with the Paulet Newcombe Agreement and the British Mandate for Palestine. This usage of "Palestine" may create confusion for the young reader, as the State did not exist in its modern form in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century.

The lessons under *As-Sirat* chapter details Prophet Muhammad's lineage, his birth, his time with Haleemath, his mother's death and his time with his uncle respectively. There are ten lessons under the final chapter, Islamic etiquette or *Islami Akhlaq*. Those ten lessons include: cleanliness; truthfulness; shaking hands; equitable distribution; accepting advice or opinions of others through open discussion; respecting parents, elders, old aged people, teachers, school regulations; and rules inside mosques.

## Grade 2

The first chapter teaches students how to recite the Qur'an correctly. It goes into how to memorize Qur'an recitation, according to *Tajwid*. In this chapter entitled "Quran," no emphasis is given to the meaning of the scripture. Students are to only master the ability to recite written Qur'anic Arabic, it does not include a translation of the parables. It is uncommon for Maldivian children to be able to understand Arabic, especially at this age. There is a higher possibility that Maldivian children understand Dhivehi, English and, possibly, Hindi at home.

The *Aqidah* chapter explains the Islamic creed and its meaning. It goes onto state the five pillars of Islam; and normative rituals espoused by Islam.

The chapter on *Ibadah* includes a brief lesson on the importance of brushing teeth, right before explaining the rituals of ablution. It is clear that 'cleanliness and personal hygiene' are tied to religious discourse under this chapter. It highlights the importance given to hygiene under Islam.

The chapter on Islamic etiquette includes normative values on a number of areas. The lessons comprise of: lessons one, two and seven to nine on respecting elders, people of old age, parents, family members, teachers, friends and neighbours. Lesson three to six contain advice on maintaining etiquette or against anti-social behaviour at home, in public, as a member of society and inside the mosque respectively. There is a brief heading titled "loving yourself and others," as lesson 10 (Page 120). Under this topic it states, "The best Muslims love themselves and other Muslims." It does not mention love for humanity as a whole, excluding from the love those who may not share the same religious views.

## Grade 3

The textbook contains, under Quran elocution of 12 parables. The *Aqidah* chapter contains lessons on faith, 'Muslimness', "eternal existence" of Allah, and the "all-knowing, all-hearing nature" of Allah. The *Ibadah* chapter under this textbook entails correct methods of ablution and instances where ablution may become invalid. It also contains lessons on acceptable ways of performing prayers. Lessons under the *As-Sirat* chapter are made of stories that divulge Prophet Muhammad's time alone in a cave in Mecca where he first received revelations from Allah. Other lessons discuss his positive characteristics, his encounter with

Waraka bin Naufal, and how Prophet Muhammad carried out the initial proselytisation in secrecy.

The fourth Lesson on Islamic etiquette discusses “protecting the tongue.” This lesson could be construed as contrary to the democratic value of freedom of expression. It endorses being silent on “matters that are of no concern” to the speaker. It depicts “protecting the tongue” as a submissive act, where one must not be critical or overtly vocal.

## Grade 4

In the first chapter, the focus is on memorising certain parables, although the first parable has inclusive (*ijmai*) interpretation in the Maldivian language.

*Aqidah* includes principles of piety, obeying prophets and their books, obeying judgement day and being grateful. It also contains a lesson called, “The last prophet.”

*Ibadah* First discusses first and second call to prayer (*Iqamah*); principles by which prayer is mandatory; praying in congregation, *Qunut*, *Dhikr/Tasbih*, and principles by which *Zakat* is made mandatory.

The chapter on Zakat, under Lesson Six outlines conditions required of a person for Zakat to be mandatory. The narrative here appears to be mostly normative apart from a sentence that states Zakat also serves as a means to “relieve the jealousy in the hearts of the poor” (p. 45). On the following page (p. 46) it states that those who fulfil the previously mentioned characteristics shall be obligated to pay zakat. If such a person does not pay zakat, when under an Islamic State, it is permissible for the State to intervene in order to procure zakat. The same lesson lists beneficiaries of zakat (p. 47) as the poor, orphans, those who collect and distribute zakat, new converts to Islam, slaves, the indebted, those who “commit jihad in the name of Allah” and travellers.

*As-Sirat* includes lessons on how the Quresh tribe tortured Muslim Prophet Muhammad, and certain Messengers.

These lessons outline the maltreatment of the Prophet and Messengers at the hands of the Quresh tribe in Mecca. It names those who tortured and harassed the religion introduced by Prophet Muhammad. First encounter is of how Prophet Muhammad was harassed when he and his wife attempted to pray at the Kaaba. Other instances include graphic torture received by Bilal (a slave who converted into Islam) from his slave master.

*“One of the acts of torture against Bilal by Umayyath bin Khalaf is where he orders Bilal to lie face down under the midday sun, places a rock on his chest and says ‘you will remain this way until you revert to Al-Lat (a pre-*

*Islamic goddess, one of three such goddesses worshiped by people from Mecca) and become an infidel to Muhammad” (p. 64)*

There is also an illustration of a man lashing another man who is on the floor (p. 64). It may not be appropriate for a 10 year old to know such graphic details of torture. The lesson goes on to mention how Ammar bin Yasir was left in the hot sun in chained cuffs and eventually died from the torture he received. It also mentions how Abu Jahulu killed his wife Sumaiya.

Lesson 2 describes why Prophet Muhammad and his followers were forced to move out of Mecca to modern day Ethiopia – Al-Habash – for three months. The following passage praises the bravery of Prophet Muhammad’s followers and their willingness to go to any length in the name of Islam. His followers eventually got permission to move to Medina from Al-Habash.

After the exodus to Al-Habash where Muslims gained protection, their perseverance was further strengthened when Umar converted to Islam. This lesson mentions Qureshi “deception” or “trickery” planned in order to “destroy” Prophet Muhammad’s aims, Islamic religion and Muslims. In this regard, Quresh tribe inflicted economic sanctions on Hashemites and completely severed social ties with them. The Qureshi position was that if the Hashemite tribe did not hand over Prophet Muhammad to them for his execution, there would be no alleviation of the challenges it had imposed on Hashemites. This resulted in Hashemites being stranded in Shib Abi Talib, with some dying of starvation. Meccan boycott of the Hashemites ended when certain Qureshis started to counter it.

These narratives may perpetuate sense of victimhood felt by Muslims. All the lessons tend to accentuate the differences between the West and ‘the Muslim world’. It discounts the mutually constitutive aspects of both. Perhaps such narratives explain why many disenfranchised youth tend to find ‘Jihad’ appealing, given the indoctrination received at such a young age. There are no critical views on how certain methods of public torture, such as flogging, stoning and execution is legitimised through Sharia and views, even from within Islam, that shun such punishments are not included in the lessons.

Lesson Four depicts a narrative where Prophet Muhammad’s uncle Abu Talib is on his deathbed, when a Quresh tribesman asks if the animosity between Prophet Muhammad’s followers and his tribe can be resolved. In his response, the Prophet claimed that if they repeated the Islamic creed they would be able to dominate all Arab countries and the rest of the world. This depicts Islam as an empire building religion, set on world domination, and not necessarily one of peace and justice. These narratives create the room in which children could internalise the sense of social exclusion and injustice felt by Prophet Muhammad in his evangelism.

Prophet Muhammad's journey to Taifah is another lesson where his difficulties in proselytizing Islam – this time in Taifah – are detailed.

Prophet Muhammad's journey to Medina explains the circumstances under which Prophet Muhammad journeyed to Medina to escape the persecution in Mecca. It explains that the efforts of "Meccan infidels" to find him were in vain as "Allah's grace" protected Prophet Muhammad.

Treaty of Hudhaibiyah – "opened the door for Muslim take-over of Mecca", again Empire building depicted as a key characteristic of Islam. However, the chapter on Prophet Muhammad's generosity, stresses on the importance of the human trait. It places emphasis on how his generosity played a pivotal role in proselytisation, thus deeming it a mandatory quality for his followers.

*Islami Akhlaq* or Islamic etiquette stresses on respecting relatives. Lesson One is on the importance of upholding family relations. It quotes the Prophet as saying that those who sever familial ties will not enter paradise (p. 95).

Lesson Two talks of the importance of kindness towards neighbours. It likens relations with neighbours to be similar to family ties and cites a Hadith from the Prophet stating, "Those who believe in Allah and the Judgement Day should not disturb their neighbours."

Lesson Three states that living things should never be purposely killed, and calls against disturbing, confining and or torturing animals. Lesson Four endorses being humble, and Lesson Five states that it may not be easy to avoid anger, but that one should control it because decisions made when angry are usually void of logic.

The lesson on "voluntarily confessing to criminal acts" states that confessing to a criminal act is a trait of those who "love the truth." Moreover, it states that once such an act is committed, one should make repentance towards Allah.

Lesson Six cites Prophet Muhammad saying that one who repents is as one who did not commit a criminal act. Lesson Seven highlights the importance of gaining trust from others and being a reliable person.

This lesson on "assisting in familial duties" reiterates Lesson One and stresses assisting parents, siblings and relatives. It says that one should not be angry with a family member for more than three days.

Lesson Nine is on the important topic of being a moderate Muslim. It says, "Islam is a moderate religion," and that "it is obligatory to opt for moderation in all activities and where capable accomplish a *Sunnah* (practices maintained through descendants of Abraham that were reinstated by Muhammad as Islamic) ritual.

Lesson 10 stresses the importance of giving thanks to those who do good unto you, and showing appreciation by returning the favour with a good deed. Under this lesson, it states that each person has responsibilities in his or her capacity as an individual. Then it gives examples of certain occupations and obligations it entails. It also says, “as Muslims we must consider all religious duties as our responsibilities” and goes onto cover responsibilities of a student.

## **Grade 5**

Chapter One of the Grade 5 Islam textbook is about the Quran. It consists of the recitation and memorisation of the Quranic parables. There is also a subchapter about the Tajwid (rules governing the pronunciation while reciting the Quran).

Chapter Two is about Aqidah (Islamic belief). In this chapter, the reasons for revealing Prophets, Messengers and miracles are explained. Some of the Prophets mentioned in the Quran are covered in this chapter.

Chapter Three is about Ibadat (worship); here the ritual cleansing and different prayers of Sunni Islam are covered along with fasting.

Chapter Four covers the Life of the Prophet Muhammad, mainly the start of the Islamic state in Medina and the battles that followed. Three battles mentioned here are against the polytheists of Mecca and two are against the Jews who were living in Medina. In the exercise following the lesson on the expulsion of the Banu Nadir Jewish tribe (p. 82), there is one question that states, “Analyse the grievances Muslims have historically had with the Jews, and state four reasons why it is difficult to live with the Jews in peace.” The past problems the student would be analysing are the two previous battles against the Jews mentioned in this book, the expulsion of tribes Banu Qunayga and Banu Nadir.

This reinforces the insular idea that Muslims and Jews will never be able to coexist; the only suggested solution is to either kill them or drive them out. In terms of the invoked lessons from the battle, it states, “The Jews are a devious people and they do not hold any value to their promises.” Due to this narrative of one Jewish tribe reneging on a promise they made, all Jews are stereotyped as untrustworthy, reflecting the anti-Semitism that is the norm in Maldives today.

Chapter Five is about Islamic etiquette. This gives a sense that Islam pervades every single aspect of life. Concepts such as personal finance, how to greet a person, are not necessarily Islamic or Western. It is better taught in another subject, ideally through Civic Education. This trend is recognisable among the Islamic Studies textbooks. If the idea that Islam is the answer for everything is so fiercely posited, then the resulting effect would be that most, if not all, students would believe anything that does not come from Islam is false.

## **Grade 6**

Chapter One (Quran) consist of memorization and recitation of selected parables in accordance to *Tajweed*.

Chapter Two is Islamic creed, *Aqidah* consists of the beliefs in Islam. Examples are the belief in the unknown, belief in the Day of Judgment, Paradise and Hell. Chapter Three (*Ibadat*) covers worship in Islam. *Aurah* (intimate parts of the body), *Sunnah* prayers (non obligatory prayers) are explained here along with *Zakat* (charity). Chapter Four covers the *As-Sirat* (lessons from the Prophet's ascension to paradise). Here the expansion of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula, battles, and the sermon of the Prophet at Hajj Al Wadhaa (The Farewell Sermon) are taught. In the expulsion of Banu Quraytha, a Jewish tribe, the verdict of killing the able bodied men of the tribe and the enslavement of the women and children is stated as having been praised by the Prophet. The verdict was passed by the head of the Aus tribe Saud bin Muaz. (p. 90) "The Prophet praised this verdict and said that this verdict was also the verdict of Allah."

This amounts to endorsement of a massacre and mass enslavement after the defeat of an enemy. A verdict of Allah will be regarded as a Sharia law. This along with the other mentions of the Jewish people (p. 82) as treacherous and devious people lead to anti-Semitic feelings among Maldivians at a young age.

Chapter Five (Islamic etiquette) covers the characteristics a Muslims should have along with how he or she should act in life.

## **Grade 7**

Chapter 1 covers the recitation and memorisation of Surats of the Quran in accordance with *Tajweed*. *Tajweed* is explained in more detail than in previous grades. Chapter 2 covers *Aqidah*. In this chapter, Islamic beliefs of the "omnipotence of Allah, Allah's characteristics, his oneness are explained.

## **Grade 8**

Chapter One, Knowledge of the Quran, starts off with recitation of four parables along with their meaning. The next component of the chapter is Quranic knowledge. This component teaches students the benefit of studying Quranic knowledge, a brief overview of what the Quran is and names of the Quran. Students also learn about the revelation of Quran and the differences between parables revealed in Mecca and Medina.

Chapter Two, Knowledge of the Hadith, teaches students of the different degrees of authenticity of Hadith, the benefits of having knowledge of the Hadith and the position of *Hadithun Nabavi* (The Prophet's sayings) in Islam.

Chapter Three, Islamic creed, teaches students about the concept of *Iman* (belief) in Islam, belief in Allah, the evidence of Allah's existence, belief in angels and in the books of revelation. One of the cases for Allah's existence stated in

this book is (p. 41) “The emotions and thought instilled in the human body by Allah is the proof of this (Allah’s existence). Sight, hearing along with the use of the brain, the evidence in Allah’s universe can be found. And it can also be found in the revelations of Allah.” The case for Allah’s existence is presented to the students with the statement that Allah exists is a given. The next significant argument for Allah’s existence is the use of the “intelligent design” argument.

Chapter 4, Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh), teaches students the tenets of Shariah. It is taught that Shariah derives from the Quran, Sunnah, Ijma (consensus of the religious community on issues) and Qiyas (the teachings of the Hadith are compared and contrasted with those of the Qur’an, in order to apply a known injunction to a new circumstance and create a new injunction.) The degrees of the rulings of Shariah are explained. Rulings according to Shariah on cleanliness, trade, usury, and rent are also taught.

The rulings on unlawful sexual relationships (extra-marital and premarital sex) as stated in this book are as follows:

1. The man who is married and has consummated his marriage shall be sentenced to death by stoning.
2. The man who is unmarried shall be lashed 100 times and banished for a year.
3. The slave’s punishment will be half of that of a freeman, therefore 50 lashes.

The ruling on homosexual relations between men and anal sex between a man and a woman is the same ruling as for unlawful sexual relations. A homosexual relation between men and anal sex between a man and a woman is regarded as equivalent to unlawful sexual relations (zinaa).

Homosexual relations between women are not regarded as equal to unlawful sexual relations between man and woman. Therefore the ruling is discretionary punishment by the judge. The ruling on people who commit bestiality is also discretionary punishment by the judge. Sex is described as something that Allah has instilled within humans for the sole purpose of reproduction and sustenance of the human race. The only way to fulfil that purpose is through marriage between a man and a woman. Homosexuality and unlawful sexual relations are described as causing adverse effects in the society. “People committing suicide due to not being satisfied” “Sexual abuse of minors.” “People will stop being modest” “Different diseases will be spread” these are some of the adverse effects that the book mentions (pg. 137).

The idea that homosexuality, extra-marital and pre-marital sexual relations causes sexual abuse of minors, leads to suicides and diseases will be spread is wrong and the students should be taught as much. Sexual abuse of minors and suicides are complex issues and cannot be distilled into simplistic statements



that say homosexuality, premarital and extramarital sexual relations are the causes of it.

The ruling on a person who steals is having his/her hand cut off. “The ruling on theft is ruling from Allah himself and should it be proved that a person committed that crime, there cannot be any pardon for the guilty.” (p. 140).

The components of Chapter Six, Islamic history and civilisation, are the importance of the Seerat (Prophet’s life) to learn Islam, the wisdom of revealing Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, Islamic culture and a brief biography on Imam Hanifa and Imam Malik.

The component “Islamic culture” compares Islamic culture with other cultures. There is an oversimplification of other cultures as materialistic and too libertarian. Islamic culture is portrayed as being divinely inspired and built upon divine foundations (Shariah and Islamic creed), more spiritual than non-Islamic cultures.

Chapter Six explains the Islamic economic system. It is mentioned that the economic systems of today, communism, socialism and capitalism are based on the deficient human intellect. It is also stated that, as these economic systems unlike the Islamic economic system have been founded by humans, they are eventually destined to fail unlike the Islamic economy which is built upon divine guidance.

Chapter Seven, on Islamic behaviour, teaches students how they should be taking into account the Islamic rules governing daily life along with treating Quran respectfully and loving the Prophet. “Loving the Prophet,” states that the Prophet must be loved above all (pg.212). “The Prophet must be loved above your own soul, parents, husbands, wives and children” (p.214). Holding the Prophet to a level of a demi-god regrettably blinds Muslims to the rights of others when it is Mohammed that is being satirised or even just drawn. The protests in Maldives on the issue of the film “Innocence of the Muslims” were carried out due to this. The Jyllands-Posten protests also drew inspiration from the emphasis upon Muslims to love the Prophet beyond anything except Allah.

## **Grade 9**

Chapter 1, Knowledge of the Quran, covers the compilation of the Quran and as to how the Quran as a holy book should be treated.

Under the heading “In response to objections made about the Quran” the following passage is taught to the students.

(Pg.18)

"Of the books revealed by Allah (God), the Qur'an is the only word of God that has not been changed by humans. This is something the enemies of Islam

believe. And they know that the only revelation that has remained unchanged is the revelation to Prophet Muhammad, the Quran. Because of this, Christians and Jews try to invoke doubt in the hearts of Muslims about the Quran, therefore defaming Islam.”

This creates a mentality that sees anyone other than Muslim as enemies. The mentality is a barrier to inter-faith dialogue and peaceful coexistence with people of other faiths. The statement “This is something the enemies of Islam believe. And they know that the only revelation that has remained unchanged is the revelation to Prophet Muhammad, the Quran,” is the Muslim viewpoint, not a statement of fact. Every religion believes their own holy book to be the one true revelation from god. A derogatory statement such as one that describes Christian and Jewish practices as trying to defame Islam must not be taught to students as fact. It is the personal opinion of either the writer or a group of people. Students must be allowed to form their own opinions about other religions instead of being spoon-fed hatred against them. Allowing students to form their own opinions would create more chances for interfaith dialogue.

Chapter Two, Knowledge of Hadith, covers the compilation of the Hadith, degrees of the Sunnah and degrees of Hadith. The students are taught how Hadith has been compiled along with explanation of the timeline of compilation and what the degrees of Sunnah and Hadith are.

Chapter Three, Islamic creed, covers miracles, belief in prophets and prophetic calling. In the component, prophetic calling, what becomes obligatory should you believe in the Prophet Mohammed is listed on page 55. “Loving the Prophet above your own soul, family and your worldly possessions” creates the room for hatred and stops any criticism of Mohammed. This particular command to love the Prophet could be better explained by teachers in such a way that does not stifle freedom of expression.

“Calling people to the religion of Allah (proselytising) and performing jihad against people that obstruct the religion.” (pg 55) How the religion might be obstructed is very vague. This can lead to interpretations that see prohibition of proselytising in certain public spaces as obstruction of religion and to wage jihad against those perceived to be imposing such obstructions. Clearer definition as to what constitutes “obstruction to religion” is needed. As the definition of Jihad here is vague it can be, and has been, interpreted as violent jihad.

Under the heading “Some of the liars that came to be in this Ummah”, the Ahmaddiyya movement is described as a plot by the British to destroy the unity of Muslims, to destroy the foundations of Shari’a and to move Muslims away from Islam. It is explicitly stated here that Ahmadiyyat (referred to in the book as Qadianism) is a false denomination of Islam (pg.58). If students are taught that takfir of this sort is permissible in Islam, this leads to a belief that extremists take advantage of. This also leaves no space for other interpretations of faith such as Sufism and Shi’ism. Rather, students will come to regard Orthodox Sunni as

the only true interpretation. The religious slur “Qadiyani” is used to refer to Ahmadi Muslims. While the term is used in Pakistani official documents to refer to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, it is considered pejorative by the community itself. The term, “Qadiyani”, should be replaced by “Ahmadiyya” as they refer to themselves.

Chapter Four, Islamic Jurisprudence, covers the Islamic rulings on fasting, death, burial and marriage.

“Muslim men may marry Muslim women and women of the People of the Book. However, this is considered makrooh (bad act but not haram). And this is considered even more undesirable should they be living in a non-Islamic country. However no Muslim man may marry a polytheist woman.”

“Muslim women may not marry any non-Muslim man even if the man may be of the People of the Book. This ruling is supported by the Quran.”

This is taught to students as a main part of the component on marriage. Students may come to see men as being given more advantages compared to women (p. 96). "If the wife disobeys the husband, the husband must first advise her. After advisement by the husband, if the wife still disobeys, they must leave the marital bed (sleep separately) and punish her. The problem must be resolved with the intervention of two judges. This is an obligation upon the husband." What constitutes punishment must be clearly defined here. Some clerics interpret punishment to be beating which will be considered domestic violence. Clear definition of punishment is needed. A vague definition leads to more violent interpretations.

Chapter Five, Islamic culture, covers the life of Imam Mohamed bin Idris and Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal, the enemies of Islam, Jews and Christians, the spread of Islamic civilisation to Europe and the problems facing Muslims of today. The component, “Enemies of Islam”, teaches students about those who acted against Islam in the days of the Prophet. These contain the infamous Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab and other polytheists of Mecca. The “hypocrites” of the polytheists, Jews are described in detail.

In the component “Jews and Christians” the spread of Judaism and Christianity are explained. Jews are portrayed as a treacherous people who work against Islam. “Some of the adversarial acts of the Jews as given in this section include:

- Embracing Islam and apostatising to make it seem as if Islam was a weak religion;
- Trying to kill the Prophet by poison and other means;
- Betraying the treaty with Muslims and having treacherous dealings with the polytheists of Mecca;
- Supporting those that assassinated Caliph Umar and those that bought a coup against Caliph Uthman;
- Working to undermine the Aqidah of Muslims;

- Working to bring the downfall of the Islamic Caliphate, stealing the land of the Palestinians and working to sow discord among Muslims” (pg. 118).

All of these acts, other than the last, were committed by the three Jewish tribes: Banu Quraytha, Banu Nadhir and Banu Qunayqa. These are not the acts of all Jews. All Jews must not be presented as a backstabbing treacherous people because of the acts of these three tribes.

“Kufr (Disbelief) is one ideology,” under this heading the book states, “The followers of disbelief and evil regardless of their religion, nationality are united in their work against what the truth (Haqq). They are all of the same ideology” (pg. 119). This presents the situation in black and white terms, where one side is absolutely right (Muslims) and other side is absolutely wrong (Non-Muslims). It teaches students that it is Muslims against everyone else.

“Therefore Islam ruling over the world is very near. This is something that the Jews and Christians do not want. It is why they collaborate against Islam even now” (pg. 199). The students are thought to think of Jews and Christians as the enemy justifying a violent Jihad against them as per “Calling people to the religion of Allah (proselytising) and performing Jihad against people that obstruct the religion.” (pg 55). “Man made philosophies have failed in being economically, socially, politically viable. The only philosophy that is economically, socially and politically viable is Islam” (Pg.119). This is a direct refutation of anything other than Islamic philosophy or systems, for example democracy or universal human rights (p.120-121). Under the heading “How the work against Islam is carried out”, the book states:

“Through the futile efforts to crush Islamic civilisation and wipe the Muslims from existence (the Crusades), non-Muslims realised that Muslims could not be enslaved as long as Muslims were strong in their belief. Thus non-Muslims officially announced an ideological war against Islam. However the first steps of this ideological war were taken during the lifetime of Prophet by the Jews.”

The ideological battle is described as non-Muslims trying to change the Muslim ideology and creed by various means and concepts. “Training and sending Muslims to spread “Western” ideologies. This is to brainwash Muslims and turn them away from Islamic ideology and towards Western ideology.” Students that are taught this will come to see anyone that espouses a Western ideology such as secularism as a Western agent and therefore an enemy of Islam.

The danger of such generalisations is that anyone who dares support any ideology that is not strictly Islamic faces the threat of being a victim of Takfir (excommunication). This has become common among Maldivians in recent years. “While Jews and Christians use three methods to do this (wage ideological war against Muslims), nowadays this is planned, financed and run by

organizations of Zionist Jews.” Here one of the methods used to wage this war is said to be Orientalism. “Orientalism is the study of Muslims and Islamic culture by non-Muslims”. This definition of Orientalism is incorrect. Orientalism is a term used by art historians and literary and cultural studies scholars for the imitation or depiction of aspects of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian cultures (Eastern cultures) by writers, designers and artists from the West. It is not exclusively the study of Islamic culture or Muslims. Even if Orientalism is defined according to Edward Said’s interpretation where those who study cultures of the Orient imagines, emphasises, exaggerates and distorts differences between various Arab cultures and that of Western cultures<sup>3</sup>, it still does not justify the simplistic statement that it is a weapon of ideological war against Muslims by ‘Jews and Christians’.

The second method mentioned is Christian missionary missions. It is described as an attempt to distance Muslims from Islam and Allah, slowly taking Muslims away from Islam and converting him/her to Christianity. It is also said here that this is done covertly by international organisations, charity organisations and NGOs. Christian missionary work is not targeted exclusively at Muslims; they seek to convert anyone that is not yet Christian whether they are Muslim, Jew, Hindu or atheist.

Advocating of secularism by Muslims is described as a plot by the West. “Westernised writers of Islam have been created by the West in order to spread their philosophy in Islamic communities. And there is a propaganda effort by the West to elect such adherents of Western ideology (taken to mean secularism) to policymaking and governing positions in Islamic communities” (pg. 127). An Us (Muslims) vs Them (Non-Muslims) situation is presented. This makes students see every non-Muslim as the enemy.

Islamic Sharia is described as being more fit for humans than democracy. And it is stated that efforts to implement Islamic Sharia have been unsuccessful due to the West.

Chapter Six, Islamic Culture, covers “human rights in the eyes of Islam,” and “Islam and family.” “The position of the wife and the husband has been muddled. Under the pretence of fighting for women's rights, the status of the women has been lowered” (p. 127). The effect of this would be that students will come to see women’s rights as a Western agenda and something that should be fought against as per what they have been taught previous to this.

“The human rights of this time are a weapon used to further the Western agenda” (pg. 136). This gives the impression that human rights such as freedom of belief, freedom of expression must not be allowed by Muslims as they are not mentioned in Islam. “Unlike the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Islam human rights are understood in terms of [protecting] dignity, reputation

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, 1977, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin Books

and human nature. It is an active human process instead of mere ink” (p. 137). This is a direct rejection of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an effective one. This further reinforces the idea that human rights originating from any source other than Islam should not be supported or enforced by Muslims.

Chapter Seven, Islamic behaviour, covers repentance, love for the creations of Allah, not submitting to urges of the soul (*havaa nafs*) and love and hate for the sake of Allah. The concept of *Al-Wala wal Baraa* (Love and hate for the sake of Allah) is used to justify executions and hate speech against non-Muslims. Students must be taught not to take this literally.

## Grade 10

Chapter One consists of Quran recitation. After every parable, there is a list of the important points mentioned in it. The topics of *Asbaab Nuzul* (circumstances of revelation of the Quran) and the Quran are also covered here.

Chapter Two, Knowledge of Hadith, covers the topics of the lightness of the duties imposed upon a Muslim by Islam, the freedom of thought and encouragement of worship in the light of hadith. The section on lightness of a Muslim’s duties highlights the need for moderation. It emphasises that Islam instructs Muslims to balance spirituality and worldliness. A hadith by the Prophet is quoted to drive the point home in which he underlines that those who leave all worldly things for spirituality are not of his congregation. The reason the Prophet gives for this is that those who do so are not following his Sunnah. The push for moderation is admirable although the aforementioned hadith also brings forth a prevalent issue of today. The Prophet declaring someone not to be of his congregation is Takfirist. This is similar to those radicals who declare those that do not follow their version of the Sunnah are infidels. Therefore, even though a call for moderation is what this hadith is supposed to be conveying, it also provides support to one of the most important tools of radicals. Right after this somewhat endorsement of Takfirism, the book states that it is forbidden upon a Muslim to declare another Muslim a *kafir* or infidel, which is what Takfirism is.

The next lesson is freedom of thought. The lesson starts with a hadith by the Prophet admonishing Muslims to think for themselves and not believe others blindly. Human intelligence is described as a gift to humanity by Allah and as something that has been entrusted to humans by Allah. It is stated that this intelligence has to be used “as Allah wishes”, meaning in accordance with Islam here. Muslims are also admonished to use their intelligence in every aspect of life. Encouragement of worship is the next lesson. Students are taught how and why they should worship. A hadith by the prophet is used as a basis for the arguments presented in this lesson.

Chapter Three, Islamic Creed teaches students the subject of belief in the judgment day. This lesson teaches what belief in the Judgment Day consists of,

signs of Judgment Day and the Judgment Day itself. This lesson is designed to put the fear of the Day of Judgment in the student. Mainly the lesson consists of the fearful lead up to the Day of Judgment and the punishments that follow.

Chapter 4 covers Islamic Jurisprudence. Lesson One is about the Hajj, its benefits and obligations. It is stated that one of the societal benefits of Hajj is that it nurtures the brotherhood of Muslims and that it is the largest gathering of Muslims. Similar to obligatory daily prayers practiced in mosques, the Hajj is also a way for the Muslim community to come together as one.

Lesson Two covers divorce and its judgments. Divorce is defined here as “the method by which the husband releases the wife from the bond of marriage.” It is also stated that divorce is a right granted to husbands by Allah, within established limits. It is repeatedly emphasised that divorce is the last option and it should only be used if there is no other way. Lesson Eight is about raising children. The requirements for a person to be able to look after a child are listed here. One of the requirements listed here is being a Muslim, another one is being a free man. Slaves are described as people that have to work tirelessly to fulfill their master’s needs and they do not have power over their own souls. Therefore, they cannot hold power over any other soul as stated in the book. This is an endorsement of slavery. In the modern world where slavery has been abolished and all persons must be guaranteed their universal human rights, anything that condones slavery should no longer be taught to students.

Chapter Five covers history and culture. Lesson One teaches students about colonisation. Students are only taught about Western colonisation, there is no mention of the Ottoman Empire that was widespread before the Western powers started its colonisation projects in the 16<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The book also only talks about the damages brought upon Muslims by colonisation; for example the loss of Islamic culture, laws other than Sharia being implemented and Muslims losing their power. In the conclusion to this lesson; it states that even though many Muslim countries are even now suffering from the effects of colonisation, there is also colonisation going on against Muslims in another form. The purpose of this type of colonization, it is said, is to gain power over Muslims by weakening their belief and forcing Muslims away from Islam. Lesson Two is on Islamic culture; here the positive effects of Islamic culture are listed. However there is no explanation of how that Islamic culture came to spread far and beyond the Arabian Peninsula.

Chapter Six is about the media and Muslims. It is stated that as Western ideals of government are still evolving while Islamic ideals are already perfect, Western leaders are afraid their ideals will come to naught against Islamic ideals when the latter starts spreading in the West. Therefore, they employ various media to spread propaganda against Islam. The lesson continues in the same vein and concludes by listing three techniques used by Western media against Islam.

Chapter Seven covers Islamic behaviour. This chapter consists of lessons on how to maintain brotherhood, how Muslims should treat one another, treating relatives and neighbours kindheartedly and obeying those in authority. Al Wala wal Bara is emphasised in the first lesson. Al Wala wal Bara is the Islamic concept of loving for the sake of Allah and hating for the sake of Allah. Scholars often interpret this as loving Muslims and hating non-Muslims. It is also used frequently by Islamists to justify the killings of innocent non-Muslims. Under the subheading, The Importance of Electing a Leader, the first stipulation listed is “relationship between religion and politics”. It states that electing a leader is a foremost obligation in Islam due to the fact that Islam cannot be established without an Islamic leader. Rather than looking at qualifications for leading a government, this emphasises the precondition of being a Muslim. The other lessons in this chapter deal with topics that are better taught in another more general subject.

## **Grade 11**

The book is divided into seven chapters: Quran and its knowledge; knowledge of *Hadith*, *Aqidah*, Islamic jurisprudence; Islamic history; Islamic culture; Islamic etiquette or Islamic *Akhlaq*.

Under Quran and its knowledge there is a parable named “The Overwhelming.” The translation of the first verse, according to Standard English translations, is as follows: “Has there reached you a report of the Overwhelming event.” However, the Dhivehi translation says, “Has there reached you a report of the impending fearful event that everyone shall be subject to.”

Where the English translation says, “humble;” the Dhivehi translation says “saddened and lowly,” with regard to the description of people’s facial expressions on the day of Judgement. Verses 4-7 are exceptionally explicit in relation to describing the impending torture for those who must “enter hell.”

88.4: *They will [enter to] burn in an intensely hot Fire.*

88.5: *They will be given drink from a boiling spring.*

88.6: *For them there will be no food except from a poisonous, thorny plant.*

88.7: *Which neither nourishes nor avails against hunger.*

## **Chapter Two: Knowledge of Hadith.**

This chapter explains that Sunnah is the interpretation of the Quran. It contends that Islamic *legislation* lacks elaboration on Sunnah and other matters. It stresses the importance of obeying Prophet Muhammad and declares that a person who disagrees with any of his teachings is not pious (pp. 36-37). It is reiterated throughout the chapter how necessary it is to emulate the Prophet and his practices. As an example, the book depicts a narrative where Prophet Muhammad takes off his sandals before praying and his followers do the same. When asked, he claims that Gabriel informed him that his sandals were dirty and



that is why he removed them (pp. 40-41). This narrative infers that the reason to follow Prophet Muhammad is due to the divine insight he has, and being given the place of an exemplary follower of Allah. Islam fervently preaches against following “the creation;” i.e. humans, the focus on literally mimicking the Prophet contradict such claims. Salafism and fundamentalism recalls the era of the Prophet and claims that its practices literally follow Prophet Muhammad’s practices, claiming its version as “true” Islam. These narratives reinforce such fundamentalist claims, invoking a Golden Age of Islam and suggesting Salafi/Wahabbi ideologies comprise the true version of Islam.

Lesson Two under the *Aqidah* chapter is called “Satan’s Deceivers.” It claims there are humans who qualify as such deceivers. Characteristics of those who deceive on behalf of Satan include “non-belief in Allah, sorcerers” and anyone who is considered a *Munafiq*. The word *Munafiq* in Arabic translates to “hypocrite”, specifically one who outwardly practices Islam but keeps his or her disbelief secret. This definition of people who “deceive on behalf of Satan” is disturbing. In most Muslim majority countries, including the Maldives, there are strict laws against blasphemy and apostasy. This terminology enables fundamentalists to publicly shame those non-believers living under oppressive Islamist regimes. Another problem is this creates legitimate room for outright xenophobia against non-Muslim foreigners. The lesson is an unrelenting vilification of non-believers, and in certain aspects equate non-believers to sorcerers.

“In order for them to obey Satan, they eat and drink filth, they prostrate to gods other than Allah, and they worship the dead.” (p. 66).

Lesson 4 on page 74 is about Shiites. It differentiates between a Sunni and a Shiite and attempts to “clarify ahistorical misconceptions” about the Shi’a. In doing so, the narrative discounts the belief system’s Islamic credentials, likening it to a heresy of Islam that has its roots in Zoroastrianism and Judaism. The chapter states that there were no factions when Prophet Muhammad was alive. Explaining further that appointing others beside Ali as the Caliph did not create any rifts within Islam.

On page 79 there is a brief paragraph about Iranian cleric Ayatollah Khomeini who spearheaded the Islamic revolution in 1979. According to the textbook, his branch of Shia should not be attributed to Islam as his writings disparaged Prophet Muhammad’s apostles. There is a three-page (pp. 79-81) refutation of “Shia ideology” consisting of 15 points, creating animosity towards this branch of Islam by portraying Sunni Muslims as the ‘true’ followers of Islam.

Lesson Six is on the Isma’ilis – a branch of Shia Islam also known as “the Seveners.” The textbook claims in its introduction of Isma’ilis: “the reality of this sect is that its objective is the destruction of the Islamic faith” (p. 82). Similar to how the Shia ideology was refuted in the previous lesson, there are xenophobic 10 points on the Isma’ilis (p. 85). The crux of these points suggests that Isma’ilis

and their denominations are “heretics”, “non-believers”, and “followers of their own desires.”

The lesson on *Qisas* – the term for “retaliation in kind” under Islamic jurisprudence – discusses how the penalty must be implemented in accordance with Islamic Sharia (pp. 162-177). It differentiates between how the practice was implemented during the age of “Jahiliya” and how it was reformed after Islam was introduced in order to bring equality (p. 164).

Under the conditions for implementing *Qisas*, it says that in certain instances killing may not be permissible, however it says “but non-believers or apostates can be killed” (p. 166). The Quranic verse cited states “As the infidels are at war (with you), wage war against the infidels too.” This verse is supported with a reference to Bukhari (a collection of Muhammad’s prophetic traditions interpreted by eponymous Persian scholar Sahih al-Bukhari). The quote reads, “Whoever changes their Islamic religion, kill them.”

The third point makes reference to a *hadith* contested by many scholars, where the Prophet claims that the death penalty cannot be implemented where a Muslim murders a non-Muslim. It states that Prophet Muhammad once said “O believers! Implementing *qisas* against murderers is mandatory; a free man for a free man, a slave for a slave” (pp. 166-167). According to the Prophet’s justification, as supported by Islamic scholars, the blood must be equal for implementation of *qisas*, and Islamic faith or freedom from enslavement is required to be considered equals.

These citations only highlight discrimination, between Muslims and non-Muslims, between slaves and the free. It is important to note here that progressive Muslim thinkers often depict Islam as a religion that freed many slaves and for the first time considered slaves as equals when they embrace Islam. However, such discriminatory and racist attitudes should not be endorsed by educational literature, especially in relation to religion.

The chapter on Islamic jurisprudence defines *Jinayat* in Islamic law as divided into offences that require *hadd* or *qisas* penalties. It also states against whom these penalties shall be applicable, excluding the insane and prepubescent (p 168). Collectively it is the Islamic equivalent of criminal law, prescribing penalties for crimes against a person. As for *qisas* penalties, death penalty can only be implemented if the victim’s family condones it unanimously (p. 171). The different types of murder punishable through *qisas* are outlined from pages 168 to 174.

There are instances where establishing *qisas* is mandatory, according to the textbook. It outlines preconditions for people against whom penalty of *qisas* can be imposed upon, one of which requires the victim or murderer to be a Muslim. The book takes it a step further and states that “[unbelievers] are permissible to be killed,” and therefore not worthy of equality. The subheading on

implementing *qisas* for bodily harm or loss of a body part suggests it can be implemented for such offences as well. Lesson Nine includes an elaboration of this topic, introducing the Islamic concept of *Diyya* where damages are paid to the victim or victim's heirs.

Under the Islamic history chapter, there is a noteworthy lesson named 'Jihad according to Islam' on the hotly contested meaning of *jihad* in Islam. It defines the Arabic word '*jihad*' as 'to endeavour greatly' or 'to bravely confront enemies.' The definition deconstructs jihad to mean, "to eradicate the rule by men over men and establish rule of Allah." To support these claims under Islamic literature, the textbook cites Quranic verses and Hadith that stress the importance of Holy War (pp. 229-230). The book quotes prophetic traditions to suggest that under Islamic law; "jihad remains a mandatory religious duty until the Day of Judgement", claiming that Muslims "hesitating" to perform this obligatory religious duty has produced bitter results in the past and it will continue to do so if left undone (p. 230). Although it states that jihad is not limited to engaging in armed conflicts, it nevertheless repeatedly stresses the esteem given to violent activism in the name of religion. It also distinguishes *jihadism* from violently active evangelism, slaughtering nonbelievers and destroying the environment -- "nonbelievers must be afforded freedom under an Islamic kingdom" (p. 232). The chapter elaborates that jihad cannot be a pre-emptive act of war but rather committed in defence. The book stresses that there is a varied definition of jihad, however, when quoting prophetic traditions or the Quran, most quotes glorify jihadist violent activism. One such instance is where the book quotes a *hadith* claiming that on the Day of Judgement jihadists such as the *Mujahedeen* who have "sacrificed their life and blood in the name of Allah" would be among the distinguished, congregating on the same row as prophets and messengers (p. 233-234).

According to the book there are four types of jihad.

1. Jihad against the self
2. Jihad with one's wealth
3. Jihad with one's tongue
4. Armed Jihad

An entire section (p. 239-240) is dedicated to the "fruits" of jihadism, claiming that the ultimate fruit of jihad is martyrdom, followed by lessons on how Islam spread throughout the globe (p. 241-259). Lesson Five discusses how "Islam lost its power," adding to the sense of victimisation felt by many Muslims. These discussions fuel hatred and depict the religion as one that is constantly under attack.

Lesson Five explains misconceptions about Islam, stating that religious scholars of other religions have disseminated disinformation about Islam, confusing believers and non-believers alike (p. 283). The first misconception it cites is that Islam was spread through "the sword," or that it is a religion concerned with waging war and strict adherence. In contrast the book claims that Prophet

Muhammad's evangelism was "neither strict nor imposing." The textbook makes a xenophobic statement claiming that Muslims in Medina never made a pre-emptive strike and that it was always to "defend" the Islamic State that was established there from the "scheming non-Muslims" (p. 284).

Ironically the book states that history shows that forcefully imposing a religion on a people would be the religion's eventual undoing, while the Maldivian Constitution requires every Maldivian citizen to be a Muslim. It cites a Quranic verse that states, "there shall be no compulsion to embrace Islam" (p.285). The verse is used to support the textbook's claim that Islam spread peacefully throughout the world. The book also likens the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia to how the Maldives embraced Islam, despite historically identifiable differences. Many historical accounts show that the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia was unique<sup>4</sup> that there was no State apparatus that imposed it on the people. However, in the Maldives, historically Islam was established when a Buddhist King converted to Islam and decreed his subjects to follow suit.

The lesson briefly addresses specific misconceptions such as equality, independence, slavery, criminal justice and extremism in relation to Islam. According to the textbook, Islam accepts diversity and does not differentiate between races, nationalities, tribes, or languages; it only takes note of one's piety. With regard to independence, the lesson refers to the epoch Islam began when the world was in the "dark ages" and people "were heavily oppressed" (p. 287). It claims that Islam brought freedom of expression, religious and economic freedom. It fails to assert that these developments – although noteworthy – are specific to an era and not reflective of today's human rights standards.

The lesson cites Quranic and prophetic traditions to prove that Islam endorsed the "freeing of slaves" (p. 287). Establishing justice is defined as the foundation of maintaining peace and stability, to strengthen the bond between individuals and citizens' confidence in the justice system (p. 289). On extremism, the lesson clearly states that extremism is anti-Islamic. It repeatedly says that Islam is a "moderate" religion and that actions taken by certain parties in the name of Islam in fact damage the reputation of Muslims worldwide (p. 290). Furthermore, it states that Islam should stay clear of such actions that may cause the international community to exclude Muslim countries.

Lesson Two under the Chapter on Islamic etiquette delves into rights afforded to non-Muslims in Islamic societies. The lesson states that non-Muslims have the freedom to practice their religion. The same Quranic verse is cited under the lesson on misconceptions of Islam to support that there should be no compulsion to follow Islam (p. 300). It states that non-Muslims should be afforded all rights and public services provided to Muslims. However, the fact that there are no places of worship for non-Muslims in the Maldives goes against what the book endorses. The lesson emphasises the importance of equality

among Muslims and non-Muslims with supporting Islamic literature (p. 300-3002). It should be noted that these narratives appear to be normative but contradicts earlier chapter on *qisas*, which states that only Muslims can be equals under Islamic criminal law.

## Grade 12

Under the Islamic etiquette chapter, there is a lesson on clothing (pp. 35-36). According to the lesson clothing is required for three main purposes; to cover areas of the body required to be concealed under Islam, to protect the body from the climate or environment, to “dress up”. There is a clear distinction between female and male attire, men and women are not to wear clothing belonging to the opposite gender. In the Maldives it is common practice for men to dance in women’s clothing at circumcision parties for recreational purposes. There are also notable cross-dressing Maldivians who are contributing members to society. However, when a Maldivian living in New Zealand took part in drag beauty pageant, there was staunch criticism of her act.<sup>5</sup> The book also notes that according to Islam, clothing should not be extravagant to the point of arrogance.

The book lays down three main bad traits considered wrongful under Islam (pp. 39-43). It includes, speaking unfavourably of people behind their back, spying on people and pitting two people against each other. Quranic and prophetic traditions are cited to support how such actions are frowned upon in Islam.

The Islamic Creed chapter begins with a lesson on *Israh and Mi’raj*, which according to Islamic tradition is when Prophet Muhammad took the significant journey on a steed from Mecca to Jerusalem, ascending to heaven, speaking to Allah and returning to Earth in one night. In an attempt to claim that this story is not merely a fable, the book claims that the tale would stand true “even if subject to a contemporary scientific analysis” (p. 76).

Under the Chapter on Islamic creed or *Aqidah*, there is a lesson dedicated to people referred to as *Zindiq*. It is an archaic term for heretics of Islam. The book notes that there is disagreement among scholars on the true definition of *Zindiq*, and was initially used to refer to Manichaeists. The book claims that such people disseminate untruths that result in disharmony, likening them to atheists. The textbook claims that there have been many irreligious groups waging war against Islam, including Abbasids, orientalist, Zionists, Baha’is, communists, *Zindiq*, Ahmadism and others (p. 87). Again, the book denotes Islam as being constantly under attack, projecting a sense of victimhood.

Islamic jurisprudence chapter has a lesson on apostasy (p. 102-109). It has a chilling introduction for apostates – “Everything they have done on Earth is void, they will be in Hell for all eternity.” According to the lesson, there are three ways to be considered an apostate.

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a) Examples of apostasy from Islamic faith (p. 103)

1. Believing Allah has a child
2. Believing that Allah has a partner
3. Believing that there is no justice between men and women
4. Believing that Islamic law is not acceptable in today

b) Blaspheming

1. Prostrating before another God.
2. Praying to another God
3. Denying His appearance
4. Believing that there is no justice between men and women
5. Believing that Islamic law is not acceptable in today

c) Apostasy through action

1. Prostrating before another God.
2. Praying to another God
3. Betraying Islamic Sharia and sentencing based on other laws
4. Disrespecting Qur'an and Sunnah
5. Confounding what is halal and haram

This definition of apostasy is problematic on many levels. It curtails any criticism of dogma, and gives no space for reforming radical narratives as the accusation of apostasy can be casually thrown at anyone who dares to. The Maldives does not have a fully Sharia legal system, it is a mixture of common law and Islamic Sharia. Most penal laws have been codified to avoid strict interpretations like stoning, amputating and until recently the death penalty, imposition of which was resumed after a 50 year unofficial moratorium. Ideas such as guilt of "betraying Sharia" and following "other laws" has paved the way for resurgence of inhumane practices in the name of religion.

The Lesson on the position of men and women is explained under Islamic tradition and history. It says that men and women are equal in Islam and that women are given the same tasks as men, "apart from those tasks that a woman cannot undertake due to their nature," the book states that this does not undermine women's role in Islam (p. 149). The second section states that the West often labels Islam as a religion that is an affront to women's rights, claiming that such notions are unfounded. It claims that Islam was the first religion that afforded rights to religion, specifically in comparison to other Abrahamic religions (p. 150). On how Islamic preaching often addresses men only, the book states that even if this is so, women are included in those callings (p. 151).

## Observations

The translation from Arabic to Dhivehi is very literal at times thereby misleading the reader. It does not invoke a positive worldview through Islamic literature, which can be achieved. The Quranic Arabic, and excessively Arabized Dhivehi<sup>6</sup> used makes meaning almost inaccessible to contemporary Dhivehi readers. Commonly used Dhivehi words can be used to explain all matters related to teaching religion, as it was done in the past.

As per the Constitution, teaching of Islam should “instil love” for the religion. This task cannot be achieved by inciting hatred towards other religions or cultures. Although the textbooks mention the multicultural prophetic traditions in the early stages of Islam, there is plenty of material that negates these positive and universal values acknowledged in Islam. The general narrative of the textbooks seem to ignite and reassert fundamentalists views, that Islam is constantly under attack and Muslims are systematically victimised by ‘enemies.’ There are certain historical accounts of war, the need to wage it in the name of religion, xenophobic and insular views that denote glorification of never-ending Jihadism. Due to the prevalence of these ideas, the textbooks fail to primarily focus on normative and universal values enshrined in all religions.

## 1.1 Magazines, leaflets and other printed materials

Pamphlets at the Islamic Centre in Malé

The Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI), a Malaysian organisation, produces the pamphlets. Their mission statement is as follows, “The primary concern of IPSI is none other than to disseminate the word of Allah through the sincere promotion of the reading, understanding and practising of the Quran and Sunnah. IPSI devotes its activities in reminding mankind of his *fitrah*; the worship of the One and Only God.” It is an NGO based in Malaysia exclusively for the purpose of proselytization. Here we must note that although these pamphlets are produced by IPSI, the distribution of these pamphlets by the Islamic Ministry of Maldives is regarded as having the Ministry’s approval.

### The Burqa & Niqab

The pamphlet claims to address the *burqa* and *niqab* from an Islamic viewpoint and address the many concerns and allegations made against the wearing of such religious clothing. The three types of Islamic dress for women are explained shortly. It states that while it is not obligatory for women to cover themselves in the presence of other women, it is obligatory upon women to cover themselves in the presence of men who are not closely related. It also states that it is prescribed in Islam yet gives no supporting evidence (from prophetic traditions or the Quran). The pamphlet claims a “fierce media campaign of fear” has been

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<sup>6</sup>Ordinarily the Thaana (Maldivian) script and Arabic script can be used simultaneously. When Arabic loan words are used, it can be written in the Arabic script.

launched against the burqa. The “fierce media war” described here are people who are making use of their right to free speech. Right after the condemnation of the media, the pamphlet waxes poetic about the right to freedom of religion and expression. The same universal human rights that are curtailed or outright suppressed under the Maldivian Constitution, its laws and regulations.

*Article 27 of the Maldivian Constitution states that: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought and the freedom to communicate opinions and expression in a manner that is not contrary to any tenet of Islam.*

*Article 9(d): Despite the provisions of article 9(a) a non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives.*

Freedom of religion is non-existent in Maldives. The state religion of Maldives is Islam and all Maldivian citizens are required to be Muslims. Regardless, this pamphlet distributed by the Islamic Ministry of Maldives states that the core values of freedom and liberty upon which modern societies are based upon must be respected. However the Maldivian citizens are deprived of the same right – of religious freedom – with which Muslims in the West use to call for an end to the *burqa* ban. It goes on to say that such banning of religious items based on merely emotional rhetoric may open the door to further discrimination and human rights abuses. However as much the Islamic Ministry preaches the great virtue of religious freedom and freedom of expression to foreign tourists from mostly secular countries; it is virulently against those same freedoms when it concerns Maldives and its citizens. “Being tolerant does not only mean accepting people who look and act exactly like you; but accepting the choices of other people, especially, if you do not understand or agree with them.” However, the space for such values in the Maldives is heavily restricted, despite being purportedly espoused by Islam.

## **Misconceptions about Islam**

This pamphlet claims to address the most common misconceptions about Islam. It starts off with a comparison of what they claim as a double standard: “Have you ever wondered why a nun can be covered from head to toe and she’s respected for devoting herself to God, but when a Muslim woman covers, she’s viewed as ‘oppressed’? Or why a Jewish person can grow a beard and he’s just practicing his faith, and when a Muslim does that, he’s labeled an ‘extremist’?”

To start with, while a nun is a religious devotee, generally Christian women do not dress like nuns, however the veil is not restricted to cloistered members of the religious community but the Muslim public at large. Nun orders are similar to clergies. Religious scholars or Sheikhs call on ordinary Muslim women to cover their heads, and those who do not heed are labeled immodest. The contrast between the two situations is clear. This pertains to the first two misconceptions presented in the pamphlet, “Hijab is oppressive.” and “Islam oppresses women.”



The pamphlet claims that there is no restriction to freedom of Muslim women whether it is the hijab or anything else in Islam. However a look at the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the mandatory veiling of women and the inequality there is enforced by the use of Islamic rulings. Hijab is described in the pamphlet as not being a symbol of oppression, suppression or silence but rather a shield guarding against degrading remarks, unwanted advances and unfair discrimination. However, the more orthodox attire niqab symbolizes the exclusion of women. The pamphlet quotes the Quranic verses 33:59 and 49:13 as proof that Islam does not oppress women. Specifically the verse 33:59 is quoted to support the hijab. The verses 2:282, 4:11 and 4:34 to quote a few, contradict these verses. These verses espouse domestic violence, unequal inheritance rights and that a witness testimony of a woman is only half of a man's; all of which are outlawed in the Maldives through codified laws.

Data gathered by Ministry of Gender and Family in 2007 shows that 1 in 3 women aged 15-49 have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence during their lifetime.<sup>7</sup> The verse 4:34 condones beating of women, “[then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them.”

The pamphlet further asserts that Islam has guaranteed rights to women that women in the West are still lacking. For example, they claim that the “overwhelming rate of female conversion” is due to having the following rights enshrined in Islam; total control of their wealth, choose their spouse, keep their own surname when married, own property, operate a business, study, receive equal pay for equal work, inherit property, have their marriage dissolved in the case of neglect or maltreatment and participate in all forms of worship that men participate in.” It also goes on to say that Muslim women are not oppressed due to teachings of Islam, rather it is because of ignorance or culture or society.

One example of what they deem to be a cultural idiosyncrasy rather than an Islamic one is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In Feb 2014, Dr. Iyaz, the Vice President of the Fiqh Academy of Maldives, endorsed FGM<sup>8</sup> on the [mvislamqa.com](http://mvislamqa.com) while answering a reader's question. While this vile practice is being eradicated in other parts of the world, this call to start this in Maldives was met with silence by the Islamic Ministry of Maldives. It was not just FGM that he endorsed; “In early January, Iyaz condemned MPs for approving the sexual offenses bill which recognises marital rape, and advised MPs who voted for the bill to repent.”

The Islamic Ministry was silent on both the FGM and marital rape issue. To claim that Islam is viewed wrongly by the outside world yet going further into barbarity in the name of Islam does not make sense. It is readily apparent that

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<sup>7</sup> <http://minivannews.com/files/2010/10/Maldives-Study-on-Womens-Health-and-Life-Experiences-2007.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://minivannews.com/politics/figh-academy-vp-endorses-female-genital-mutilation-77037>

the veneer of moderation by the Islamic Ministry wears off when it is faced with such “cultural idiosyncrasies” which oppress women.

The pamphlet goes on to talk about the how Allah is the same god of Christians and Jews as seen by Muslims. It also challenges the concept that Islam permits terrorism. The stand against terrorism is admirable yet we see no actual counter-terrorism work. They have not yet held any workshops or anything of that sort against terrorism. However Sheikh Adam Shameem who is endorsed by Islamic Ministry by virtue of being selected to preach for them on different occasions, calls for jihad against non-believers who oppress Muslims. And he speaks out against the branding of jihadists in Syria as terrorists.

The pamphlet espouses some admirable values yet it is contradictory with the actions of the Islamic Ministry in relation to the Maldivian public. A better understanding of Islam would help the public slow the rise of radicalism.

### **Pictures from an Islamic Perspective:**

The author starts with declaring that there is great debate in the Maldivian society on the issue of pictures. Therefore he declares that he will strive to shed light upon the different types of pictures and answer the questions that have been posed by Maldivians.

Idol making is also part of *tasveer*. Anything which is hewn out of rock, wood and other metals and perfected into a form is considered an idol. It is not stated whether what kind of a form is required for it to be an idol. In a pamphlet that claims to answer the questions that society has, it is very vague on what is exactly an idol. The author states that Islam not only forbids possessing idols, it also forbids the making of idols and working in places of manufacture of idols.

Under the heading, “the wisdom of forbidding of idol making”, the author states that;

- Idols are forbidden to differentiate between idolaters and Muslims and to protect the “*aqidah*” (Islamic creed).
- The prohibition of idols is to protect the creed of Oneness of Allah
- The start of the worship of idols is not sudden but that it is a gradual process. And that the gradual process starts when the people held in high esteem in societies are immortalized by statues of them. After time passes people begin to see these statues of people as holy things and start to worship them.
- It is already in Western culture to erect statues in squares and decorate their homes with statues.
- The other condition for prohibition of idol-making is because the makers of idols feel pride in their work and feel as if they have created life. In the past, some of the idol-makers have said that their creations have talked.

- In addition, idol-makers spare no thought for making idols which are not suitable for children. They do not feel that this is wrong.
- Idols as in the past are a waste which people use to decorate their homes.

The assumption that people who believe in Islam will be slowly eroded by some statues is insulting to the Muslims themselves and is not supported by any *Hadith* or *Ayat* here. Western culture is described as degenerate with the Christians worshipping idols of Jesus. The idea that all sculptors feel as if they have created a life (living organism) is preposterous. Rather than think rationally and come to the conclusion those manmade idols of wood or stone haven't come to life or talk simply because some sculptors claim so. Extra-ordinary claims such as these require evidence before it is bandied about as fact.

"To preserve the memory of great men" the author goes on to say that no matter how virtuous or heroic, no statue should be raised to commemorate them. He takes a hadith of the Prophet to justify this stand. However he does not give any reference or whatsoever so that the hadith can be checked. The author just states blandly that the Prophet said so and so. With numerous hadith in existence, if a person is to use a hadith to justify their stand, it is common to reference where the hadith was taken from. This would give anyone who was skeptical about the hadith the chance to check the line of narration and determine if it is true or probably false.

"Are the idols which children play with permissible?" The author states that as long as there is no intent for holiness, waste or any other reason that conflicts with Islam, it is permissible to possess idols. The example he gives is of a child's toy idol. The conditions that make an idol permissible as a child's toy are that it is not treated with respect and is used for fun. In this section of the pamphlet, the Hadith are quoted verbatim with no reference at all.

"Photos, photo frames and hand drawings." It is stated that drawings that could be worshipped are explicitly forbidden. The pamphlet refers to Hindu holy drawings as an example and states that anyone who creates art for this purpose is an infidel/apostate (*kafir*). The reason stated for this prohibition here is so that men may not gain a God complex. "Even though it might be something that cannot be worshipped, if he has made art alike to one of God's Creation thinking that he might be able to emulate the Creation and to show his talent and ability, then it is expressly forbidden." No human has yet so far been able to know what is going through another person's head. Following that logic, how can we condemn a person as an apostate thinking that he was seeking to emulate Creation while he might be using his art as an expression of his wonder at the beauty of Creation? The author states that landscapes are deemed permissible by some scholars.

The author states that photography is deemed prohibited except for extenuating circumstances. Extenuating circumstances in this case is said to be situations such as passport or I.D. card photography. However other than these special situations photography is prohibited.

Overall the Hadith quoted in this pamphlet have no reference at all. Very rarely the author gives the chain of narration. However we have to take the word of the author for the authenticity and even the very existence of the hadith. If Hadith

is to be quoted, it is recommended that it is properly referenced so that a skeptical person might be able to verify. The rulings in this pamphlet are based on Hadith therefore it is important that it is referenced correctly.

### **The conditions to be fulfilled upon recitation of “*La ilaha ila Allah*”:**

The author, Ibrahim Fauzy bin Ali Mohamed, starts the pamphlet by praising Islam as the religion that is strong and has the perfect creed. He continues in the same vein, praising Islamic creed and stating that the strength of the Islamic creed stems from belief in the Oneness of Allah and belief in the Day of Judgement. The messages of the prophets are described as being the same at the root of it although some rulings might differ. The essence of the prophets' messages are said to be worshipping Allah alone and not associating anyone with Allah. The different prophets mentioned here would be the prophets of Islamic tradition which sometimes overlap those of Judeo-Christian tradition. This implies that as in Islamic tradition that the prophets Jesus and Moses preached the message of Islam and that their teachings were later changed to Judaism and Christianity. The author also praises Allah for having led Maldivians from Buddhism to Islam. The period before the advent of Islam in Maldives is described as the “period of darkness where Maldivians worshipped idols”. The author thanks Allah for the fact that the practices of our ancestors such as *Maulood*<sup>9</sup>, *Talqeen*<sup>10</sup> are being slowly erased from our society. And he states that it is cause for joy that such practices of our ancestors are being erased.

“Although this is a period of great awareness of our religion (Islam) in our society, it must be said with regret that there are some acts which are completely at odds with Islam.” These acts of which the author speaks constitutes part of our culture. *Maulood* and *Talqeen* are practiced by Muslims in other countries. *Talqeen* and *Maulood* are practiced by adherents of the *Shafi'i* school of Islamic Jurisprudence. Imam Shafi'i and his companions in his school said that *Talqeen* is a likeable matter (Imam An-Nawawiyy, Al-Adhkar). However these acts are against the teachings of Wahhabi school of Islam.

The author states that many people do not realize the magnitude of uttering the words “*La ilaha ila Allah*” and the conditions that come with it. He further states that this pamphlet will cover the conditions that come with utterance of the words “*La ilaha ila Allah*” and the hope that Allah would grant the mercy of allowing the people who read this to follow these conditions.

The phrase “*La ilaha ila Allah*” is the phrase that realizes the Oneness of Allah and is the foremost pillar of Islam. This phrase is also the highest of beliefs. It is obligatory upon every person that has reached puberty, has the sense of hearing and sight or either one and whom the message of Islam has reached to recite “*La*

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<sup>9</sup> a ritual in which songs were sung in praise of the Prophet

<sup>10</sup> Recitation of Quran while a body is being buried

*ilaha ila Allah*” and believe it with his/her heart. The person must also act upon this phrase.

The phrase “*La ilaha ila Allah*” means that there is no God other than Allah and there is no other that is worthy of worship other than Him. The author states that the polytheists of Mecca refused to recite “*La ilaha ila Allah*” because they knew that then they would have to leave their religion, believe in the Oneness of Allah and act according to Islam. He also goes on to say that the polytheists of Mecca knew and accepted that the One who provides is Allah and Him only. This is conjecture based upon the Quran only. These can be taken to mean that all those who do not believe in Allah do so out of arrogance. All of this is also based upon the belief that Islam is the one true religion. The author states that the phrase “*La ilaha ila Allah*” is a holy phrase, the cause for war and it is the reason for everything that exists between the sky and the ground.

This pamphlet furthers the Islamist notion that the people of Maldives were backwards and ignorant before the advent of Islam in Maldives, hence their referring to the pre-Islamic period as “Jahiliyya”. The author ignores the diverse beliefs that converged to form the traditional Islam practiced by Maldivians, and declares those practices to be against Islam. He condones stripping our culture of such practices and moving towards strict Wahhabism. There is no space for a diverse culture in the view of this author. He sees it obligatory upon every human being to believe what he believes and leaves no space for thought that does not align with his. This pamphlet espouses society moving towards Wahhabism and losing our cultural practices.

## **1.2 Prayer sermons**

The project analysed 30 religious sermons. These included regular Friday sermons and special sermons delivered by local sheikhs as well as foreign speakers who arrive upon invitation from local NGOs or the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Friday sermons are those delivered before the Friday prayer. These sermons are mostly prepared by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, or those prepared by other institutions are reviewed by the Ministry before being allowed to be read out.

Out of those licensed under the Religious Unity Act to deliver sermons, a roster is prepared by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

The sermons for the Friday prayers are published on the website of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs prior to being read out.

### Features common to Friday sermons.

#### **Language**

The national language of Maldives is *Dhivehi*, unique only to Maldives with its own script and a few dialects spoken across the country. Although *Dhivehi* has evolved considerably over the years, the language used in these sermons do not

reflect a dialect or version of what was spoken of it in the country. It is used in a mixture of modern *Dhivehi*, and causes some confusion in the understanding of some terms or phrases and even “instructions” as relayed from the Prophet Muhammad’s *Hadith*<sup>11</sup>.

The population of the Maldives has a large majority of youth in it, and are not at all familiar with the language used in the sermons. It is very likely that for those who make an effort to follow it, find it difficult to understand entirely.

Descriptions and metaphors used in the sermons depict an environment of a battle, hardship and violence almost all the sermons. For example, one referred to those who try to weaken one’s belief as “*they will not let our ranks to be laid out straight*”.

## **Fear**

While the sermons constantly remind the people of the afterlife and the Day of Judgment, it appears that a disproportionately high focus is given on the ‘dark’ side of these concepts. For example sermons speaking of the Day of Judgement speaks of those whose logs of deeds would be handed out to their right hand being an indication that they had outweighed evil with good, and those who receive the log in their left hands being an indication that their evil deeds had outweighed the good. However the same subject continues to probe the consequences for those who outweigh good with evil, and focuses heavily on how their fate lie. Graphic descriptions of the fire of hell, the unnaturally high heat of it, how their bodies will be the logs that burn the fire and many more details into the suffering in hell is described while not much is said about the rewards for the good except for eternal happiness and the availability of wines, honey and beautiful women in heaven.

The tone of voice used in delivering the sermons must also be looked at in this regard. The tone of the speaker is never one of gentle advise, but rather harsh, loud and one that immediately creates a sense of fear.

## **Incitement of hatred and Intolerance**

A commonality throughout the sermons is the man made necessity to *protect* Islam. The insecurity that someone or some people are constantly trying to destroy Islam is mentioned in almost all the sermons, creating a need for the people to always be prepared for battle to save the religion. It is unclear why there is such a need, as more moderate scholars strongly advocate that Islam is a strong religion, and that Allah, who made the universe and everything in it, would most certainly defend it without human beings fighting a battle for it.

The messages that instil this insecurity further adds that a certain community or people of a certain religion should attempt to derail Muslims. Those who are mostly connected as being ‘evil’ are Jews and Zoroastrians. Further, the word *Yahoodi* (Jew) appears to be used as a synonym for ‘evil’.

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<sup>11</sup> A Hadith is a term used to distinguish words or messages spoken by the Prophet Muhammad.

The sermons appear to suggest that Jews are not to be trusted at all, and that they, alongside other religions constantly plot to wage a war against Muslims and therefore people should always be prepared to fight back, leaving people deeply hateful of people of other religions.

## **Confusion between the divinity of the Prophet**

All the sermons stress on the necessity to follow the Prophet Muhammad's *Sunnah*<sup>12</sup>. While the messages and habits of the Prophet have been relayed through word of mouth for several hundred years before being published, it is extremely difficult to ascertain whether some of the habits said to have been followed by the Prophet is correctly relayed.

Some of the sermons indicate, with *Hadiths* and some translations of the Qur'an, that one is not a complete believer until he follows *everything* that the Prophet did in the same manner. Some such implications in the Maldivian society is the growing of long beards and some colouring it red, claiming that it is a *Sunnah*. Men leave a space around their ankles, trimming the trousers shorter claiming *Sunnah* again.

Modern scholars argue that not every act or habit of the Prophet must be replicated claiming it is *Sunnah*, but rather it is the principles by which the Prophet lived, and the messages to specific inquiries that must be followed, and most importantly, the messages that the Prophet Muhammad brought to the people in the form of the Qur'an.

It must be noted that some of these sermons highly confuse the reverence of the Prophet so seriously that people may begin to find it difficult to distinguish between God and His Prophet. Although one sermon has a single line which says that praise for the Prophet must not go beyond boundaries, and if one does it becomes a sin, the sentence is followed by more messages calling the people to constantly praise the Prophet and follow his every act as a *Sunnah*.

## **Disregard for women**

All the sermons begin with a phrase that suggests that only men are listening to it, and therefore the speaker addresses the audience in a masculine term. It seems to imply that these messages must be taken to the women by the men, as women need to be guided by the men.

Some of the sermons refer to men as those who has the highest responsibility in the family, while the reality is a strong contrast. The sermons do not speak of what the responsibilities entail, such as whether it means sharing the housework, caring for the children and elders and their wives or whether it simply means only going out and earning, which is how it is understood by several families.

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<sup>12</sup> The *Sunnah* is the words and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. More widely understood, it also includes every act, behaviour, attitude and habit of the Prophet.

## 2. Online Radicalisation of Religious Beliefs

By Azra Naseem (PhD)

This section, 'Online Radicalisation of Religious Beliefs in the Maldives', is part of a larger project intended to make a preliminary assessment of the level of [religious] radicalisation in the Maldives. While other sections of the project review printed material; public seminars and other promotional material; and gather relevant information through interactions with the people; this report is based on observations of the online behaviour of radicalised and radicalising individuals and groups in the Maldives.

The Maldives is a nation of 1200 islands scattered across roughly 90,000 square kilometres of the Indian Ocean. A population of less than 400,000 people lives on 200 of these islands belonging to 21 administrative atolls. 44% of the population use social media online, and the country's two main Internet Service Providers claim 3G services are available on all inhabited islands. While Internet access made the world less remote for Maldivians—like everywhere else in the world—it is the availability of social media that has connected Maldivians to each other and to the outside world more closely than ever before. Experts studying online radicalisation have shown how the Internet's role has evolved from hosting websites and discussion forums to the more 'immersive' experience offered by social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Ask.fm (Conway 2015)<sup>13</sup>.

At the end of February 2015, both Facebook and YouTube had over one billion users each, which amounts to half the people online worldwide. Meanwhile, Twitter had over 284 million users worldwide by the end of February 2015, sending out 500 million Tweets a day. 77% of the world's Twitter users are outside of the United States and 80% of Twitter users access it from a mobile device<sup>14</sup>. The world has never been so connected before and never has such vast amounts of information been shared over such long distances within such short periods of time.

Of the 393,000 population of Maldives, a large percentage comprises youth. Statistics show that by October 2014, 43% of the Maldivian population (168,990 people) were active mobile social media users<sup>15</sup>. It has the most number of active social media users of all countries in South Asia. To put things into context, only 9% of the population in its closest neighbouring country Sri Lanka are active mobile social media users. India, another close neighbour, has a social media penetration of only 7% of the population. This makes Maldivians more open to

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<sup>13</sup> Maura Conway, 2012, 'From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence and Development of an Online Radical Milieu.' *CTX: Combating Terrorism Exchange* 2(4) (2012): 12 – 22.

<sup>14</sup> Information shared by the companies at a meeting in Dublin attended by the author on 24 February 2015. While the said information is public, the meeting itself was confidential and, therefore, cannot be named here.

<sup>15</sup> 'Active mobile social media penetration in Asian countries in October 2014', Statista. Accessed online: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/295631/active-mobile-social-media-penetration-in-asian-countries/> on 26 February 2015



Internet and social media influences than even some developed First World countries in the Asian region such as New Zealand and South Korea. Given this high level of Internet penetration in the Maldives, and the worldwide role of the Internet in facilitating radicalisation, the online behaviour of Maldivians is a vital and indispensable part of any assessment of the levels of religious radicalisation in the Maldives.

## Method

This study is a qualitative content analysis of the material published by a sample of Maldivian religious NGOs, thought leaders, and their followers stating, promoting and disseminating their beliefs via the social media. It is based on material comprising:

1. A sample collection of Facebook Pages belonging to three segments of the population within the religious sphere: a) Civil Society Organisations; b) Public Figures; c) Individuals
2. A sample collection of websites that publish religious material
3. Twitter profiles of religious 'disseminators'

The Facebook Pages of civil society organisations and public figures were selected on the basis of their popularity, which is judged according to the number of Likes that each Page has. To make the selections and the analyses consistent, the content analysed is restricted to a particular time period: between 1 December 2014 and 31 January 2015.

The dataset of Facebook Pages belonging to individuals, however, deviates from this for a specific reason, outlined as follows. The dataset comprises the Facebook Profiles of 100 individuals who chose to publicly align themselves with the Jihadi groups [Islamic State and/or Jabhath Al-Nusra] currently fighting in Syria and Iraq. This dataset was collected in July and August 2015, shortly after ISIS declared the Islamic State in June 2014. It was also around this time that news broke of the first Maldivian killed fighting in Syria<sup>16</sup>. Following the publication of this news, for the first time, Maldivians going to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters became a dominant topic in the national discourse.

It became a divisive issue where a substantial number of Maldivians declared their support publicly for the 'Jihad' while a similarly substantial number declared their opposition to it. Supporters of ISIS and Jihad quickly moved to

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<sup>16</sup> 'Maldivian militant killed in Syrian suicide attack, claims online Jihadist group,' Minivan News, 25 May 2014. Accessed online: <http://minivannews.com/politics/maldivian-militant-killed-in-syria-suicide-attack-claims-online-jihadist-group-85600> on 25 February 2012

demonstrate and discuss their support on social media. The 100 individuals analysed included in the dataset all adopted ISIS or Jihad related pictures and insignia as their Facebook Profile Pictures or Cover Page photos.

Despite the difference in time period in relation to the profiles included in the other datasets considered in this report, it was felt that an analysis of these individuals during the period in which ISIS first entered into national consciousness in a substantive manner would contribute to an understanding of who in the Maldivian society are attracted to Jihad. Observations of the behaviour of these individuals on Facebook, it was felt, will enhance the understanding this report attempts to achieve of the online radicalisation of Maldivians.

The analysis in this report is grounded in content analysis. Broadly defined, content analysis is ‘any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages’ (Holsti, 1968: 608). The method applied in this report is mainly qualitative. As this is a preliminary assessment of radicalisation in the Maldives, and the results are presented as ‘observations’, the selected material is subjected to less rigorous procedures [such as coding] than a more scientific study would have been. Thus, the selected content is scrutinised for the ideologies they disseminate and to see whether or not what is said or pictured support Maldivians joining Jihad in Syria. The latter is determined by ‘Status Updates’ and posts (including photographs and illustrations) and photographs that support Jihad on Facebook; or Tweets (including photographs and illustrations) on Twitter and articles (including photographs and illustrations) on the websites. To determine the beliefs and ideologies expressed and disseminated on these various social media platforms, the content posted is scrutinised and compared with how it measures up to or deviate from the ‘core values’ of the Maldivian society to determine how ‘radical’ they are.

## **The [Face]Book of God**

This section examines Facebook Pages (FB Pages) of a selection of popular Maldivian religious NGOs, religious ‘Public Figures’ and general users with the aim of answering three key questions:

- a) What type and form of content is being shared on their Facebook pages
- b) What are the core messages of this content?
- c) What general observations, if any, can be made about individuals, who openly support Jihad on social media?

In addition to providing an understanding of the religious ideologies being disseminated online in the Maldives and what the core messages are in these materials, the answers will also help identify the religious figures who are

‘thought leaders’ or ‘disseminators’ in the Maldivian online community, what their appeal to Maldivians are, and what kind of messages resonate most with the local audience. The observations in this section of the report are based on a content analysis of three sets of Facebook profiles collected during specific periods of time:

- a) A sample of Facebook Pages run by civil society groups and communities.
- b) A sample of Facebook Pages belonging to popular religious clerics.
- c) A collection of Facebook Pages of 100 individuals who adopted ISIS-related insignia and symbols as part of their Profile Picture or Cover Page after the Islamic State was declared in June 2014.

## 2.1 Civil society on Facebook

The height of Maldivian agitation for democracy coincides with the heyday of Maldivian civil society. Once democracy was achieved, many of the activists assumed government positions signalling, in the long-term, an end to the vitality of civil society organisations. With the continuing authoritarian reversal, civil society organisations have been scaled back, and more strict regulations established for registration of an NGO. Religious NGOs have been mostly spared the same fate. A large number of religious NGOs exist, and most are highly active across the country. Table 1 below provides a list of the organisations whose Facebook profiles were used as a sample in this report.

**Table 1. List of 20 notable Facebook Pages run by religious NGOs or communities**

GROUP/COMMUNITY	FOLLOWERS <sup>17</sup>	DESCRIPTION
Maldivian Pearls	21,679	Education website
HajaM	17069	Community
DhiSalafiyya	13999	Community
Noor	12,000	Community
Jamiyyath Salaf	11643	NGO
Click4Islam	9389	Society/Culture
Al-Asr	6121	NGO
Message of Islam	4153	Bookshop
Spiritual Healers of Maldives	3811	NGO
Jamiyyathul Bayan	1807	NGO
Beynumee Maru	2019	Group
Waa Islaamaah	1854	Community
Fans of Sheikh Shaheem	1865	Fan Page
Noorul Islam	4346	Corollary to website
United Islamic Society	710	Community

Of the 15 Facebook Pages listed above, five have been chosen for the in-depth analysis that follows below. The first, Maldivian Pearls, was selected because of

<sup>17</sup> The follower figures last updated of 10 March 2015

its reach—over 20,000 Likes. The second one on the list, while popular, is more of a parody/entertainment account which, while centred around religious, engages more in salacious gossip than in religious discourse. For that reason, it was excluded from the analysis. The next two included in the analysis from the list, DhiSalafiyya and Jamiyyath Salaf, are included for their large numbers of followers as well as due to the fact that they represent the fastest spreading religious ideology in the Maldives. Al-Asr was chosen for analysis because it is an event-management page, largely for Sheikh Adam Shameem, the most popular preacher/Sheikh currently working in the Maldives. [His personal Facebook Page is analysed in the following section]. The two pages work in tandem with each other, and it was felt that the report will benefit from the analysis of both. Jamiyyathul Bayan, meanwhile, was chosen because of its more radical stance—it is more prepared to publicly endorse Jihad than other websites here. Another factor in the decision to include Jamiyyathul Bayan is its affiliation with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

## 1. Maldivian Pearls



Education website

21, 679 Likes

URL: [maldivianpearls.com](http://maldivianpearls.com)

Started on 19 February 2012

As previously mentioned, the analysis of these Facebook Pages focus on content published from the last week of December 2014 to the first week of January 2015. The analysis looks at the content published during this period.

Maldivian Pearls, which appears to be a website geared towards women, kept much of its focus in December 2014 on warning believers not to celebrate the Eid

of the Infidels i.e, Christmas. On 24 December 2013 it published a video on YouTube against celebrating Christmas. Uploaded on YouTube<sup>18</sup>, the 13-minute audio focuses on various reasons Muslims should never celebrate Christmas. Maldivian Pearls further reinstates this position by uploading a religious ruling on the matter, issued by a Sheikh Adam Nishan [discussed later in this report]. It is in the form of a 10-minute audio stressing the importance of Muslims drawing barriers between them and non-believers. The message is to differentiate and distance themselves from Others [non-believers] as much as possible<sup>19</sup>.

In April 2014 it advertised a special lecture for women organized by Jamiyyathul Akhawaath, an organization dedicated to women, or, 'Sisters in the shade of Islam'<sup>20</sup> [Akhawaath, too, has its own Facebook Page with over 2000 Followers]. With the title, 'The woman who wants paradise', the lecture was given by Sheikh Ahmed Sameer bin Ibrahim, and was held at one of the halls in the island's main conference venues Dharubaaruge.

A popular post in April (liked by 319 and shared over a 100 times) was one that urged followers to 'Say Not April Fool's Day' because 'it is forbidden for one Muslim to frighten another'. This is an example of a generic opposition to any custom or tradition that is Western and, therefore, to be regarded as Un-Islamic. Similar posts were shared on 11 May in relation to Mother's Day (US), the message being that a child who recognises who their mother is only one day a year is not a child who appreciates their mother or wishes her well.' A Mother's Day is only marked by those who do not value their mothers properly. Such days are generically classed as 'Infidels' Celebrations'. In the same month Maldivian Pearls also shared a 'press release' by Sheikh Ilyas Hussein who condemned the new penal code passed by the Majlis on 1 April saying that, too, was 'un-Islamic' as it was in contravention of Shari'a, something which, according to the post, 'no mortal has the right to do.'

The Page also regularly shares religious fables/anecdotes from Saudi Arabia in audio form, dispensing religious advice and morality based on Saudi religious ideology. Topics covered are wide-ranging, from the 'Status of Mother', 'Did God Ever Sleep?', 'The Youth Who Refused that Allah has All The Power', 'How did he protect against Fornication?' and 'Don't let anger get the better of you, child'. These video files [audio behind a picture] are also shared on YouTube.

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<sup>18</sup> The video is available on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80VxyZoaUsU&feature=youtu.be> Accessed online on 10 February 2015

<sup>19</sup> The video is available on YouTube at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfaZEBb\\_a7Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfaZEBb_a7Q) Accessed online on 10 February 2015

<sup>20</sup> Akhawath can be accessed on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jamiyyathul-Akhawaath/408268975927863>

Another common theme is to fear death, fear Judgement Day, and to fear the Devil and his seductions. Many posts speak of signs of Armageddon which, according to one popular post [liked over a 100 times and shared 39 times] include: increased ignorance, increased fornication, increased drinking, decreased number of men and increase in women so much so that each man has to look after as many as 50 women.

In April, the organisation promoted a forum, hosted at the Islamic Centre on 'The Oneness of Allah'. It was organized by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and was presented by a Shaikh Ilyas Jamal. The event was advertised on DhiIslam, a website that publishes religious material along with news. Like other similar Pages, there is advice on the conduct of the Muslim self in all areas of life from which position to sleep in and switching off mobile phones to pray, to what prayer should be said first thing in the morning to the last one to be uttered at night. There is also marital advice, such as:

In a marriage there are times when the love in your heart for the husband gets a bit shaky. There are times when you don't want to see the husband, and when the sight of him makes your heart uncomfortable. In times like these, ask for help from Allah. Happiness in life can be gained by remembering Allah. (18 April 2014)

and,

Use Your 'Fitnah' (Beauty And Overtures Of Allurement) To Win The Heart Of Your Husband. All women have the ornaments that Allah blessed them with. Use the beauty Allah - Azza wa Jal - has bestowed you with to win the heart of your husband. (6 May 2014)

If a husband comes to bed and wants to have conjugal relations but the wife refuses, she should know – if he spends any time of that night unhappy about this, angels will be laughing at that woman until daylight. (20 May 2014)

Another post says that a real husband would not allow his wife to display herself in front of another man (29 November 2014) At the same time, the site also posts material which call on husbands to treat their wives well. There is advice for men to help women in household chores (13 August 2014), and also to speak to the wife with affection. 'Address her with endearments such as 'my love', etc.

Several posts urge women to cover up, and not show their 'awrah', defined as 'private parts that need to be covered in public'. This, according to the ideology spread by the Page, is everything.

Sometimes, according to the Maldivian Pearls, this applies to being around her own children:

Woman's awrah in front of her children:

If the child understands what the ‘awrah (private parts which need to be covered in public) is, then it is not permissible for a woman to uncover her ‘awrah in front of him. But if he does not understand because he is little, then it is permissible (8 November 2014)

One popular post, liked 245 times and shared 110 times, expresses similar sentiments about women putting up their pictures on Facebook. According to the post, every time a man, who is not related to her by blood or law, looks at her picture, it adds to her own sins. (25 November 2014)

In May, it contributed to the many calls to end the current moratorium on capital punishment in the Maldives. One post on 3 May 2014 described those who oppose capital punishment in the name of ‘Islam’s beautiful principle of forgiveness’ as people who oppose Allah’s instructions and ‘only believe half The Book and calls for non-belief in the other half.’ The post also added, ‘It should be verified whether such people are Muslims.’ The quote is attributed to an Ahmed Mihsan Mohamed.

Maldivian Pearls calls for prayers and worship above all, God before life. The main priority is to abstain from enjoyment of life in this world to enjoy what happens after life is over. Why, asks one post, do people hasten to buy jerseys and tickets to watch football when they show no such eagerness to acquire heaven as instructed by Allah? (23 May 2014)



On 12 June it shared the post [pictured on the left] by Sheikh Adam Nishan bin Ali Adam Al Maaldheefee, a supporter of Jihad. The post was liked by 45 people and shared by 63. The headline reads: ‘Are they disapproving of Jihad on Allah’s path?’ and is followed by a

verse from the Qur’an which calls for Jihad [not necessarily Jihad of the military kind but can be, and is, interpreted as such]. Ghaza is an emotive issue in the Maldives, and all Pages analysed in this report utilised it to highlight the narrative a persecuted Muslim Ummah. Many of the pages also use extremely graphic images alleged to be from the conflict.

The site also shared a post from the website RaajjeIslam that challenges the view (officially shared by the Islamic Affairs Ministry) that the conflict in Syria is a civil war which means joining it cannot be qualified as a jihad. The article is based on a series broadcast on a series broadcast on ‘a famous Gulf channel’ [shared on

YouTube where a Sheikh says that joining the conflict would qualify as a jihad.]<sup>21</sup> RaajjeIslam, a religious website [analysed later in the report] translates these views by an Arab Sheikh into Dhivehi<sup>22</sup> (5 July 2014).

And the illustration to the right was shared, at the height of Israel’s assault on Ghaza in August 2014. It says: ‘It is the duty of all believers to help the Ummah to the best of their abilities’ (3 August 2014, Liked by 97). It is common to all content analysed in this report to portray the Israel-Palestine conflict as one between Jews and Muslims, part of the greater war between Islam and the West. This post has been highlighted here not just for the call to aid the Ummah, but also for the insignia used.



Like all other pages analysed in this report, the main concern at the end of the year 2014 was about the music show planned for celebrating New Year’s Eve in Male’. On 28 December, an ‘inforgraphic’ was posted praying for the failure of the event. It proved one of the Page’s most popular posts, liked 380 times, shared 39 times, and commented on 41 times. It was followed by criticism of politicians who led planning of the event, quoted verbatim below:

“The democrats r ruling in this country, not the [#shaikhs](#) [#scholars](#). The scholars hv nothing except the [#Quran](#) & [#Sunnah](#). When the dirty politicians want to do something they can and they will, even though its agaist the shariah, we like it or not. What the scholars can do is advicing, reminding the [#Muslims](#), and in my opinion they r doing that.

What is sad is that, the people who do not listen the scholars in their life and have their own nolitical aagenda point their fingers to the scholars. blaming and barking like

<sup>21</sup> Full video is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUkE6cQkguE#sthash.GZ9aHsld.ouhuZ9h.dpuf> Accessed online on 20 February 2015

<sup>22</sup> The full Dhivehi translation can be accessed on RaajjeIslam <http://www.raajjeislam.com/?file=16021> Last accessed 20 February 2015



## 2. DhiSalafiyya



Education website

13,398 Likes

URL: <http://www.dhisalafiyyah.net/>

Started in 2012

This Facebook Page belonging to DhiSalafiyyah, is described as an educational page and has over 13,000 Likes. It is one of the most active among civil society organisations engaged in religious activities. Status updates are frequent and regular; most concern the daily conduct of the Muslim Maldivian self rather than that of a political citizen. This is not to say there were no political statements made or stances taken during the period. There were several politico-religious statements. In May 2014, for example, DhiSalafiyyah warned President Yameen to fear Allah if he were not being a proper leader of Muslims.

Shared with President Yameen (and addressed to him directly), it said: ‘Oh the leader who has been appointed over the beloved Muslims of Maldives! You please fear Allah’ (7 May 2014).

On several occasions it condemned democracy, and ‘the West’ - the message underpinning this rhetoric is that Islam and democracy are incompatible and, as an Islamic state, the Maldives should stay away from the West. On 13 May 2014 DhiSalafiyyah posted: ‘Why don’t everyone ask themselves this question: Did society gain from democracy? Or did it lose?’ When raising your voice for human rights and freedom mustn’t you first perform the rights of Allah who created you from nothing?’

DhiSalafiyyah’s concentrated focus during the period under analysis (December 2013 - January 2015), however, remained on the conduct of the people whose chief identity was to be constructed as ‘Maldivian Muslims’. For Maldivians, life must

be ruled strictly by Hadith and Sunnah, and Shari'a—as implemented by Salafis—must be the ultimate word.

To this affect, DhiSalafiyyah provides many guidelines—laid out in the form of status updates— on a broad array of issues from forbidding unmarried men and women to be in the same place alone to the minutiae of life such as how to sleep (lie on your right side, after ablution) and how to clean breastfeeding baby boys after they pee (sufficient to sprinkle some water). The ordinary is strictly regulated. It is forbidden to grow one's nails long, a woman must not shave their hair. 'Trimming and cutting is allowed.' Brushing your teeth every time you enter your home is encouraged. If men wear their trousers all the way down to their ankles, the lower part of their legs are in hell. The best prayer for a woman is the one made in the inner-most part of the house. There is a time limit of 40 days for trimming the moustache, clipping nails, plucking armpit hairs and shaving pubic hair. The Page advises ablution if considering having sex with the wife a second time in a row, as this 'increases agility of the body.'

Much of modern life must be off limits in order to attain heaven in the unlimited afterlife. Fun is discouraged, and music is Haram.

'There is no truth to music being a cure. That's for the ignorant. Music is not a cure, it's a sickness' (19 May 2014). DhiSalafiyyah is critical of an annual singing competition held nationwide among students, calling it a 'blatant act of sinful debauchery'. The statement is accompanied by a post:

It is a tragedy that parents are dressing their children up with their own hands to lead them towards the punishment of hell and God's judgement.  
(12 May 2014)

It is Haram for men to wear gold, and desirable for them to have more than one wife.

DhiSalafiyya has much to say about the conduct of women. It advises women to read a book on the subject of what they should wear, available on DhiSalafiyyah website to download<sup>23</sup>. There are several other posts on the subject. It is not sufficient for women to just wear headscarves: 'Those who wear the burqa (headscarf) in all sorts of 'styles' — are they trying to deceive Allah and say on the Day of Judgement that I also wore the burqa?', asks one post.

DhiSalafiyya encourages followers to respect women, as long as the women follow Shari'a and bring their children up to be great followers, too. The organisation is adamant that a girl becomes a woman at puberty.

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<sup>23</sup> The book, Maldivian women's clothes, is available [in Dhivehi] for download at: <http://dhisalafiyyah.net/?p=18987>. Last accessed online on 25 February 2015

According to Islamic Shari'a, any person who has reached puberty is liable for adult punishment. But, Munafiqs and Infidels object to this punishment. They decided by themselves when someone becomes an adult. As if this were not enough, they refuse the Hadd [lashes].

DhiSalafiyya supports Female Genital Mutilation. In one 'info graphic' status update it said:

don't cut too much for it gives the most pleasure for a woman. It is also what the husband would love most.' It also said, 'female circumcision' is 'the most likely way to make the face of a woman beautiful.

The focus on women are primarily as mothers. One post says what the Ummah needs most are women with religious education because they are the 'base from which the new generation will spring'. Women who do not cover themselves up are frequently admonished. Wives are often told to 'be good' to their husbands. Frequently, husbands are told to 'be good to their good wives'.

A man who gets a pious wife is someone who has the opportunity to reap the benefits of both worlds. – 15 May 2014

One post says, if a husband has two wives and favours one over the other, he will be paralysed on one side on the Day of Judgement. In this way, there is a sense that DhiSalafiyya sees itself as championing for women's rights by taking such stance. As one of its info graphic updates said, 'No other religion gives as many rights to the woman as does Islam' (6 May 2014).

Apart from these, general observations can be made about the kind of beliefs that DhiSalafiyya considers important. Satan and hell are strong presences, along with other supernatural entities such as Jinns and Demons. DhiSalafiyya published an entire book on the subject, which is available to download as a Dhivehi Language PDF on their website<sup>24</sup>. An audio lecture is also available on how to protect oneself from Satan and Jinns<sup>25</sup>. At the same time, it cautions people against resorting to astrology or consulting the Zodiac signs for advice, as these are tools of the non-believers. They also believe in exorcism, promotes it, and have strict regulations about who can perform the ritual and who cannot.

Dhi Salafiyyah also publishes a variety of books on the above subjects, translated from Arabic into Dhivehi. The publications are available in a large number of bookshops while many are also available to download for free from their website. All such publications are also advertised on the FB page, linking to the site.

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<sup>24</sup> For a full copy, visit: <http://dhisalafiyyah.net/?p=17349> Last accessed on 25 February 2015

<sup>25</sup> The full audio version [in Dhivehi] is available at this link: <http://dhisalafiyyah.net/?p=17745> Last accessed 20 February 2015

Thaw'heed is one of the organisation's main activities, and it stresses the importance of evangelical and missionary activities to spread the word of Allah – according to Salaf ideology. One of the posts (17 April 2014) states that the Tawheed lectures for children the organisation conducts in the Maldives are based on a series of books published in Saudi Arabia as text-books for children. It also has several publications meant for children from storybooks to religious advice<sup>26</sup>.

### 3. Jamiyyath Salaf



NGO

11,643 Likes

URL: <http://www.salaf.mv>

Jamiyyath Salaf has over 11,000 Likes, making it one of the most recognised NGOs on Facebook in the Maldives. It represents a registered NGO, Jamiyyath Salaf, has a physical office, a Twitter handle, a website ([www.salaf.mv](http://www.salaf.mv)) and a YouTube Channel. It also has a dedicated radio channel, Salaf Radio, and has built an Android App RadioSalaf available for Download from Google Play. Interested people can listen live to various lectures organized by Jamiyyath Salaf in various parts of the country. It takes pride in its social media presence.

Jamiyyath Salaf Facebook Page, which replaces an older one, started on 10 October 2014 and it began with an advertisement for The Call 2014. The event, with its own hashtag, #TheCall2014, is heavily advertised both on social media and offline. Billboard spaces are bought, indicating there is substantial funding behind such events. This series took The Call to Male', Addu and Fuammaulaku, the most populous areas of the Maldives.

The Call is an event Salaf first held in 2010, and again in 2011 and this latest one in October 2014. There's a trailer on Salaf's Facebook Page for The Call, which is

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<sup>26</sup> Do all religious books in the Maldives now emanate from the Saudi/Wahhabbi curriculum? This is a question worth considering in further research into the Maldivian experience of 'radicalisation'.

noteworthy for its slick production. It is in English, and produced like a trailer for a Hollywood film. The narrator has an American accent. The Call was live broadcast on YouTube and the fact advertised on Facebook. Bilal Phillip is venerated and, in his first lecture, says inviting tourists to Islam has more value than dollars. The main event was to have been at an open-air venue but rain forced Salaf indoors. Interestingly, the alternative venue was the Islamic Centre, controlled by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. This reveals the connections between the Salaf NGO and the Islamic Ministry, indicating the possibility that ideologies disseminated by organisations such as Salaf are shared by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

Advertisements for Bilal Phillips's lecture on Facebook showed his focus was on 'youth and the way forward' while he also held special smaller meetings with teachers and other educators on 'Islamised education.' He also targeted parents with a lecture on 'How to Raise Children into Responsible Muslim Adults', which was webcast live on YouTube. He was also invited to the Faculty of Islamic Studies at the Maldives National University.

Jamiyyath Salaf is closely affiliated with a radio station, Radio Salaf, which live broadcasts most of its events including Tawheed classes conducted at small mosques. The posts include links to lectures on subjects such as 'After Death' (Sheikh Ahmed Sameer) and why it is necessary to get all children indoors before dark.

Religious NGOs are often given air time on various media. Jamiyyath Salaf runs a #SuvaalakeeKoba [#WhatIsTheQuestion] program with SunTV where viewers can ask questions online answered live on television by Salaf's Sheikhs. It sponsors and co-ordinates visits from Islamic scholars from abroad, often preachers who have been banned from several countries for being too radical. On 12 October it announced that Dr Bilal Philips would be joining The Call, second time Salaf invited the preacher. Salaf also invited Abdul Rahman Green during the same event. Salaf shares a lot of content from the Islamic Online University, which appears to be its chief international affiliation.

Salaf also has a large collection of lectures which are available for sale as CDs. There are 53 CDs advertised on its Facebook Page. There is a weekly video advice feature in which various Sheikhs appear to dispense Salafi interpretations of Islam relating to all aspects of life.



Like · Comment · Share · 106 · 1 · 6

The main focus of Jamiyyath Salaf seems to be reform of the youth. As a citizen, it is the duty of every person to reform others. It is active in the community offline as an NGO. In December 2014 Male' the capital island was crippled by a water crisis. Salaf Jamiyyath acted quickly, organising volunteers to help in the crisis, and also

took the opportunity to train and strengthen a group called SalafAID to volunteer assistance in any potential crises. A crisis themed lecture by Sheikh Muhammad Sinaan was also organised in response to the water shortage. Broadcast live on Radio Salaf, Sheikh Sinaan spoke of how each crisis in life is a worldly test for the hereafter. Pictures were posted to Facebook showing SalafAID volunteers distributing and donating water during the crisis.

At the end of the year, the main focus for Jamiyyath Salaf, like other groups discussed in this analysis, was Christmas and New Year celebrations. It is forbidden, says Salaf, for Muslims to celebrate the Eid of another religion. Any encouragement for Maldivian youth to participate in celebratory activities such as music and dancing is un-Islamic. Each and every individual has to remember, it says, they will be held accountable for their actions on Judgement Day.

On 25 December there were admonitions to refrain from acknowledging there is any God other than Allah. As Minister of Tourism Ahmed Adeb insisted on hosting a music show in Male' to celebrate New Year's Eve, Salaf's calls for youth to refrain from participating in such a sinful and forbidden activity grew louder. On 26 December it put up a status update condemning 'rich people' and 'some government leaders' for trying to keep youth on the wrong path of music, dancing and intoxication. It called upon everyone to refrain from participating in the activities and also to try and make every possible effort, in any manner possible, to stop the show from going on.

Jamiyyath Salaf started 2015 by dispatching teams of clerics to three atolls in various regions of the country.

#### 4. Al-Asr

Seek counsel and advice from the learned ones

mail@asr.mv

Sheikh Ali Zahir  
Sheikh Adam Shameem  
Sheikh Nimal Mohamed  
Sheikh Mohamed Shafu

**Al-Asr** at : facebook.com/alAsr.mv  
Non-profit Organisation

COFFEE WITH SUFUR

Unfold the Truth

Like Follow Message

Timeline About Photos Reviews More

Non-Profit Organisation  
6,120 Likes  
URL: <http://www.asr.mv/>  
Started July 2013

Al-Asr describes itself as a non-profit organisation focusing on ‘Life skills, motivational lectures, leadership programmes, and health and fitness’. It also has its own URL [www.asr.mv] but following the links reverts to the original FB Page which was created on 3 July 2013. It also has an Instagram account which, at the end of January 2015 had over a 100 posts and 560 Followers. The Facebook Page Al-Asr’s is the main online social media platform of Sheikh Shameem [discussed later in the report] and/or vice versa. Throughout the year, the organisation hosts religious educational events across the country. It promotes all of them heavily on social media. During the period of analysis [December 2013-January 2015] the organisation used fifteen different hashtags promote as many events.

Videos of various classes along with sermons and lectures given at different locations are posted on the FB page as well as on YouTube, and also on Instagram, and broadcast on Jazeera TV, as well as live streamed. Events are advertised on Facebook, promising various free gifts to those who attend. Example from 4 May 2014:

Rejoice! SET YOUR GOAL event is coming to male’, in sha Allah, this Thursday @raalhugandu (near usfasgandu). From 1600hrs to 1800hrs. [Sheikh Adam Shameem](#) & Sheikh Nimal will be available to answer your questions or offer consultation on religious matters. Plus we are giving away a lot of free stuff like audio lectures, mobile apps, Islamic books, kids books, mushafs, translations & dates. See you there, in sha Allah!

Al-Asr is also involved in organising religious clerics from abroad to give lectures at their various events. During these visits, the Sheikhs travel across the country in the company of the local host—like Sheikh Shameem—picnicking on the beach, and talking Da’wah with boys of all ages. During the period under analysis, the Sheikh accompanied a visiting cleric from the Netherlands on a visit to several islands. Such visits are heavily promoted online, published on various social media and shared often by hundreds. Religious talks are run for young mothers, pre-school children, and university students. Some of the programmes have existed for years. One of the lectures, on 12 August 2014, was called ‘Fleeing from War’. A clip of the lecture was made available on the Facebook Page, it is only long enough to know the subject is Jihad but too short to decipher much else.

Lectures on such topics are often held in spaces closed off except for those who have accepted the Da’wah. Online advertising makes it possible to know when the next class is, and to build interest among the island population before the Sheikhs arrive.

## 5. Jamiyyathul Bayan



Non-Governmental Organisation

1807 Likes

URL: No

Started December 2013

Jamiyyathul Bayaan is a religious organisation established in the Maldives ‘to strive in the cause of Allah swt’. With less than 2000 Likes, it has considerably less followers than the Facebook Pages analysed above. It has been used as a sample for two reasons: it openly discusses Jihad, and is affiliated with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The organisation is also affiliated with the Muslim World League which has a branch at Male’s Islamic Ministry. The views Jamiyyathul Bayan holds, as seen from the observations below based on their Facebook posts, can be seen as those largely shared by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

The organisation was started on 2 December 2013 with the chief aim of disseminating their religious beliefs, teachings and ideologies to the Maldivian population. Organising lectures in the Maldives by various religious clerics, local and foreign, seems to top its agenda. One of their main objectives, observed from their various posts online, is to shape ‘the Muslimness’ of Maldivians. To this affect there were several lectures on the theme of ‘The Reality of Muslimness’ and ‘What it means to be a proper Muslim’, throughout the time period under analysis (December 2013 to January 2015).

Like DhiSalafiyya, Bayan also believes in the spirit world and demons. They are proponents of Ruqya, a Shari’a based form of ‘Islamic exorcism’. In March, Bayan held a Ruqya Forum on possession by demons, curses and the evil eye. Those trained to perform these exorcisms are called Al-Raqi, a position requiring specialist training. The clerics behind Bayan also practise Hijama, or ‘cupping’ a medieval form of healing by bloodletting. This is a practise previously unknown in the Maldives but have been imported directly by clerics returning with Salaf-influenced education. All these ‘arts’ are taught and practised in Bayan’s



headquarters in Male' and across the country by the travelling Sheikhs of Bayan. News of these events are advertised on the Facebook Page.

Bayan sends groups of clerics across the country to meet with local councilors and school teachers to request and demand there be more Salfist religious education in their schools, and that there be more religious policing of each other among civilians. As mentioned previously, Bayan is a supporter of Jihad. Its stance with regard to the War on Terror, which has ceased to exist in name, is a war between Muslims and 'the Infidels' of the West.

Bayan is disapproving of nationalism and attempts, through its messages, to convince all Maldivians that they should identify with the Uslamic Ummah first and nation later, if at all. Clerics of this persuasion meet to discuss these ideas, and do not hesitate to use the black flag with white Shahadath—used by Al-Qaeda affiliated Jihadists in Syria—as a backdrop for these meetings. Bayan wants its followers to draw a line between Us and Them, Us the Muslims and Them, the Infidel non-Believers.

One of the main proponents of this belief for Bayan is Sheikh Jaufar Faiz. A lecture by the name of 'Shahadath', given by Jaufar Faiz in May 2014 was promoted using the Shahadath as it is on the seal of Prophet Mohamed, co-opted by the Islamic State as its flag. The lecture was co-sponsored by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and was held within the Ministry's premises. The lecture was streamed live on [www.dhiislam.com](http://www.dhiislam.com) and was later uploaded on YouTube in full<sup>27</sup>.

On 22 March 2014 it started a new Facebook Page by the name, 'Plea of the Ummah' which in January 2015 had 16,509 Likes. Most of its posts carry news, many in the form of graphic images, of Muslims being killed in Syria, Iraq, Palestine and other places of ongoing conflict. Fundamental to these posts is the accompanying narrative of the Muslim Ummah being persecuted by the West. On their own page, they post 'info graphics' supporting Jihad. 'About the martyrs who lose their lives while in Jihad for Allah that they have died. They are alive, you just don't know it.'

On June 29, after the Islamic State was declared, Bayan posted illustrations encouraging war 'to protect men, women and children in the name of Allah'. In July it used the Facebook to distance itself from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs shortly after Minister Shaheem described the war in Syria as 'a civil war', which meant foreign fighters joining it cannot qualify as jihadists. Bayan responded with the following statement:

those who depict the wars between Muslims and infidels as civil wars. 'Oh Allah! Keep us steadfast on the righteous path. And may victory be awarded to the Mujaheddin who are performing jihad in the path of Allah.

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<sup>27</sup> The lecture is available in full on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWc88bHnTMw&feature=youtu.be>  
Last accessed on 25 February 2015

Some of these lectures, often by Sheikh Jaufar, are billed as ‘Brothers Only’, implying certain kind of discourse is kept to trusted few. Sheikh Mohamed Ibrahim (from the island of Naifaru), is also part of Bayan and is on their lecture circuit.

## **Observations**

All Facebook Pages related to religion appear to share a common communications strategy: provide people with bite-sized messages they can easily understand and share with others on their Facebook network. A common tool for this is bite-sized ‘info graphics’ - a 4x4 inch picture on which are superimposed various Hadith or verses from the Qur’an translated into Dhivehi. They all address aspects of life lived as Salafism demands. These info graphics are shared among 100s of people on Facebook, and are seen, read and interpreted by thousands, influencing their religious discourse on and offline. Most religious NGOs on Facebook are present across the entire spectrum of social media platforms: Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Flickr, Ask FM, and others. The NGOs appear to organise a large number of offline activities throughout the year. Chief among them are regular lectures at mosques across the country, Da’wah camps to invite people to answer the Call of Islam, Takziya Camps, Taw’heed camps etc.

These activities are conducted throughout the year, and increase in number during school holidays. In the lead-up to a planned event, they are advertised on Facebook. When the event occurs, photographs are uploaded on Instagram and Facebook. It is also live broadcast on Atoll Radio and live streamed on other social media and Internet platforms. Later, a recording is uploaded on YouTube and 100s view them nationwide. Video clips are uploaded on Facebook and Vimeo, and are passed around. There is full social media saturation.

## **2.2 Facebook Pages of religious Public Figures or Disseminators**

This section collected data relating to 12 clerics working in the Maldives today (Table 2). Of these, four were chosen for in-depth analysis – Sheikh Adam Shameem, Sheikh Hassan Moosa Fikree, Sheikh Ilyas Hussain and Sheikh Adam Nishan (bin Ali Adam Al-Maldheefee). The first three were chosen on the basis of their follower numbers. The fourth, Sheikh Nishan, who has a relatively number of followers, was chosen due to his more public support of Jihad.

The fifth figure analysed in depth here is not on the list as he is not a religious cleric *per se*. He is, however, the most popular voice that speaks widely and often about religious affairs. Ali Rameez is a musician who embraced the Salafi ideology and has since become its most vocal advocate. He has over 44,000 followers and is popular among youth. It was felt that his contribution to the changing religious beliefs and ideologies of Maldivians should be considered here for a fuller picture of the phenomenon of radicalisation in the country.

Table 2. List of 12 clerics with Facebook Pages as 'Public Figures'

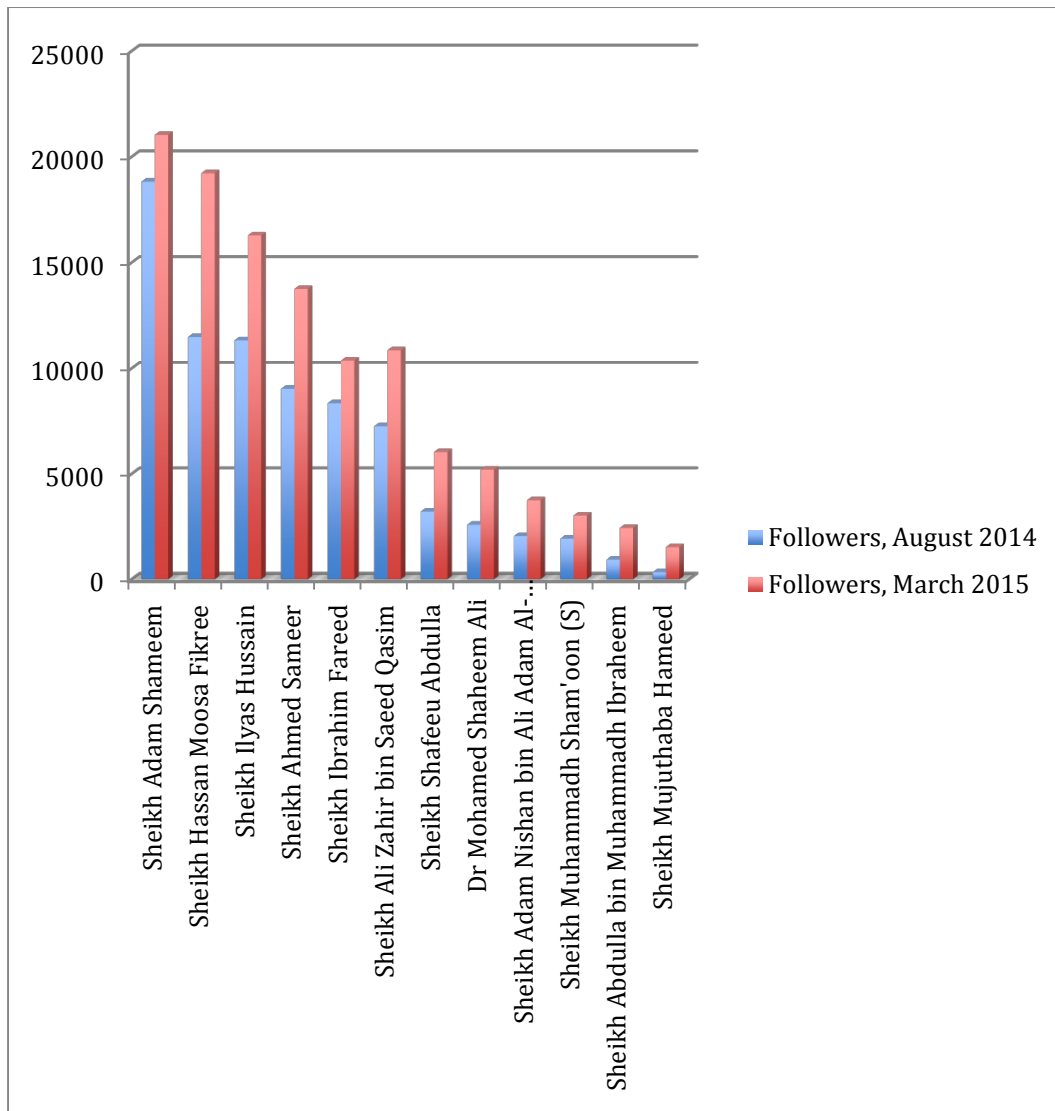
CLERIC	AFFILIATION	FOLLOWERS <sup>28</sup>
Sheikh Adam Shameem	None	21,036
Sheikh Hassan Moosa Fikree	None	19,222
Sheikh Ilyas Hussain	None	16,283
Sheikh Ahmed Sameer	Associate Lecturer MNU <sup>29</sup>	13,754
Sheikh Ibrahim Fareed	None	10,365
Sheikh Ali Zahir bin Saeed Qasim	Dean, Islamic Studies Faculty, MNU	10,851
Sheikh Shafeeu Abdulla	Dhi Salafiyya	6031
Dr Mohamed Shaheem Ali	Minister, Islamic Affairs	5196
Sheikh Adam Nishan bin Ali Adam Al-Maldheefee	MA student Al- Madinah University, Malaysia	3744
Sheikh Muhammadh Sham'oon (S)	None	3019
Sheikh Abdulla bin Muhammadh Ibraheem	None	2430
Sheikh Mujuthaba Hameed	Madinah Islamic University graduate	1520

If the number of followers of each Sheikh is an indicator of their popularity, an increase in their followers can be seen as an increase in their popularity. The following graph demonstrates how much more followers each Sheikh is gaining on a regular basis. The red columns show the number of followers each Sheikh had in August 2014 in comparison with the number of followers each Sheikh had by 10 March 2015. As the graph demonstrates, the number of people heeding the advice and subscribing to the views espoused by the clerics are increasing at a rapid rate.

<sup>28</sup> Follower numbers were recorded on 9 March 2015

<sup>29</sup> Maldives National University

**Table 3 Number of followers in March 2015, compared with No. of followers August 2014**



## 1. Sheikh Adam Shameem



Public Figure

21,036 Likes

URL: <http://www.adamshameem.com/>

Started 2013

During the last decade, a new type of preacher has emerged to dominate Maldivian religious landscape. Sheikh Shameem is the leader among the group; his page had over 21,000 at the end of February. The last census in 2014 puts the Maldivian population at 350,000, which means close to six percent of the Maldivian population is following the Sheikh.



Figure 1 Sheikh Shameem, dressed for an official lecture

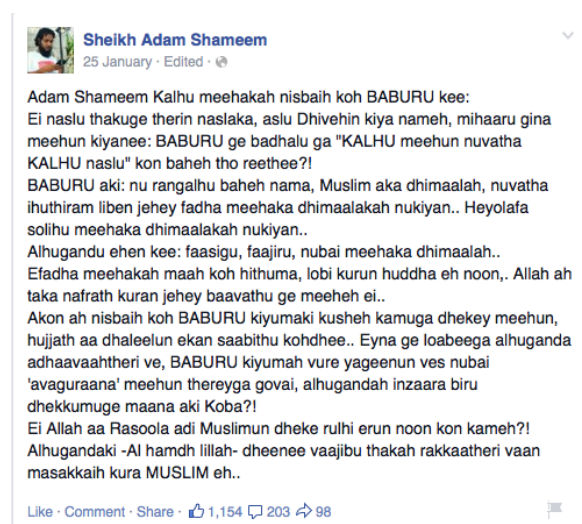
Sheikh Shameem is a performer, as are many of his peers. His sermons are tirades against democracy and the West, and all non-believers alike. He cries for the Ummah. His Dhivehi is interspersed with little English, just enough to let people know he is 'hip', not just old Sheikh who cannot understand the modern man. He decorates his sermons with outbursts in Arabic, often expressed in a loud wailing voice. He puts on turbans, and

plenty of airs of graces; he also dresses like the common man, depending on the circumstances and the audience. His Facebook Page is also different from many of his contemporaries' in that he also shares personal stories, news of illnesses, spending time with children, etc., which makes him appear approachable and 'one of us' to the followers. He has also started travelling to the islands with a

musician, once a pop-singer, now ‘converted’ to Salafism and shuns all music except hymns.

In January 2015, he became caught up in a race row after he called Canadian rapper Akon an ‘Infidel Negro’. Sheikh Shameem refused to apologise insisting, ‘Allah requires me to hate people of that ilk.’ Adamant in his beliefs, he put the following status up on his Facebook page. It was a popular post, with over a 1000 Likes.

Adam Shameem addressing a black man as Negro:



“Negro is a term used in original Dhivehi to refer to a race of people. Most people now say Black person instead of Negro. Saying ‘BLACK person or BLACK race’ instead of Negro, which term is nicer?! If NEGRO is an incorrect word, I have not used it to address a Muslim or someone who should be respected...haven’t used it to address a good, pious person. I said it to a corrupt, immoral, evil man. It is not allowed [in Islam] to respect and revere such a person. That is the kind

of one should hate for the sake of Allah. Those who think that it is an offence to call Akon a Negro, prove it to me with evidence...What is the meaning of calling me worse names in public than Negro and, in hating me for the love of Akon, warning me and threatening me?! What else is that other than hating Allah and his Prophet and Muslims? I am ---Praise God --- a MUSLIM who tries to protect religious duties.”

Social media is central to the existence of Sheikh Shameem, the ‘Public Figure’. He is on all its prominent platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Tumbler, Instagram, Flickr and YouTube. Sheikh Shameem also has a website of his own where he disseminates advice on everything from sex to finance. His dominant message, which he says is based on Islam, is to stop living for today and live for what will happen after death. He does not, however, advocate Jihad on any occasion on Facebook during the period analysed in this report. The only post which indicates he supports Jihad is one on 29 May which states:

29 May – May Allah accept the Shahaadhath of all Muslims for the Maldivians who have been killed by enemies in Shaam and elsewhere! May there be victory for the Mujahidhs! Amen! (292 likes)

During the period analysed, Sheikh Shameem’s all other discussions of Syria were limited to their humanitarian implications. In December 2013 he launched a

charity fund to collect donations to 'help Syria through the winter season. One of Sheikh Shameem's favourite lectures appears to be on called A Tear for The Ummah. He gave the lecture first on 10 May 2012 at the Furqan Mosque in Male', known as a venue for radical discussions. He shares and promotes this video at regular intervals. On this occasion he used a trailer of the lecture to promote the fundraising drive for Syria. The trailer is highly emotive with a hymn as a soundtrack which asks: 'is there no empathy? No sympathy?' Videos are of Al-Jazeera footage of a conflict in a Middle Eastern country where children are being killed and there is relentless and graphic violence. These videos are interspersed with brief videos of a lecture by Shameem. His language is emotive, his expression angry, concerned.

It has been centuries now where infidels have got together and conspired to commit violence against Muslims, all over! For ages they have been violating the sanctity of the Prophet SAW! 'People are being killed, children are being slayed, women are being orphaned!<sup>30</sup>

On 29 January he travelled to Syria to hand the donations over in person. Most of his posts from the Syrian trip were uploaded on a page dedicated to the event itself. A few posts were shared on his own page, however. They included pictures from a children's refugee camp and also pictures of the Sheikh and his delegation at the Hagia Sofia mosque in Turkey. He made no mention of fighters in Syria.

Back in the Maldives, his Facebook Page shows, he sticks to a grueling schedule of lecturing and holding various religious events across the country. In 2014 he travelled to over 15 different islands to give lectures or hold camps. He led Dawah Camps, Takziya Camps and Prayer Workshops at various locations. In between he held regular lectures at various mosques in and around the Male' area, and also after-prayer classes on Aqeedha [Creed]; 'Urwatul Waqsa' [discussions about the (non) Immaculate Conception of Jesus; Hadith; Halaqa [theology]; and also a series called 'FeeBuyooth'. In addition to these classes, Sheikh Shaheem also gave several public lectures on various subjects and accompanies visiting Sheikhs from foreign countries on tours of Maldivian islands. When he is travelling on his various trips, he holds lectures for schoolchildren, parents, men and women of the islands. Sometime together, sometimes separately.

Like his contemporaries, he shares the belief that Maldives should be ruled by Sharia, and shared several posts on his Facebook Page calling for the death penalty and denouncing those who oppose it. He is critical of anyone who does not support the implementation of Sharia, and shared a video post on 5 July in which he describes the recent UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay as

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<sup>30</sup> 'A Tear for The Ummah' is available in full on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-iPuFEdeil&feature=youtu.be>

'an old hag'<sup>31</sup>. He also supports the division between Muslims and Infidels, and often refers to the principle of Al-wala' wa-l-bara'<sup>32</sup>.

The Asian Tsunami of 2004 had a devastating impact on the Maldives. It was also a turning point in Maldivian religious beliefs, largely due to the fact that many of the clerics used it to convince people that it was God's wrath wreaked upon them for not practicing the right Islam and straying from the path of Allah. On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tsunami Sheikh Shameem shared a lengthy post, which provides some insight into the way in which the tragedy was portrayed to the public by clerics.

Ten years ago on this day, South East Asia and South Asia including Maldives was devastated by the deadliest natural disaster in recent history. Scores lost their lives. Whole islands and many livelihoods were devastated. The pain still continues in the form of psychological trauma, memories of lost loved ones and displacement from former homes. Some of the lessons that were learnt on this hard day are long forgotten as if it is an incident of a bygone era. The bond of togetherness that was part of our culture has been shredded by political schisms that run across the very fabric of society. For a people whose priority list was Islam > nation > politics now seems to be reversed. On that day, one thing was repeated everywhere. People sought and received refuge in Allah. They rushed to the Houses of God. It is an undeniable fact that even in Maldives, small mosques located on the beach front were left undamaged and even without any significant water getting into them in some really miraculous cases while the whole island was hit and submerged by a high speed wave more than 10 to 15 feet high and stout buildings were ruined... Ask the survivors. Today let us all pray for all those who lost their lives and livelihoods. Let us renew our faith in God and determination to cling to His religion. Let us all renew the bonds of national belonging. Let us reorganise our our priorities list so that the path to salvation in both worlds or Islam is at the top and relegate petty politics to the back of the list where it rightly belongs (27 December 2014).

Like his contemporaries, and the NGOs and communities discussed previously, the Sheikh's main preoccupation at the end of the year was with Male's plans to hold a music show to celebrate the New Years Eve, an 'Infidel Holiday.' The following are some of the thoughts he shared with his followers in relation to the occasion and the plans to celebrate it. At the time he shared these posts, the Sheikh was in Mecca for the Umrah pilgrim.

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<sup>31</sup> Navi Pillay addressed the Maldivian Parliament in November 2011 and criticised the country's continuing practice of flogging women for the offence of fornication. For more information see: 'Flogging for fornication "inhumane and degrading violence against women": Navi Pillay tells Majlis', *Minivan News*, 24 November 2011. Accessed on 28 February 2015

<sup>32</sup> Al-wala' wa-l-bara' is generally referred to as the Islamic concept of friendship toward fellow Muslims, and never loving nor praising the Non-Muslims



It was on a night like this, in a month like this, when people were sleeping after sinning that waves of the Tsunami came...Beloved Prophet sounded a warning that wrath will come on a night when revellers are at a music show, changing some people of this Ummah into pigs and monkeys...I call upon beloved brothers and sisters not to participate in tonight's show to celebrate the Christian's New Year...However strong the security that police can provide, it cannot stop divine wrath...May Allah protect this Ummah. Amen' (31 December 2014)

There maybe disagreement about political matters but when it comes to lewd acts and sinning, there's agreement. On one side, those who have urged it on from earlier, even made fatwas to spread it..on the other side those who've said the way to escape is the way of white people, and spreads local tourism while 'maintaining religious faith', are tonight 31 dec 2014/1Jan 2015 ignoring party colours and mixing with WHITE PEOPLE dancing on stages and beaches of islands with DJs... (31 December 2014)

Spoke of the dangers of local tourism in the 'Andalus' lecture<sup>33</sup>. Used examples of scenes that could already be observed on some of the islands. Some people who claim to be right-thinking people challenged my views even then. Others, using the slogan 'For Religion', hastened to make noise in their homes and other venues. Wonder if they ask themselves any questions now that there are youth and school children from the islands drinking and dancing publicly on the beaches with white people. Think and Ponder! Fear Allah! I have sounded, notified, and reminded (31 December 2014).

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<sup>33</sup> 'Al-Andhalus' is a highly controversial lecture given Sheikh Adam Shameem in September 2013, during the troubled presidential elections. It denounced democracy and liberalism, calling both anti-Islamic. Read a translation of salient extracts from the lecture here: <http://minivannews.com/politics/jamiyathuh-salafs-al-andhalus-sermon-66015>, 'Translation: Jamiyyathu Salaf's 'Al-Andhalus' sermon', Minivan News, 21 September 2013. Last accessed 10 March 2015

## 2. Sheikh Hassan Moosa Fikree



Official Fan Page of Sheikh Hassan Moosa Fikree.

الهيئة الرسمية  
للشهاد حسن موسى فكري

Cover Photo

**Sheikh Hassan Moosa Fikree**  
Public Figure

Like Follow Message

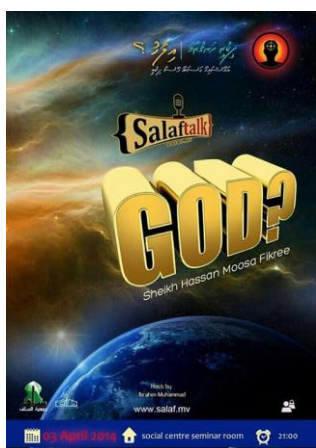
Timeline About Photos Likes More

Public Figure  
19,222 Likes  
URL: <http://www.hassanfikree.com/>  
Started July 2012

Sheikh Hassan Moosa Fikree, like his contemporaries, is fast growing in popularity. In August 2014 he had 11,000 followers. By the end of January 2015, the number had grown to well over 18,000. Although he maintains the page himself, he describes it as ‘The Official Fan Page of Sheikh Moosa Fikree’. He also has a dedicated website: [www.hassanfikree.com](http://www.hassanfikree.com) and is on Twitter too. He is affiliated with Jamiyyath Salaf.

Like other such personalities on Facebook, Sheikh Fikree speaks on a vast array of subjects governing the conduct of the self according to Salafi beliefs. This is often done in a weekly television programme, ‘What is the Question?’ on Sun TV conducted by host and another popular figure on the religious landscape, Ali Rameez (analysed later in this report). Clips from the programme are then uploaded on the Sheikh’s Facebook Page.

He encourages ‘youth with sexual desires’ to get married in order to prevent the sin of sex outside marriage and calls on parents to refrain from stopping their children from getting married. On 11 January the Sheikh dismissed as ‘un-Islamic’ a provision in the Sexual Offences Bill (in parliament), which defines as rape sexual intercourse between a man and his wife in the absence of the wife’s consent. Such a provision is, according to the Sheikh, wrongfully adding manmade provisions to Allah’s word and quotes a Hadith to support his claim. Sheikh Fikree also supports the death penalty and other Shari’a based punishments and called on the government to end the current moratorium on the death penalty.



The Sheikh also runs a series of talks at various venues in Male’ and other islands with the title, SalafTalk the subjects of which are also wideranging, from online safety to speed reading, the negative effects of mass media on Islamic society, the benefits of exercising and keeping fit, celebrating birthdays (un-Islamic), ‘God?’ and Best Ways to Repent. He leads and/or participates in Da’wah events across the country. He shares the belief with other Salafi Sheikhs that music is a sin and criticized Maldives Red Crescent’s plans (which were later scrapped) to hold a music festival to raise money for Ghaza – an un-Islamic plan which ‘we have learnt from Non-Muslims’. He also shared by a colleague, Sheikh Sameeru, which describes the war in Gaza (3 August 2014) as a conflict between Muslims and Infidels.

Like other clerics, Sheikh Fikree also travels to other islands across the country to give his lectures. He makes short video clips while on these islands, and uploads them to his Facebook Page. The contain religious advice about various topics. He believes in the supernatural, jinns and demons, and calls on people to beware of them. He warns people to always be afraid of Hell.

Sheikh Fikree also endorses particular candidates for political positions.

Despite the large following, Sheikh Fikree appears to have less charisma and controversy surrounding him. His beliefs are Salafist, so he shares others’ stances on death penalty, Sharia, status of women and other major issues that have created debate and discussion in the Maldivian society in recent years. Yet, he works more quietly, but no less steadily, than others to build his support base. He does not speak of Jihad, but restricts himself mostly to issues regarding the conduct of the Muslim self.

### 3. Sheikh Ilyas Hussain



Public Figure

16,283 Likes

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/user/sheikhilyashussain>

Sheikh Ilyas Shameem has only been on Facebook for over a year, but has built himself a large following. This maybe due to his popularity as a lecturer. Like Sheikh Shameem discussed previously, Sheikh Ilyas is a performer. He borrows from Arab dress to such an extent that sometimes he can be easily mistaken for one. He has made several controversial lectures, always in a religious context, over the last few years, especially against democracy, and the former government of Mohamed Nasheed in particular. This could also be one of the reasons for his popularity. had over 16,000 followers making him one of the top thought leaders among popular religious clerics online. He also has a dedicated YouTube Channel, where visitors can view many of his lectures and opinions.

Sheikh Ilyas uses his Facebook Page mostly to promote his lectures. However, he does share some opinions and views. He, like his contemporaries, is critical of anyone who does not support strict implementation of Sharia in the Maldives. At the start of the period in which this report focuses on (last week of December 2013 – first week of January 2015), the Sheikh's main concern is with joining in 'Infidel Celebrations', like Christmas and New Year's Eve. On 27 December he posted several infographics warning people against joining such celebrations. Each post contained references to words of the Prophet that forbid such activities. Sheikh Ilyas's infographics often have the title, 'Reminder', and they often ask people to recall the importance of keeping Allah in mind in all their activities.

#### 4. Sheikh Adam Nishan (bin Ali Adam-Al-Maaldheefee)



Sheikh Adam Nishan, as can be seen from the information above, has far fewer followers than other figures discussed here. The reason for including an analysis of his page in favour of others with more followers is to provide some insight into the content disseminated by a cleric who does support Jihad openly. Inclusion of his profile makes the analysis more representative of the different types of clerics currently working in the Maldives. Unlike other clerics, he does not describe himself as a 'Public Figure' but as a Teacher. Unlike others, he also provides his educational background: "Graduate of Madhinah Islamic University in Al-Madhinathuh Nabawiyyah and currently completing masters at Al-Madhinah International University in Malaysia."

Although different from other Sheikhs in some ways, Sheikh Nishan also ends the year 2013 with the same message: it is forbidden to celebrate 'Christmas or any other festivals of Kuffar'. The language he uses to address non-Muslims is the worst possible kind; not non-believers, but Infidels. It incites hatred. Sheikh Nishan also says that it is not just the Infidel celebrations that are banned, but also any festival marked on a repeated basis weekly, annually or in any other regular manner.

Like other Sheikhs, he is also adamant that all women should be covered up, and condemned the Elections Commission's decision to publish the voter registry along with pictures of women (who had chosen to wear the veil since). Sheikh Nishan's comment also included the statement that 'publishing any Muslim's personal information without their permission is a major atrocity' (18 January 2014). Sheikh Nishan's language is often cruder than all of his contemporaries, especially when speaking of women he sees as having strayed from the right path.

In one post he admonishes women who do not cover themselves up, and does so in Dhivehi that is usually only used by ‘street people’. His words are a translation of a verse from the Qur’an, “And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance.” He uses the most vulgar of words to translate the verse.

On 23 January he published the following post [original in Dhivehi]:

Beheading by sword is the best way to impose the death penalty according to Shari’a. However, Shari’a does not specifically say that beheading is the only way to kill. The best method is the one which causes the person least amount of pain and takes her life the fastest. I do not support killing by injection. However, even this way of killing is better than letting a person live who has taken a life. If the person is killed even that way [by lethal injection], the spirit of the principle of Qisas [retaliation in kind] is maintained. To say that a person cannot be killed because at this moment in time it is not possible to kill a person by beheading them is nothing but making a case for not adhering to the judgement of Qisas.

A few days later, he shared a post which criticised the fact that the question of whether or not Allah’s judgement (death penalty) was to be implemented had risen. Holding such a discussion, he said, means that the Qur’an and Sunnah were being called into question. Thus, people who engaged the discussion were putting themselves outside the religion of Islam.

He gives regular lectures at various mosques on different topics, and plugs these events on Facebook. He also puts video clips of the lectures on the Page. One of these lectures was on the issue of death penalty. He put up a video clip, saying that people who replace Allah’s Sharia with manmade laws are Infidels, and they are among those who have crossed the limits of right [Taghut]. Like it or not, he said, right is right (14 April 2014). He also says that Maldivians are not truly free until they fully implement Shari’a (26 July 2014, Maldivian independence day).

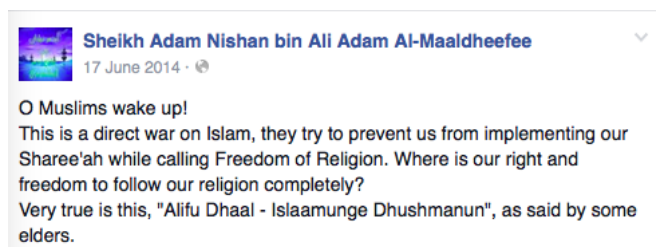
Like other Sheikhs, he has a list of things that are forbidden – music, Valentine’s Day, even magic shows. Why magic shows? Because magic is a falsehood, and watching falsehoods is forbidden (17 April 2014).



On 1 June he shared a post saying that Jihad is a duty. On 4 June he posted a video with the title: 'Is the conflict in Syria a civil war?' In the two minute video, full of graphic violence including beheadings, he answers the question: No, it's not. Bashar Al-Assad has been making people in Syria call him God, which makes him an Infidel, which in turn makes the conflict in Syria one between Muslims and Infidels and, therefore, not a civil war (4

June 2014).

Ten days, he was discussing the subject again via Facebook. This time he was negating the opinion expressed by some Sheikhs (not on Facebook) that there are certain conditions which have to be met before fighting in a conflict can qualify as Jihad. Among these conditions are not to fight without an Imam; and not to join the Jihad without permission from one's leader (head of state) and one's parents. According to Sheikh Nishan these conditions do not apply when the entire Ummah is under threat from Infidels and when troops are fighting to free Islamic states from Infidels. (14 June 2014).



He also frequently calls on all Maldivians to 'stand up' and fight for the strict implementation of strict Shari'a in the Maldives. On the left is an example one such

post (17 June 2014).

When he is not calling for Jihad, Sheikh Nishan is performing. He wears long flowing white robes and has himself filmed lecturing on various topics at various outdoor locations in the Maldives and elsewhere.

When ISIS declared the Islamic State, Nishan responded with a lengthy post in which he says several questions had to be answered before it could be declared a valid Caliphate. Without a doubt, he says, there were many Takfiris (a Muslim who accuses another Muslim of apostasy) among the leaders and followers of the IS. However, he says, the IS were still better than the former leadership of Iraq which had descended into idol worship and believing in Gods other than Allah.

When the Gaza conflict was at its worst in August 2014, he discussed the conflict solely as one between Muslim and Jews. On 21 August he shared a post calling on people to:

know your real enemies'. 'Is it still not time to recognise that America and the UK and other such nations are not our friends but are real enemies of Muslims? It is countries like the UK and UN [sic] that are, in the name of international law, encouraging the Jewish Zionists to commit major atrocities against Muslims. It is America that is giving weapons and financial aid to slay Muslims.

He followed this with a verse from the Qur'an which calls on Muslims to refrain from considering Christians and Jews friends.

On 27 August he stated: 'The truth we should know is that Jews never respect any agreements they enter into it.' Again, he finds support for this from the words of Allah.

In September he responded to the announcement that US was launching attacks against the IS. He reminded followers that, as he had previously said, while there were elements within the IS that were not right, it is still better to be governed by an organisation like the IS than by a system which did not implement the Shari'a and had turned against Allah's judgements and words. 'Because they [the IS] are Muslims and they are implementing Allah's Sharia'. Therefore, Sheikh Nishan had this to say:

So I also support them [IS] against the enemies of Islam like America and the UK and all other such Infidel countries. Because these mobs who are trying to snuff out the flame of Islam and abolish Islamic Shari'a are worse in every way. Therefore, anyone who assists a country like America, which is blatantly trying to abolish the Shari'a, are themselves crossing the boundaries of Islam. And such assistance is directly aiding Infidels to destroy Islam (14 September 2014).

Like all the other Sheikhs, as the year came to an end, Sheikh Niashn's main concern was that young Maldivians were excited about a music show to celebrate the coming new year. If the country had youth who were afraid of Allah and were not distracted by fun and games, they cannot be led astray and be manipulated



for political purposes (28 December 2014).

## 5. Ali Rameez (Artist)



Ali Rameez is not a religious cleric, and thus is not included in the list of most popular religious figures listed at the top of this section (Table 2). He has, however, been included in the in-depth analysis of religious figures because he is one of the chief disseminators of Salafist ideology in the Maldives. With close to 50,000 Followers on Facebook, he is also the most popular. He kicked off his Facebook Page on 13 August 2013 with a newspaper profile of himself with the headline ‘A slave to supporters as a musician, now Allah’s Slave’<sup>34</sup>.

There are many reasons for his popularity – the chief one being that he was once a celebrity pop-singer loved by a large percentage of the population. It is a relevant point to note here that it has been a successfully deployed strategy of the Salafist movement in the Maldives [and elsewhere in the world] to persuade popular musicians to subscribe to their ideology. Once they join in, they refuse to denounce music and start working as preachers, or hymn singers and, with their already established popularity, persuade many of their fans to follow them in their new chosen path.

Once a popular singer with several Dhivehi albums to his name, Ali Rameez used to earn his living from singing cover versions of American and British pop songs on various resorts in the Maldives. He was a celebrity, especially popular with girls and women who loved his looks and the romantic love songs he used to sing. Sometime towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s, Rameez heeded the ‘Call to Islam’ by Salafists and underwent an astonishing transformation from pop celebrity to ‘religious figure’. He also has a Twitter account with close to

<sup>34</sup> ‘A slave to supporters as a musician, now Allah’s slave’, Haveeru News [Dhivehi], 18 July 2013. Last accessed: <http://www.haveeru.com.mv/dhivehi/people/14112> 7 March 2015

7000 followers, and his Facebook status updates are set to appear as Tweets and vice versa.

In June 2014 Rameez came fifth in a nationwide Facebook poll to select the Most Popular Maldivian Man ([Emme Maqbool Dhivehi Firiheenaa](#) – 2014), Rameez carried his celebrity status into his new persona with tremendous success, and can be ‘credited’ with making the Salafist call ‘fashionable’ among thousands of young men and women. Having declared music ‘haram’, he now only sings religious hymns and ‘nasheeds’, has a long beard, dresses in Arabic/Pashtun style salavars, wears a turban on his head, and drives around Male’ on a Harley-Davidson type motorcycle. He is one of the foremost disseminators of Salafist ideology in the Maldives, not just via social media but also through various programmes he presents on mainstream media including television and radio.



Figure 2. Ali Rameez, the Salafi ‘Disseminator’ (L) and Ali Rameez in his previous incarnation as a popular musician and singer (R)

It becomes evident from Ali Rameez’s Facebook that it is very important for him to differentiate between Muslims and Infidels, the former being good and the latter bad. Any cause, concept or law supported by ‘the West’ is to be denounced. This included even Malala who was awarded the Nobel Prize. The celebration of Malala was not to be supported because she was ‘Championed by the West’ (19 February 2014). He also frequently shares posts about non-Muslims who embrace the religion, especially musicians like him. He denounces democracy, sometimes using the most unlikely of incidents as proof that democracy is to blame for social problems in various countries. On 7 March 2014, for example, he shared a post about an Indian rape victim who sought police protection and was raped again while she was under that protection. Ali Rameez shared a link to the news with this statement: ‘Democracy changed India from rural to a rapist country...[#shame](#)’ (7 March 2014).

He thinks man-made laws are invalid, and that the only laws that should be implemented in the Maldives is Shari’a.

Women are also an important topic for Rameez, and he has much to say on the subject. He speaks of the obligation of wives to acquiesce to sex when the husband wants it and also states that 'unless a woman attends to the obligations to her husband, it cannot be said that she attended to the obligations to her God' (10 January 2014). The post was liked by 713 followers and shared 77 times. Rameez referenced 'Haadith' as the source for his post. He also had a discussion on television (video clip shared on his FB page, 13 January 2014) about a draft bill in the Maldives Majlis which defines as rape sexual intercourse forced on a wife by a husband. He, and the cleric, disagree with the law, and finds Islamic sources to back up their stance. Rameez supports female circumcisions, and sees it as a Sunnah. To support his stance, he posted the following link, which discusses 'the medical benefits of female circumcision' with reference to Islamic teachings: <http://islamqa.info/en/45528> The post was liked by 125 people and shared by three. On 27 March he shared a post from RaajjelIslam.com which claimed in America there was a large increase of older women committing sexual offences against young boys.

On 18 January, when the Elections Commission publicized voters lists with pictures, displaying faces of women who have chosen to wear face veils, Rameez objected to it on his Facebook Page, describing it as a violation of the said women's rights. The posts were liked by over 700 people.

Ali Rameez is also a leading voice against allowing guest houses on inhabited islands, allowing common people to join the billion dollar tourism industry instead of being left out of it by strict government policies that only allow resorts to be operated on uninhabited islands. He describes it as a policy that would 'inevitably demonstrate bitter results for this Islamic nation'.

He is the compere of a public forum launched in January 2014 called Salaf Talks where the public are invited to ask questions on religious matters from designated clerics. He also presents a show on Sun TV called 'What is the Question' where he presents questions from the audience to various 'scholars' appointed by Salafis. In February 2014 he presented the 135<sup>th</sup> episode of the programme. He advertises the show on his FB page and also posts clips of them on both Facebook and Twitter. Some of the topics discussed are political-religious such as death penalty others are related to the conduct of the Muslim self while some others dispense advice on how to protect oneself from supernatural being such as Jinns and Satans. On 7 April, he put up a link to a recording of the show, made available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/Jamiyyathsalaf> .



He is a vocal supporter of the death penalty, and welcomed the decision of the current Maldivian government to end the 53 year old moratorium on capital punishment. ‘Allah Akbar!’ he declared, posting the news that Home Minister Umar Naseer was signing into law the decision to re-start implementing the death penalty in the Maldives. The post, on 23 January 2014, was liked 1,057 times and shared 53 times. Those

who object to Shari’a he describes as Munafiqs. On 30 January, he shared news that Saudi Arabia had beheaded an Indian who was accused of murder. The post was liked by 494 people and shared by 53. He also used a post from a group called Bilad Al-Sham News and Updates (unlikely to be the real Bilad Al-Sham as this one carried an ISIS flag), which also denounced those who do not support the implementation of Shari’a.

Ali Rameez also appears to be an Event Manager for Salaf, advertising visits from foreign clerics, meeting and greeting them, and being very active in the promotion of such events.

## Observations

An overwhelming majority of Maldivian religious clerics subscribe to the idea of a Maldivian society ruled by Sharia. Their vision for the Maldives is an Islamic state where citizens live by strict Salafi and Wahabbi interpretations of Islam. A vast network of these clerics exist. They are connected nationwide to their followers—and to each other—through the Internet twenty four hours a day. These groups and individuals are highly organised and extremely active. Driven by the mission to issue the Call to Islam to all Maldivian Muslims perceived to be in need of reform, they criss-cross the islands continuously, on missionary journey that run throughout the year. They hold daily prayer meetings; lectures after prayers; lectures for parents; lectures for students; lectures for young women; camps for boys; Eid celebrations for everyone. These various organisations and individuals all disseminate some core messages to the populace that remain constant: democracy is not compatible with Islam and must be rejected as an ‘UnIslamic Import’ from the Infidels in the West; all non-believers should be hated and disliked; it is okay to be racist about non-believers; ‘us’ and ‘them’ divides the world; and, the West is conducting a War on Islam. The Internet provides an open space where these ideas can easily be disseminated to a population where communities, who live separated from each other by the ocean, are brought together as one audience.

With the silent revolution in religious beliefs in the Maldives, a handful of Sheikhs have emerged as ‘thought leaders’ in society. In the past decade or so, a certain type of preacher has emerged as popular: someone who can recite from the Qur’an and Hadith in heavy Arabic accents; dress like a Sheikh; and can command tears to fall at whim. Some of the performances are reminiscent of theatrical Evangelical churches in the United States. Sheikh Shameem, with 20,000 followers is the most popular figure by well over 2000 people. Shameem’s media profile is typical of popular preachers. he has a website, a Facebook Page, a Twitter handle; an Instagram account; a YouTube Channel; and a charity organisation that also promotes the Sheikh and all his activities. All Sheikh Shameem’s lectures are advertised on all his social media platforms and they are video-taped with full lectures put up on YouTube shortly after the event. The lectures are also downloadable as audio files. Backing up this strong appearance online is traditional media, radio and television which often broadcast the lecture live. Not to be forgotten is Internet live streaming of the same event. Sheikh Shameem is representative of the shared vision of the clerics who dominate Maldivian religious discourse. He is staunchly against democracy; supports FGM; think women who do not wear the black veil are naked and without shame; believes music is haram; wants Maldives to be run according to Shari’a. He preaches hate against the Infidels, anyone who is not Muslim. He, too, believes Muslims are at war with the West, and rightly so.

### 2.3 Supporters of Jihad on Facebook

In May 2014 local media broke the news that a Maldivian man, who went by the name of Abu Turab, had been killed fighting in Syria<sup>35</sup>. A few days later, there was news that another Maldivian had been killed in Syria. He, too, had been fighting in Syria with Jabhat Al-Nusra<sup>36</sup>. These news items brought Jihad to the forefront of national consciousness, and became the predominant topic of public discourse. In June 2014 ISIS entered Iraq and declared the Caliphate, calling itself the Islamic State. The dataset analysed in this section, Facebook Pages of 100 Maldivians, was collected in July and August of 2014, when Maldivian interest in the subject was still at its peak. The collection was made through random browsing of Facebook Pages. Selections were made if any individual was using ISIS/IS related insignia or pictures as their Display Picture [Profile Picture] or Cover Page. Profiles of those who were using material associated with other Jihadis, such as the black flag used by fighters with Jabhat Al-Nusra—with whom most Maldivian fighters in the region are affiliated with—were also added to the collection. Most of the profiles adopted the black flag of IS as their logo/cover picture or had a black flag with the Shahadath printed on it in white, preferred by Al-Nusra. The few that did not have either, had pictures of warriors on horseback fighting in the desert with swords. One had a map of the world

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<sup>35</sup> Ahmed Rilwan, ‘Maldivian militant killed in Syrian suicide attack, claims online jihadist group’, 25 May 2014, Minivan News. Last accessed: <http://minivannews.com/politics/maldivian-militant-killed-in-syria-suicide-attack-claims-online-jihadist-group-85600> on 26 February 2015

<sup>36</sup> Ahmed Naish, ‘Second Maldivian killed in Syria, claims jihadist media’, 27 May 2014, Minivan News, Last accessed: <http://minivannews.com/society/second-maldivian-killed-in-syria-claims-jihadist-media-85809> on 26 February 2015

covered by the IS flag while several had display pictures of fighters wearing balaclavas (IS style), and carrying weapons.

This report did not analyse the content of the pages, most of it was not public and only available to Friends of the owners of the pages. Most of them, however, revealed certain amounts of information such as their professional and/or educational backgrounds.

People from all works of life in the Maldives support Jihad. A large number of them are in the Civil Service, which is not surprising that a large percentage of the Maldivian workforce is in the civil service. Among supporters of Jihad are staff from the Ministry of Islam Affairs; the Prosecutor General's Office; Ibrahim Nasir International Airport; Gan International Airport; Correctional Services; Housing Development Authority; the Indhira Gandhi Memorial Hospital; and Customs. Among the professions on the list are journalists; software designers; airline technicians; teachers; spiritual healers; airport workers; divers; construction workers; preachers; spiritual healers; airline ticketing agents; Qur'an teachers; and prison officers. Judging from the educational affiliations provided, a significant number list the Maldives National University (MNU) as their college while another significant number also list the Centre for Higher Secondary Education (CHSE). This supports the unofficial reports long in circulation that both institutions have teachers and lecturers who subscribe to the Salafist radical ideologies and have been instructing students to follow the same path. Another significant number of the Profiles are associated with the Centre for Holy Qur'an, also suspected to be an institution where radical ideologies are being taught.

One of the profiles that had been deleted belonged to an Abu Dujanah Al-Maaldeefi. He was included in the collection because he had a picture of Jihadi fighters on his cover-page, and the profile picture of a man wearing a balaclava, looked authentic rather than a picture taken from the Internet and pasted, as many seemed to be. He also gave his location as Idleb, Syria. [This did not, however, mean that the information was necessarily true. As has been widely discussed in the media recently, one of the main problems of conducting research on online radicalisation is that fake identities, falsely claiming to be in conflict zones when they are not, is a common enough occurrence<sup>37</sup>.] That is to say, Abu Dujanah was included in the dataset not because of any certain knowledge that he was in Syria, but because of the pictures on his cover photo, and also some pictures from Syria on his Facebook page shared with the public. Of the 100 people in the dataset (29 percent) were friends with Abu Dujanah on Facebook.

In early September 2014, local media reported that two more Maldivians had been killed in Syria. One of them had the 'Jihadhi name', for want of a better term, of Abu Dujanah. Local media also identified Abu Dujana as Yameen Naeem

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<sup>37</sup> For an example of this, read 'Shami Witness unmasked: 'I will not resist arrest', Channel 4 News, 12 December 2014. Last accessed: <http://www.channel4.com/news/police-bangalore-islamic-state-twitter-shami-witness> on 3 March 2015

of Georgia in the Maafannu ward of the capital Malé, who reportedly travelled to Syria after studying in Egypt<sup>38</sup>. Bilad Al-Sham Media [analysed later], which has established itself as the voice of Maldivian Jihadists in Syria, also claimed that Abu Dujanah was the editor of their website<sup>39</sup>.

When the same set of profiles were examined six months later, at the end of January 2015, an interesting change had occurred. 44 of the profiles had been removed. One of the suspended ones was that of Abu Dujanah. Another suspended account belonged to an Abu Ubaidah Al-Maldeefee. He also gave his location as Syria. His cover photo was that of the black flag used by Jabhat Al-Nusra fighters. No news of his death has appeared anywhere. It is very likely that the suspensions are due to a 'cull' by Facebook, as it steps up its efforts to prevent Facebook being used as a platform for terrorists and radicals to disseminate their messages. Interestingly, of the accounts that have not been removed most have now removed the IS/Al-Nusra associated material from their Facebook profiles. Again, the reason for this change cannot be said for certain – it could be that once the novelty of Maldivians being killed in Jihad wore off, people are less interested in the subject; it could be due to Facebook's stricter controls; or, it could be a combination of both. It is also possible that people are less attracted to Jihad, and radicalisation is slowing down in the Maldives. This, however, seems the least likely reason for the reduction in visible support for Jihad among the individuals in this dataset given that the number of Maldivians leaving for Jihad has increased steadily since the dataset was collected.

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<sup>38</sup> 'Jihadist media claims two more Maldivians killed in Syria', Minivan News, 2 September 2014. Accessed: <http://minivannews.com/society/jihadist-media-claims-two-more-maldivians-killed-in-syria-89915> 27 February 2015

<sup>39</sup> For more insights into the life of Abu Dujanah, and about the process of radicalisation in the Maldives, read 'The Biography of Abu Dujanah Al-Maldeefee', Bilad Al-Sham Media, 18 November 2014. Accessed online <https://biladalsham.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/abu-muhammad-maldifi.pdf> on 7 March 2015



## 2.4 Dedicated websites

There are dozens of websites currently in the Maldives that disseminate religious advice, teachings and ideologies. A large number of the civil society organisations, which were discussed in the Facebook Pages section all, have their own websites. There are also several sites that combine news and religious advice while some focus on certain segments of the population like women or youth. The following three websites have been selected on the basis of the types of content they cover: 1. Haqqu, is a site run from the Maldives which disseminates Jihadi literature and news; 2. RaajjeIslam provides news and religious advice, views and opinions; and the third represents the foreign fighters in Syria, and is widely believed to be run by foreign fighters based in Syria.

### 1. Haqqu



Haqqu is a website launched in August 2014, shortly after the proclamation of the Islamic State in Iraq. It began with a Facebook Page, which was launched on 5 August 2014. The Facebook Page is still in operation, and at the beginning of March, had over 800 Likes. It is not analysed in this report due to the lesser amount of followers compared to the Pages that were analysed; and also because the decision was made to analyse its website instead. Haqqu is also on Twitter [[@haqqu\\_official](#)] but the account is not very active. It has 117 followers, has Tweeted only 19 times, and follows only one person - [@ShamiWitness](#) the 'Jihadi' who was exposed as a man living in Bangalore rather than a Mujahid fighting in Syria. It's last Tweet [as seen at the beginning of March 2015] was on 28 November.

Haqqu has a domain name based in Gabon: [www.haqqu.ga](http://www.haqqu.ga) Its sole purpose is to promote Jihad, specifically as interpreted by Islamic State [IS]. The header, as seen from the picture below, carries the IS logo.

The site has nine sections: FrontPage; News; Aqīdah [creed]; Writings; Books; History; Health; Analysis; and Technology. It should be noted that all articles and posts are made under pseudonyms, many beginning with Abu, as is the norm with all Maldivian fighters in Syria.

The FrontPage and News sections are entirely dedicated to bringing news of IS related news and developments. News of beheadings is published with pictures, many of them graphic. Going through the archives, some notable items include

messages from the ‘Allah’s Martyrs’ who carried out the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, news that IS started manufacturing its own weapons; and a news report where people living in the Islamic State profess to be surprised by IS’s mercy in place of the cruelty they expected.

In the Creed [Aqīdah] section are various writings that justify the practices of the Islamic State with reference to various Islamic texts; writings that explain who the real Khawarij [the real extremists] are; in-depth analyses of idol worship; calls to fear Allah’s laws; and denouncements of nationalism, which according to the writings have a negative impact on the identity of the Ummah.

The ‘Writings’ section covers a variety of topics from journalism to women’s rights and false propaganda against the Islamic State. In a piece about journalism (Abu Kathir, 19 February 2015), the author criticises journalism in the Maldives for forgetting about Shari’a and following principles of democracy. With the headline ‘The Dirty Pen of Journalism’, the article denounces Maldivian journalists who report on Jihad for describing them in negative terms instead of giving the honour they deserve for engaging in such a noble activity. Another article explores the rights and wrongs of leaving wives and children behind when going to Jihad and another calls on women to hold their heads high; and another explores the rights and wrongs of levying tax on Infidels who are not residents of a country. An article published on 18 September 2014, ‘From a life of comfort in London to Syria!’ glorifies the phenomenon of British foreign fighters while another provides a favourable comparison of the Islamic State with other states (17 September 2014). Another article demands the right to fly the Islamic State flag in the Maldives, and criticises Maldivians who discussed its presence in Male’ as ‘frightening’ and ‘dangerous’.



Figure 3 Cover of 'The Dust Will Never Settle Down', a Dhivehi translation of a lecture by Anwar Al-Awlaki

To date there are three items in the Books category. The first, dated 07 May 2009 (before the website was launched), has the title ‘This is the promise of Allah’. The second book, ‘A Message to Mujahids and the Islamic Ummah in Ramadan’ is dated 29 August 2014; and the third book is ‘The Dust Will Never Settle Down’ uploaded on 02 February 2015. While the first two books are short, and the contents are published on the website itself, the third book is a 56-page translation of a lecture given by Anwar Al-Awlaki<sup>40</sup>. It was translated to Dhivehi by an Abu Abdul Rahman Al-Maldifi [a pseudonym] and is available for download from the website in PDF form.

The first item uploaded in the History section is a biography, or more accurately a hagiography, of Al-

<sup>40</sup> The lecture, delivered in English, is available in full on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbzdeXMIMdQ>, Accessed online on 26 February 2015

Baghdadi, the Caliph of Islamic State (28 September 2014). This is followed by an item discussing the First Caliphate under Abu Bakr, after which is a profile of Sheikh Abdulla Yousuf Al Azzam [also known as the Father of Global Jihad]<sup>41</sup>, who is described as Sheikh-Al Mujahidin in the article.

The Health section has three articles: one speaks of the health benefits of the olive; the second discusses the merits of brushing teeth with a brush made from the areca palm; while the third argues against vaccinating children (22 September 2014) which is an increasing problem faced in the Maldives as more and more people object to vaccination in the name of religion.

The Analysis section repeats two posts from other sections – one on ‘dirty journalism’ and the one against vaccinations [both discussed above] – and two other articles. One of them is a discussion of ‘Ijthihad’, an Islamic legal term meaning ‘independent reasoning’ (7 November 2014). The second is an article which alleges that the United States has banned Maldivian journalists from publishing any positive coverage of Jihadis. According to the writer of the piece, ‘The “Secret” Consultations of Maldives News Providers with the Blatant Infidels of the United States’ (2 October 2014), the US sent a delegation to meet with Maldivian news editors who ordered the journalists to stop writing anything that supports Jihad, and to ‘write in ways that would produce as much hatred of the Caliphate amongst people as possible’. According to the article, Haqqu was informed of the ‘secret’ meeting by some of the editors. The article accuses the United States of waging a war against Islam, and also of having Maldivians working as spies for the US. ‘These spies travel to America once a year’, and also allegedly inform the US, through the American embassy in Colombo. As proof of the ‘secret meeting’, the article carries a montage of headlines from Haveeru [main local daily newspaper] which uses the common term ‘died’ for Osama bin Laden and members of other terrorist organisations while they use a different term [also meaning died]<sup>42</sup> for foreign leaders such as Ariel Sharon and others.

In the Analysis section are four articles, two to do with technology in general and two related to the Islamic State. One of the latter two is an announcement that the second version of the special ‘Islamic State font’ in Dhivehi is available for download [5 October 2014] and the other is a translation of a news item from Reuters which reported that an average of 1000 people join the Islamic State every three days (13 September 2014).

## 2. RaajjeIslam

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<sup>41</sup> For an introduction to the Sheikh Abdulla Yousuf Al Azzam, see the following article by ‘Perspectives on World History and Current Events’ <http://www.pwhce.org/azzam.html> Accessed on 27 February 2015

<sup>42</sup> The Maldivian language has three tiers, a system inherited from the times of monarchy, in which people belonging to three different ‘classes’ in society are addressed differently.

The website has been in operation from 2009, and has five main sections: FrontPage; Writings, Quran; Audio and News. The main section is Writings, which has a dropdown menu with six links: Religious Writings; General Writings; Fatwa; Books; Health and Poetry. The Quran section also has a dropdown menu, with three options: Recitation; Translation; Quran and Science. The Audio section offers: Lectures; Call for Prayers; and Miscellaneous. The News section provides up to date local news. This report focuses on the content in the main Writings section.

Articles appearing in the Religious Writings section are similar in content to the material posted on Facebook by the various NGOs as analysed previously in this report. There is a large amount of content, reflecting the length of time the website has been operational. The Religious Writings section contains 81 pages, the first one dating back to 22 March 2009. The topics are varied, and most aim to govern the conduct of the Muslim self; displays a lot of concern for the afterlife; and often repeats the narrative of the Muslim Ummah being persecuted by Infidels. The site also contains articles which call for separation between Muslims and Others, the latter being Infidels. One such article, 'Distance yourselves from being similar to non-believers', has a picture of a national football team (France) and, with reference to Hadith, describes the act of such distancing as desired and practised by the Prophet (18 June 2012). Many articles stress this division between Muslims and Infidels and discuss the wrongness of associating with the Others, and allowing so-called 'LaaDheenee' [irreligious] thought to take hold in society. Examples of such LaaDheene thought and actions include, according to content on this website, celebrating occasions marked in non-Muslim societies such as New Year and Christmas; believing in evolution; being critical of Shari'a; saying that Shari'a violates human rights; allowing the media to publish material that encourages 'hedonistic' behaviour; and allowing Western philosophical thoughts to contaminate Islamic creed.

There are also several articles that deal with the supernatural – possession by Jinns, diseases caused by Jinns and so on. There is also an entire article denouncing a Maldivian blogger who prayed that Steve Jobs would go heaven. The RaajjeIslam article is incensed that someone would pray that Infidel goes to heaven (11 October 2011).

Several articles focus on the role of women as obedient wives and stress the importance of wives obeying their husbands. One article dated 16 March 2010 asks whether it is permissible in Islamic Shari'a for women to be appointed as rulers. The answer according to the article, which refers to various Hadith and other Islamic writings, is No.

Another article claims that 'appointing women as leaders and judges is a violence committed against them' (16 March 2010). Many also dispense advice on

marriage and love life in general. There are also 'Islamic' perspectives on various issues, sometimes surprising ones, such as 'Swine Flu From a Religious Perspective'. The hatred of democracy present in the various Facebook pages are also present on this site, with one article claiming that 'The Real Terrorists are Democratists [supporters of democracy]. Like the material on Facebook Pages discussed previously, RaajjeIslam also supports the implementation of strict Shari'a rule in the Maldives. There are several articles dedicated to the greatness of Shari'a and to the wrongness of criticising it in any way (9 November 2011; 13 November 2011; 15 November 2011).

One article (29 November 2009) discusses why churches cannot be allowed in the Maldives [written at a time when then President Mohamed Nasheed was falsely accused of trying to allow the same]; while another is about 'Suicide Attacks'. Interestingly, although the headline remains, the content of the article has now been removed from the site. Another article says Islam forbids music, singing and dancing (14 March 2010). In November 2010, the website tackled the question of Jihad by posting an article with the headline, 'Even if war is something you do not desire...' With reference to an Arabic sentence [maybe a verse from the Quran, but it does not specify], it provides a translation which says that 'war has been made an obligation for you, even if you may not desire it.' It goes on to say that sometimes what people desire maybe bad for them while at other times what people don't want maybe good for them. Allah knows best what is good and what is bad.

### 3. Bilad Al-Sham Media



Bilad Al-Sham Media describes itself as the official media representative of Maldivians fighting in Syria. It was started on 15 August 2013. It is likely that the claim is true. The organisation, which also has a Facebook Page, brought news of the first Maldivian death in Syria, and has since been providing local media with details of the Maldivian 'community' of over 50-200 people now said to be residing in Syria having heeded the call to Jihad. The Bilad Al Sham website is

entirely dedicated to Jihad-related news, literature and discussions. Most of its content is written in English. According to its own news reports, one of the Maldivians killed fighting in Syria (September 2014), Abu Dujanah, was the editor of the organisation. This, too, is likely to be true—the website has been much less active since September 2014. There have been no new posts since 4 December 2014.

With regard to the content of the website, until recently, it was meticulous in providing ‘biographies’ of the Maldivians who are ‘martyred’ fighting with Jabhat Al-Nusra. They made available, for example, the biographies of Abu Dujanah Al Maldeefee<sup>43</sup> (18 November 2014), ‘Maldivian Martyrdom Bomber’, Abu Turab (15 June 2014) and Abu Nuh (1 June 2014). They were all written by Abu Ayyub Al Maldifi, based in Syria (his Twitter account is analysed below). Although there have been other Maldivian deaths reported<sup>44</sup> since Abu Dujanah’s in September 2014, the Bilad Al Sham Media website has not provided any literature on their lives or deaths.

Apart from the biographies, the entire focus of Bilad Al-Sham Media is to provide evidence from Islamic teachings and history that support and encourage Maldivians to join the Jihad with Jabhat Al-Nusra. Among its most popular posts are ‘First Chapter: Forty Hadith about the virtues of Martyrdom’<sup>45</sup>, a poem by one of the ‘martyrs’ dedicated to his mother posted as an audio file uploaded on YouTube<sup>46</sup>; and a post on why ISIS should not be supported, ‘Clearing the Accusations against Ahlul-Jihad and clarifying the errors of Jama’at ISIS’<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> For the full biography, visit <https://biladalsham.wordpress.com/2014/11/18/the-biography-of-abu-dujanah/>, Bilad Al Sham Media, 18 November 2014. Last accessed 5 March 2015

<sup>44</sup> Maldivian Jihadist fighter dies in Syria, Minivan News, 8 November 2015 <http://minivannews.com/society/maldivian-jihadist-fighter-dies-in-syria-90883> Last accessed on 5 March 2015

<sup>45</sup> ‘First Chapter: Forty Hadith about the virtues of Martyrdom’, Bilad Al-Sham Media, 9 June 2014. Accessed online: <https://biladalsham.wordpress.com/2014/06/09/first-chapter-forty-hadith-about-the-virtues-of-martyrdom/> on 5 March 2015

<sup>46</sup> Abu Nuh Al-Muhaajir, ‘Loabivaa Mamma’ [Beloved Mother], Bilad Al-Sham Media, 16 August 2014. Accessed online at: <https://biladalsham.wordpress.com/2013/08/16/loabivaa-mamma-abu-nuh-al-muhaajir/> on 5 March 2015

<sup>47</sup> ‘Clearing the Accusations against Ahlul-Jihad and clarifying the errors of Jama’at ISIS’, Bilad Al-Sham Media, 5 July 2014. Accessed online at: <https://biladalsham.wordpress.com/2014/07/05/clearing-the-accusations-against-ahlul-jihad-and-clarifying-the-errors-of-jamaat-isis/> on 5 March 2015

## 2.5 Radical Tweeting

Until a few years ago, very few Maldivians used Twitter. Those who did were young, educated, and tech-savvy; not a representation of the general population. Things changed shortly after the events of 7 February 2012 which led to the forced resignation of the country's first democratically elected President Mohamed Nasheed. As it happened in Iran (2009-2010); Tunisia (2010-2011) and Egypt (2011), with the social and political unrest which followed the fall of Nasheed's government, the number of Twitter users in the Maldives exploded. Just as it happened in elsewhere, it became a weapon of protest, a platform for expressing dissent, and a tool for mobilising against anti-democratic activities which followed. As the country remains in political turmoil at present, Twitter remains primarily a political platform. Its use as a platform for dissemination and discussion of religious matters is limited but not unknown or ineffective. Many clerics mentioned above are also on Twitter. Ali Rameez, the artist/Salafi Spokesperson regularly uses Twitter. For the most part, all these figures use Twitter to advertise their off-line activities, and to provide links to religious material that support their cause. However, follower numbers, which remains in the hundreds for most, show that among their followers, Facebook is still by far the more popular social media platform.

Rather than focus on the Twitter accounts of religious clerics who use mostly Facebook, the analysis below, therefore, focuses mainly on the accounts of Maldivian Twitter users who are associated with Jihad. Three of the four accounts are belong to Maldivians in Syria, and are being updated from the battleground. The fourth belongs to Soldiers of Islam, which is operated from the Maldives, and has been included to provide a brief synopsis of what the general content of such an account is like.

### 1. Bilad Al Sham Media

[@BiladAlSham\\_Dhi](#)

1,330 Tweets

2,195 Followers

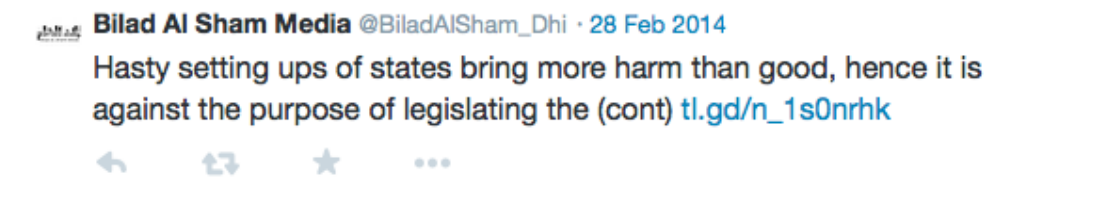
405, Following

Bilad Al Sham Media began Tweeting in February 2014, four months before they became widely known in the Maldives, for bringing reliable news about Maldivian Jihadists in Syria fighting with Jabhat Al-Nusra. Most of its original Tweets are links to Arabic writings, and sometimes their translations, that support Jihad. It also Tweets news about the Maldivian community in Syria. Sometimes the whole content is in Arabic.

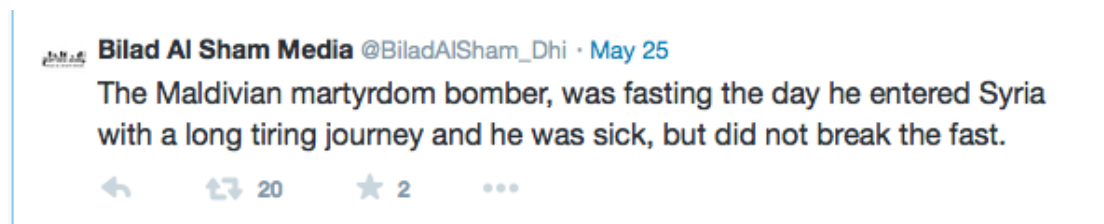
Bilad Al-Sham also regularly criticises the IS for being anti-Islamic, and also extremist. The following Tweet is an example:



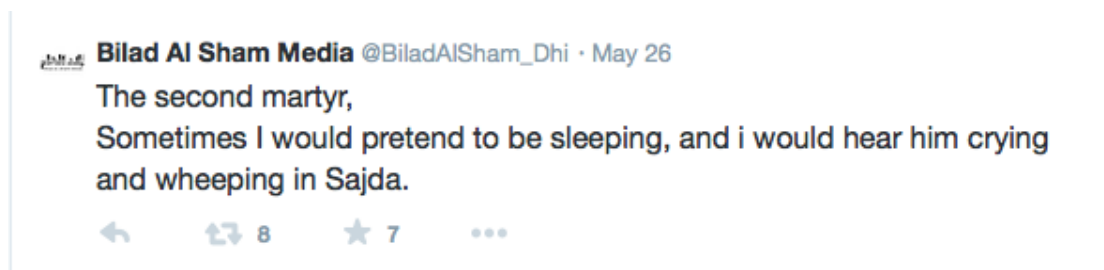
And this Tweet, before the official proclamation of the Islamic State in June 2014



On 25 May 2014, it Tweeted about the death of the first Maldivian in Syria and followed it up with another Tweet that provided more details.



This was a time when the Bilad Al Sham Media account was most active, especially in interacting with the Maldives. On the same day that it announced the death of the ‘Martyrdom Bomber’, it also used the TwitLonger App to relay the last words he had from the deceased<sup>48</sup>, and also Tweeted directly to local online newspaper Minivan News, challenging their coverage of the death. The Tweet said, ‘There are some lies and twisting of words by minivan news. I will write a few notes insha Allah ehen [sic] i get to a laptop’ (25 May 2014). The following day, Bilad Al Sham Tweeted news of the second death, also followed by personal details about the deceased.



This was followed by two Tweets which gave more details – that the two fighters had argued with each other over who should join the operation and that in the

<sup>48</sup> For the full text visit TwiLonger: [http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n\\_1s1sltb](http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n_1s1sltb). Last Accessed on 6 March 2015.



end they went together, and were killed together. On May 27 it Tweeted a full criticism of Minivan News of its coverage. The Tweet was linked to its Facebook page, which is no longer available. Several similar Tweets followed, informing Maldivians about the two martyrs, providing links to biographies of their lives, and also the reaction from the families of the deceased. Tweets were also sent from the account saying that two deceased men ‘used to hate J.ISIS.’ According to Bilad Al-Sham, Abu Nuh was ‘ready to go to Deir al-Zour to ward off their oppression’ (29 May 2014). On 29 May, it Tweeted a link to a video from Syria, showing the attack in which Abu Turab (Martyrdom Bomber) was killed<sup>49</sup>.

During this period, Bilad Al-Sham also interacted directly with local newspaper Haveeru, finding its coverage wanting. It also directly challenged the Maldives Police Service for announcing that they were investigating the issue of Maldivians going to Jihad. Like most of the longer Tweets, these messages were connected to Bilad Al Sham’s Facebook Page, which cannot be accessed any longer. On the first of June 2014, it used Justpasteit.com to convey a message to the Sheikhs of Maldives, calling upon them to “stand up for the Salafiyya and declare the truth without fearing the Tughat. Else wait for the day when a person runs away from his wife and children”<sup>50</sup>.



On 3 June, Bilad Al Sham Media Tweeted that it had left an important detail out of the biography of the deceased Abu Nuh: he had taken part in the attack on the Maldives National Museum. The attack on 8 February 12, the day after the alleged coup on 7 February, destroyed historic artifacts belonging to the pre-Islamic Buddhist

era of Maldivian history<sup>51</sup>. On the same day, it also spoke of ‘the gay in New Zealand’<sup>52</sup>, leaving a long comment on Facebook which cannot be accessed now.

<sup>49</sup> The video is available in full on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVBKGZxfQWI> Accessed online on 7 May 2015.

<sup>50</sup> The full text of this message is available at: <https://justpaste.it/QAfourteen> Accessed on 7 March 2015

<sup>51</sup> “Hawwa Lubna, Mob storms National Museum, destroys Buddhist statues: “A significant part of our heritage is lost now”, Minivan News, 9 February 2012. Last accessed: <http://minivannews.com/society/mob-storms-national-museum-destroys-buddhist-statues-a-significant-part-of-our-heritage-is-lost-now-31813> on 7 March 2015

<sup>52</sup> This is a reference to a gay Maldivian who sought asylum in New Zealand. For more information read, Mariyath Mohamed, “Maldivian asylum seekers assured of prosecution upon return, says President’s Office’, Minivan News, 3 June 2014. Last accessed <http://minivannews.com/politics/maldivian-asylum-seekers-assured-of-prosecution-upon-return-says-presidents-office-86360> on 6 March 2015

For a while it continued to provide news and information related to the deceased Maldivian Jihadists, Tweeting the following picture of the second ‘martyr’ Abu Nuh on , and also a link to a video Question and Answer session [in Arabic between] Abu Nuh and a Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Suri (10 June 2014). The video has since been removed by YouTube ‘because its content violated YouTube’s Terms of Service’.



On 2 September 2014, Bilad Al Sham Media reported via its Facebook Page that two more Maldivians had been killed in Syria<sup>53</sup>. This news, however, was conveyed via its Facebook Page (now non-existent) and was not Tweeted. This maybe due to the fact that one of the people killed, Abu Dujanah, was reported as the editor of the Bilad Al Sham Media website. It is likely that he may also have been operating the Twitter account. The Twitter returned to reporting deaths again in November 2014, when on the 7<sup>th</sup> it reported that an Abu Fulan had been killed. This was followed by a Tweet 11 days later which provided a link to the biography of Abu Dujanah who had been killed in September and several Tweets that shared pictures of him. In December, pictures were Tweeted of Abu Dujanah’s workplace in Syria from where he edited the website and was active on the Internet. So far there has been no biography of the man killed in November, and there has been a significant decrease in the account’s activities compared to earlier in 2014 when news of the deaths of first Maldivian Jihadists first broke. Months now go between Tweets. The latest Tweet concerning a Maldivian in Syria was on March 7, when a picture was posted of Maldivians in Syria playing a football game against Indonesians.

<sup>53</sup> “Jihadist media claims two more Maldivians killed in Syria”, Minivan News, 2 September 2014. Accessed online: <http://minivannews.com/society/jihadist-media-claims-two-more-maldivians-killed-in-syria-89915> 6 March 2015

 **Bilad Al Sham Media** @BiladAlSham\_Dhi · Mar 7

Maldivian vs indonesian mujahideen playing futball yesterday in the playground of recently freed area by mujaahideen.



  86  48 

[View more photos and videos](#)

## 2. Abu Ayub

[@abuayubalmaldif](#)



322 Followers (March 2015)

75 Tweets

87 Following

Abu Ayub is a Maldivian fighting with Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria. His Twitter account, like other Maldivian fighters' is only sporadically active. Much of his Tweets are against the IS. He is also a contributor to the Bilad Al Sham Media website (analysed above), and wrote the biographies of three Maldivians who died fighting in Syria. He also contributes other material to the website calling for Maldivians to join the Jihad.

On 2 March, he Tweeted a picture of a new-born girl. According to his Tweet, the baby was born to @AbuYunus123, another Maldivian fighting in Syria. The Tweet includes two pictures, one a close up of the baby, and the other a picture

of the baby in the arms of Abu Yunus. The picture is not taken in the Maldives. The man cannot be identified from the picture. Beside him are two guns. The account of @AbuYunus123 has been suspended and cannot be accessed.



The day before, he also posted a picture, saying that @AbuYunus123 was preparing to perform Aqeeqa (an animal sacrifice) for his baby:



These pictures are evidence of ‘the Maldivian community’ which is reported to be flourishing, and growing in size, in Syria.

In February, he was in a village near Marrat Norman where he was attending lectures and programmes of a Dawah project. As discussed previously in this report, many Dawah projects are now held on various islands across the Maldives on a regular basis all year round.

The destination for Jihadis fighting with Abu Ayub seems to be Al Aqsa in Jerusalem, as indicated by the following Tweet on February 12.



Abu Yunus, like all other Maldivians fighting in Syria with Jabhath Al-Nusra, has connections with Bilad Al-Sham Media [discussed previously] which claims to be their official media representative. On February 12 he uploaded a video published by Bilad Al-Sham with the title – ‘Jabhat al-Nusra: The Path to Salvation’.

### 3. Abu Umar Al Maaldifi

[@AbuUmarMaaldifi](#)

17 Tweets

157 Followers

24 Following

Based in Syria [Shaam]



Abu Umar started Tweeting on 11 December 2015. By 1 March 2015 he had Tweeted 17 times. There hasn't been any Tweets since 19 January when he Tweeted a picture of the sunset in Ma'raa.

He shares the view, held by all Jihadis, that Islamic scholars who denounce their fight as un-Islamic and failing to meet the criteria of Jihad are themselves working against Islam. On January 19<sup>th</sup>, he Tweeted a message ‘To the “sheikhs of Maldives”’.

Zayd ibn Aslam, from his father, that the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu `alayhe wassallam) said: *"Jihad will remain fresh and green as long as raindrops fall from the sky. And there will come upon the people a time when Qur'an reciters from among them will say: "This is not the time of Jihad." So whoever comes to that time, then it is the best time for Jihad."* They said: "O Messenger of Allah, would someone really say that?" He said: *"Yes, the one whom Allah has cursed, and the angels and all of mankind."*<sup>8</sup>

He also Tweeted an explanation of why he chose to join the fighters in Syria (January 19)

Salamah bin Nufail said: While I was sitting with *Rasulullah* a man came to him and said, "O Messenger of Allah Horses are being humiliated (ignored), and weapons are being laid down and people are claiming there is no more Jihad and war has ended" *Rasoolullah* said: "*They are lying! Fighting has just begun! Fighting has just begun! And a party of my Ummah will remain fighting on the true path and Allah will deviate the hearts of some men and Allah will provide the fighters from them until the final hour starts and the promise of Allah is fulfilled and good is on the foreheads of horses until the day of Judgment. It is being revealed to me that I will be departing you soon and you would follow me while you are fighting each other and the house of the believers is in al Shaam.*"

He believes that he is fighting against the 'Kuffar of Assad', the non-believers of Assad. Before travelling to Ma'raa, he was Idlib, Syria, from where he Tweeted a picture of sunshine falling on grass, admiring its beauty.

Among the 24 people that Abu Umar follows is a member of the Maldives Immigration Department, where radicalisation is said to be rife. The Immigration official, Hussain Shiham [[@KalhuZakariya](#)] has a Twitter account where almost all Tweets are about the Syrian conflict, and Jihad. He follows 1,594 people a majority of whom are Sheikhs and scholars who support Jihad, or Jihadis. Unlike those fighting with Jabhat Al-Nusra, this man supports the IS, and Tweets often in support of the organisation.

#### 4. Soldiers of Islam

[@SoldiersofIslam](#)



On Twitter since March 2012  
7,374 Followers (March 2015)  
10,600 Tweets  
1,665 Following

Most of the Tweets by Soldiers of Islam are advertisements of various activities held in Male' and various other islands across the country by different clerics and religious groups. There is also a substantial number of Tweets alerting people to the five daily prayer calls.

Apart from these, the Twitter account shares the bite-size infographics so favoured by the Facebook Pages analysed above. Many are quotes from the Qur'an or Hadith, and are about the conduct of the Muslim self. Several are

prayers. Soldiers of Islam also comments on local and international affairs, Tweeting about the conflict in Ghaza, and about the implementation of Shari'a in the Maldives.

Tweets by soldiers of Islam does not express overt support for Jihad, but some Tweets do skirt around the issue. The following Tweet, for example, was sent out in August 2014 when Maldivian public discourse was dominated by activities of the IS, Jihad in general, and local support for these activities. It was claimed by many who were using the logo liberally on social media, that its use did not necessarily mean they support the IS. The claim is that, because it was Prophet Mohamed's seal, it can be used without it being associated with the Jihadi group. To take the debate further, Soldiers of Islam, also claimed that criticism for using the IS and Jihadi logos [which use the Shahadath on their flags] was not criticism of the killings and other violent activities conducted by these groups, but stems from the Infidel's hatred of the Shahadath.

### **3. Activities by Islamist NGOs and Islamic Ministry**

By Leevan Shareef

#### **3.1 Special events organised by Islamist NGOs or the Islamic Ministry**

##### **Sermon for Adh. Dhigurah School**

**Scholar: Sheikh Mohamed Shafiee**

**Venue: Adh. Dhigurah School**

This sermon was organized by the school, especially for the students. The Sheikh who gave the sermon was Sheikh Mohamed Shafiee, a graduate of Medinah University. The sermon was geared towards students, however adult participation was also allowed. The tone the sermon was delivered in was different from the usual tone of sermons. It might have been that since this was a sermon specifically targeted for children, but due to prevalent use of a harsh tone which creates fear in even most children's lecturers; it seems more likely that it was the choice of the specific Sheikh himself.

The topic of the sermon was "Obeying the parents". Obedience to parents was portrayed as an obligation upon everyone no matter how old or young. However it is blind obedience that was advocated in this sermon as long as the parent does not command the child to commit any act that is against Islam. The ever present message in this sermon was that you get to Paradise only through obeying and loving your parents. No matter how good you may be or no matter how much you worship; if you do not obey your parents, Paradise will be barred from you. The sheikh stated that only prayer comes before the parents and only after parents, comes jihad. He also states that the mother is also given a higher status than the father in Islam and that the way to Paradise is under the mother's feet meaning that loving and obeying the mother is the method to gaining a better afterlife.

Jihad was mentioned only a few times in this sermon. The Sheikh stated that "Jihad is one of the highest deeds that a Muslim could do and Mujahids get 72 Hurul-Ain (women in paradise), see their position in Paradise in this life, and can choose to exempt any person of their choice from hellfire although Jihad comes after attending to the parents specifically the mother." The glorification of Jihad in a sermon for young students is disturbing. Along with that, the talk of rewards for paradise was male biased, there was no mention of what would happen when a women went to paradise.



A case in which the mother was accused of beating her son to death happened a few days before this sermon. In the sermon, the Sheikh refers to the case as a unique case and mothers do not do that. He also bemoans the media coverage of the case versus media coverage of cases of children neglecting their parents. He sees cases of child abuse far less deserving of the media attention than cases of children neglecting parents.

The glorification of Jihad and the inaccurate portrayal of child abuse as rare are alarming when the sermon is targeted at a young audience. Combined with the Islamic syllabus they are taught in school and similar regular religious sermons; it's a high possibility that most of the young people when they finish grade 10 at this school, they will be to some degree radicalized.

### **The Message part 1/4**

**Date:** 24/01/2015.

**Person:** Skh. Adam Shameem.

**Venue:** Alimas Carnival, Male.

This is the first sermon of the four part program The Message organized by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The name of the sermon is "Our responsibility to our nation." Sheikh Adam Shameem is one of the high profile Sheikhs in the Maldives. In the past he has been overtly political and used religion as a tool to promote his politics. He has written essays on his own website adamshameem.com on religious topics. He has also been accused of being a radical Islamist which a look through his writings and his speeches makes the accusation to be a true one. He has also been accused of raising funds for jihadist groups in Syria although at the time of writing these claims are yet to be proved.

Adam Shameem starts off the sermon with thanking Allah and apologizing for the late start to the sermon. He uses the late start as an example of how the future is unknown except for Allah who is All-Knowing. He notes that although humans sometimes fail or be careless in the task they are assigned by Allah, by His generosity He forgives many of those mistakes. However sometimes to teach those people a lesson, to make them remember, to make them return to the right path from which they have strayed; He gives them a small taste of punishment. This is one example of the fear driven narrative Adam Shameem has become popular for.

"If we were to try and keep this beautiful pious Islamic Maldives an Islamic country, Allah would reward us by making it happen." After this statement he goes on to say that although there are righteous people and wrongdoers in society, the wrongdoers outnumber the righteous ones thereby allowing society to become corrupt and unIslamic. "It is our responsibility to espouse right above wrong for society. If we uphold this responsibility of ours, we will prosper into a peaceful Islamic society" "Even if countries make laws, the power of divine law cannot be denied." Adam Shameem denies that democracy and man made laws

have any power by this statement. This is a common subject with him; he denies the rule of manmade law over Muslims and espouses the idea that even though Sharia is not applied, it is the responsibility of Muslims to only follow divine law (Sharia). This is a danger to a fledgling democratic state such as Maldives. “Even if it is an unwanted pregnancy, it cannot be aborted. Because it is an *amaanaath*” By explicitly stating unwanted; the impression Adam Shameem gives here is that even in cases of sexual assault, it is forbidden in Islam to abort the fetus. However he goes on to say that there are some cases where scholars have made exceptions but he does not go into further detail on that matter. Adam Shameem expounds upon the topic of parental responsibilities saying that it is obligatory upon the father to provide for his family and obligatory upon the mother to care for the child. “No matter what kind of job she is working, no matter how well paid or prestigious it is, the first responsibility set upon her by Allah is to take care of her child.”

“There are children participating in Quran competitions that recite Quran beautifully, it is because their parents work for that. We do not see those children dancing and singing at places. On the other hand there are other children who do not know how to recite a single word of the Quran but they are children who have “talent(singing,dancing)”.” Adam Shameem states that the parents of the children who are talented will have to bear the evil of what they’d done. The evil he mentions here is allowing children to learn to sing/dance rather than reciting the Quran. He says that the people responsible for this evil are the ones who caused it in the first place i.e the parents, and that other people involved will also be held responsible for it. He portrays singing and dancing as one of the worst things a child could do.

Adam Shameem says that the cause for all the ills in society are due to parents not upholding their responsibility. The responsibility upon the parents as he sees it is the teaching of Islam, Islamic values, Quran to the children. Such a simplistic view of the society when widely propagated is damaging. In Adam Shameem’s opinion, society’s ills are only due to a lack of Islamicness. He goes on to say that person who does not uphold the first responsibility (prayer) the slave has to Allah cannot hope to be good and that anyone who desires to do good must first be a Muslim and uphold Islamic values no matter what. This implies that a Muslim is automatically good while a Christian, Jew or atheist are bad while ignoring whatever contributions to society by all of them.

“In the age when democracy is held in the utmost esteem, this will seem very odd.

. But I am not a person that feels too warm towards it (democracy). Therefore I will say very clearly that there is no philosophy, ideology, theory, nothing that can come close to the closeness that is there in the Islamic system of governance that Allah has bestowed upon us” Adam Shameem is stating that to achieve the best for the country, it is imperative that Maldivians take on the national responsibility of changing from democratic governance to Islamic governance. He does not state whether the Islamic governance would be a caliphate or anything

else. He then says: “Allah has commanded us to obey Waliul Amr unless he commands the people to do anything which are against Islamic laws. Then it would be a sin to obey him.” He talks about the protests that were occurring in the time period this sermon was held in. Adam Shameem has been close to the current ruling party before it’s election giving a politically charged xenophobic speech. He portrays the protestors as unIslamic due to protesting against their leader, the authorized leader (Waliul Amr).

“This is a Muslim society, Islamic country. Here Kufr and Shirk, these are things that come from the outside. We have to uphold our responsibilities to stop Kufr and Shirk from spreading among us.”

“There are some amongst our society who believe that the youth should get what they want. And they believe that what the youth want is sex, drugs and rock’n’roll. And these things; sex, drugs and rock n roll, come from the outside. This thinking is purely Western. This thinking is promoted by irreligious governments, secular governments and those with no religion. This thinking has come to Muslims from the outside. If we accept that thinking or tolerate it, how do we live in this country? How do we have assurance of our safety in this country?” Adam Shameem promotes the idea of a purely Islamic Maldivian society where anything that is contrary to Islam comes from outside influence. He makes it a national as well as religious responsibility for Maldivians to reject such influence.

"Protests have come from land of the Hindus, Europe and America. Protesting and rioting was not the way of our forefathers. It is not the way of us Muslims. India is a place ruled by their sorcerers. They have no culture, no path and no religion. They are ruled by their priests." Uninformed xenophobic comments such as this are a norm for Adam Shameem. As mentioned before, he advises Maldivians to view any thought or influence outside of Islam as it will not be beneficial purely due to it not being from Islam.

Adam Shameem laments the fact that people queued to enter a New Year music show before evening prayers and therefore missing prayers. He states that it is not even an Islamic show with songs that are purely vocal without music, but that it is a show with an infidel “baburu” (local term for blacks; in this context derogatorily used) brought from abroad.

Adam Shameem gave this sermon as the first of a four part series. The other participants in the series are Yasir Qadhi, Arnoud van Doorn and Tariq Ramadan. The tone of voice used in this sermon was one that is usually used in sermons with similar topics, a beseeching and sad one. In this event organized by the Islamic Ministry, Adam Shameem has given an extremely xenophobic sermon similar to his most famous “Al-Andalus” sermon. In both of these sermons he beseeches Maldivians to work to maintain the status of Maldives as a 100% Sunni Muslim country. He further urges Maldivians to not bow down to manmade law should it conflict with Islamic Sharia and work onwards implementing Islamic Sharia fully. As a popular sheikh with support from the Islamic Ministry and NGOs, he has a wide reach which sands as an obstacle to a free and democratic Maldives.

## **4. Informal information gathering session**

By Shahindha Ismail, Mushfiq Mohamed,

### **4.1 Focus Group discussions on Constitution: Rights**

The Project conducted informal information gathering through focus group discussions at island communities outside of Male', the capital city. The target was to meet with two groups of men and women separately. The island communities were selected based on their history and reputation for Islamist activities. Some of the islands are known for recruitment to Jihadi activities, most recently to Syria, and other islands known to have had serious clashes with the government for activities in the name of Islam, considered to be outside the boundaries of the laws. Some individuals from these communities have also been implicated in a bomb attack in the capital Male' and subsequently charged for terrorism.

The primary topic of discussion was the Chapter of Rights in the Constitution, and the questions used for the phone survey were formed within the discussion to analyse the group views.

#### **Views of men in the focus groups**

The views of men in the groups differed to some extent to those of the women. Some of the highlights of responses are that participants referred to Islamic Shari'a in formulating their views. None of the principles enshrined in the Constitution were used to balance their views, and use of logic was used sparingly.

The main ideas supported within the groups were that although a set of values were outlined in the Constitution, the Islamic Shari'a prevailed. They were of the view that the Constitution was written in light of international conventions and norms, and therefore imported from the "West", with no respect for Islam.

Other views indicated that in serious issues such as the implementation of the death penalty and flogging, participants accepted that the system developed in the Maldives to implement the death penalty is very different from other Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, in which Maldives lacked the security provided in Saudi Arabia through the multiple filters to ensure a conviction beyond doubt, and the system in the United States of America where convicts were kept on death row for longer terms which have resulted in charges being overturned over time. The conclusion by the groups were that the judicial system in the Maldives is presently too immature to implement such harsh punishments, and judges lacked the knowledge, experience and integrity to carry out such a verdict. However the groups believed that the death penalty is a critical part of criminal justice and deterrence to crime. In the case of flogging, the participants believed

that the fact where women faced unequal sentences when compared with men was simply that women were unfortunate to be the ones who get impregnated as a result of sexual intercourse, and once again believed that forensic evidence should be admissible to courts in order to be able to serve an equal sentence to the man and woman involved in the act. The group again believed that flogging and other capital punishment is a deterrence to crime.

When asked about immunisation as a basic right to health, the group agreed that immunisation is vital and that some local scholars who visit their communities promote refraining from it. They also mentioned having requested the government to provide the community with a cleric of the government's choice to help promote immunisation of babies with the assistance of a medical doctor so that the populace could be convinced of the need for it, but that none of the governments had responded to the request so far.

Some of the island communities have had internally displaced groups from the Tsunami who presently live on their islands. The participants report that some of these individuals are radicalized to the point of having their own congregations. The vast majority of women from that community wear the full veil (niqab). However as they have been slowly integrated amongst the original population, their views have been mixed with the original inhabitants, and this mixing have moved both ways, where a few of the radical practices have ceased as well as other radical views have spread further into the community. There is one family who has been home-schooling all of their female children and yet no action has been taken against them. These families have been conducting out of court marriages of girl children and the community is not fully aware of how many girls they are, since none of the girls are allowed to be seen outside of their homes.

A severe intolerance for those alleged of child abuse, murder and other serious crimes was noted, where an allegation of murder was presumed sufficient to pass a death sentence and even to the extent of denying legal representation.

In conclusion, it can be said that the men in the island communities, who lead the community by culture, have not been exposed to an alternative narrative of the notions of Islam that have led to some very radical practices in the islands. While some of the men support and request different views to be introduced to them, they also noted that the government did not accept these invitations to send out scholars, and that what they were constantly exposed to were lectures and sermons by visiting private clerics such as Sheikh Adam Shameem<sup>54</sup> who frequent the islands regularly.

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<sup>54</sup> A profile of Sheikh Adam Shameem is included in the section 2.2 of this report.

## **Views of women in the focus groups**

All of the women on the island where the veil and a few wear the full niqab with the face covered.

When asked if they believed it was a possible task to maintain Islamic and democratic principles as prescribed in the Constitution, the women initially responded with disagreement. When asked for a reason, two were suggested. One was that 'democracy' was something of the 'West' and therefore against Islam. The second was that democracy called for religious rights. The discussion then went into evaluating the principles of Islam and the principles of democracy, and also the difference between principles of Islam and tenets of Islam. The result was interestingly that everyone was finally in agreement that both Islam and democracy was primarily about "the voice of the people" and "majority". It was noted that the group was more susceptible to the explanations when it came from a licenced Islamic scholar who volunteered for the project.

When asked if they felt a woman could take Presidency, the view was that a woman was too fragile to take up such a big responsibility, but when asked about their responsibilities in raising children – especially sons who would eventually become leaders, in addition to the housework and also menial employment to bring home an income, the women stated that taking the responsibility of leading a country in addition to the domestic responsibilities would be too much for a woman to endure. When asked about other public office positions such as the parliament or local governance, the women responded by saying that no woman would be able to gain a seat in such an election for their constituency.

The views of women and men are similar in the case of implementing the death penalty and flogging and other capital punishment. Further, they did not believe that exhibiting artefacts from old Buddhist practices in the country was a wise practice, and were of the view that those artefacts and relics should be destroyed.

The women reported that forced marriages of girl children did take place within the community, and was not supportive of the practice. They however were of the view that it was not up to them to decide or defy, and that it was up to the parents, namely the father of the child to decide the best for the daughter.

The women generally believed that they were treated unequally in the community when compared to men, and did not support much of the practices in the community that were mostly led by the men. The group was of the view that it was beyond their control and brought the example of voting rights, where they simplified the situation into choosing to be with their family rather than vote, not vote or vote for their choice if it meant that a divorce was the consequence.

Most of the women were of the view that one must be a Muslim in order to be a Maldivian because the Constitution stated it. When asked if they were familiar

with the term “Stateless” the group responded by saying that they were not, and were not able to grasp the notion of belonging to a State being an inherent fundamental right.

In conclusion, it can be said that the women who participated in the focus groups were merely following instruction and advice of the men in their communities and families. A culture of obedience and silence over the years, instilled both through the formal education system as well as through a number of private clerics who regularly visit the island communities have resulted in the women refraining from opposing or questioning their “fate” as set by the men of the communities. It was noted that the women, when brought into deep discussion, showed high interest in the explanations and some of the alternative narratives to some of the notions of Islam, provided by a licensed Islamic scholar who volunteered for the project.

## **4.2 Discussions with schools**

### **Methodology**

The Maldives is an archipelago of over 1,200 islands, out of which 200 are inhabited and divided into 19 administrative atolls. The total population of the country is close to 400,000 and the capital of Maldives, Male’ hold more than 100,000 in the administrative area consisting Male’ (1 square mile) which holds over 60,000 people, Hulhumale’ which holds approximately 30,000 and Villimale’ holding about 10,000 people.

The survey was conducted across the Maldives, schools from the islands and schools from Male’ included. Interviews were conducted either in person or through phone. The principal or deputy principal usually along with the school’s head Islam teacher were those giving the information.

### **Questionnaire**

1. Have you had a shortage of Islam teachers?
2. Are school kids compelled to go to religious sermons? Is it mandatory?
3. Are there many parents who are averse to their children learning music and/ arts?
4. Is there a demand for Arabic language? Or Arabic medium education?
5. What percentages of female students wear the veil?
6. Are students tested on prayers?
7. At which grades is it most/less prominent?
8. Do many parents complain about students singing at the school assembly?
9. What emphasis is given to Maldivian poetry and literature?
10. Does the school have any policies or directives regarding religious practices?
11. Does the Education Ministry give policy directives or does it leave it to the school board?

### **Schools' response to the questionnaire (Male')**

1. The schools in Male' have had no shortages of Islam teachers.
2. Religious sermons are also held by the schools however the students are not required to attend. It is entirely up to the parent whether or not the student goes to these sermons.
3. Arts and music classes are held in these schools and there are some parents are averse to their children participating in these classes. For these parents, the school does provide the option of not having the children participate in these classes.
4. Arabic language as a subject is taught at some schools. And at the schools where it is not yet available, parents have requested for the subject to be taught and the schools are taking steps to do so.
5. A lower percentage of female students wear the veil in schools in Male' compared to female students in schools outside of Male'.
6. Students are tested on prayers in all the schools in Male' that were interviewed. Some schools have passing these tests as a prerequisite for becoming either a prefect or an elected school post.
7. Most schools test the students on prayer throughout all grades however in some schools it is more prominent in higher grades.
8. In all of the schools in Male' that participated in this survey, there were some parents that complained about their children singing in the school assembly.
9. Not much emphasis is given to Maldivian literature and poetry apart from what is taught in the Divehi subject. Apart from the Divehi subject, the only activities on Maldivian literature and poetry are held by the Divehi club of each school.
10. Some schools noted that they are required to have school policies align with government policies which does include sections on Islam under laws.
11. All of the school policies have to align with the Education Ministry's policies.

### **Schools' response to the questionnaire (Islands)**

1. All schools have had shortages of Islam teachers. Some of the schools have no Islam teacher or have only one Islam teacher from grade 1 – 10.
2. There are religious sermons organised by the schools however in most schools, it is not mandatory for the students to go to these sermons.
3. At some schools there have been complaints from the parents however there are some schools who teach their students arts and music with no adverse reaction from the parents.



4. All of the schools have had requests from the parents for an Arabic Language class however due to difficulties in finding an Arabic Language teacher, none of the schools have yet to teach it as a subject.
5. Almost all of the schools' female students are veiled. The lowest percentage of veiled students is 95%.
6. All of the schools test their students on prayer.
7. Students in all grades are tested however more emphasis in some schools on higher grades.
8. At some schools music is banned outright with the school song being replaced by a recording of Quran recitation.
9. Apart from Divehi as a subject, only activities carried out by the Divehi club promote Maldivian literature and poetry.
10. Schools noted that they are required to follow government policy which does include sections on Islam under laws.
11. Some of the schools have school boards to decide policy. However most school's policies are decided by the Ministry.

### **4.3 Interview with law enforcement personnel**

Informal conversations were held with law enforcement personnel, including former and present intelligence officers among others.

Subject: Radical elements within the MNDF.

According to the source, infiltration of radical elements into the military forces of Maldives lie at a more senior level. Brigadier Generals of the army have known to have had close connections with radical peers. Local Sheikhs have been entertained at the military forces, organising sermons for the soldiers. Similarly, although he did not visit the country, some of the officers have been followers of famous Anjem Choudary of the UK.

Although not actively promoted, the radical opinion has existed within the force for a few years now, and nothing has been done to mitigate it. Some groups within the soldiers have raised the issue with senior officers, noting concern over the likelihood of an act of terror when Islamists infiltrate the military forces and have access to the State artillery. However concerns by soldiers were ignored and the senior officer continued to entertain local clerics such as Sheikh Adam Shameem, who promote a very radical school of thought.

The Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) has a process under which soldiers are allowed to grow their beards to a specific measurement. The process is long and requires the registration of beards as well as moustaches under the

regulation. This process exists as local clerics state that Islam required for men to grow their beards.

Some senior officers have recently been moved from the armed forces into other State jobs, and it has taken away those that encouraged radical views within the army. It is believed that a maximum of thirty soldiers remain with the forces that have been recruited into the radical community. The ex-MIE stressed that the present time would be an excellent opportunity to introduce an alternative narrative of Islam into the soldiers' community in order to replace the radical views. It would be a matter of time before the new seniors are recruited to the system.

### **Subject: Radical elements within the police.**

According to the source, infiltration of radical elements into the police force initiates at the level where civil employees are recruited into the service. These civil employees carry out administrative tasks at the service and are not part of the uniformed force.

The civil employees who follow a slightly different protocol from the uniformed force have stronger access to radical promotions in the forms of published material and gatherings where highly radicalised scholars expose them to lectures and seminars. They then transport the knowledge and opinions into the premises where they work alongside uniformed police personnel and interact with many. Since the civil employees have no specific requirements with regard to the clothes they wear to work, such as the requirement to wear trousers in the case of women, the tops of the uniform having required to be of a certain length etc, these civil employees began donning the full *hijab* into the premises of the police service, whereby pressuring uniformed personnel to do the same. Men in the civil employees department are allowed to grow their beards to any length, and thus exposed this behaviour to the uniformed police personnel.

The uniformed police personnel have been subject to pressure from the civil employees to engage in "religious" activities such as attending sermons and lectures. The way they dress have also been at time ridiculed by civil employees as being un-Islamic, and pressured to wear the *hijab*.

The Maldives Police Service regularly engages with Sheikh Adam Shameem to conduct religious sermons and lectures for the police. Sheikh Shameem is a strong promoter of radical thought. Sheikh Shameem is popular with the police because he portrays himself as a "modern scholar", which he does through quoting examples of incidents from the western world, the frequent use of English language in his sermons and through high interaction with young police personnel in social arenas.

The Maldives Police Service does not acknowledge that the institution has been infiltrated by Islamic radicals, and claim that although a large proportion of the policemen sport beards, it is not a religious behaviour. Hence the institution does not have plans to deradicalise police personnel, and continue to engage with Sheikh Adam Shameem for religious modules in the training of police personnel and also through regular sermons conducted inside the police premises.

## 5. Interviews

By Shahindha Ismail, Mushfiq Mohamed, Leevan Shareef

### 5.1 The Minister for Islamic Affairs, Dr. Shaheem Ali

(1) We believe that there is more that can be done to instil love for Islam. We see there is a lack of respect for religion in society.

Must not mock or offend any religion's spiritual leaders.

Extreme ideology against Islam present in the Maldives.

The message of the Islamic Ministry is a "positive" message.

(2) We believe that children should be aware of the normative qualities of religion from a young age. What have you done in relation to this?

Islamic Ministry is negotiating with relevant American and UK people to provide opportunities for scholars to study in the West.

(3) Do you assist or partake in any activities conducted by NGOs? Salaf Jammiyya? MDN?

There are no partnerships with any NGOs at present or in the past.

Islamic Ministry vets all preachers that operate inside Maldives. Also the foreign ones that NGOs bring from abroad.

(4) Many youths are leaving to Syria in the name of jihad. What is being done to stop this?

Appeal to bring back jihadis

Official stand against jihad

Scholars being sent to the islands to preach against radicalism and jihad.

An integral part of Islamic Ministry's message is "no participation in civil wars or any wars in private capacity."

(5) What happens to those who come back? Do you monitor them with intelligence services?

Answer to question 8

(6) The Ministry decided that Muslims should not engage in civil wars outside the country. Why then does the Ministry endorse certain scholars that do?

Islamic Ministry has banned preachers that have had links to terrorism.

Islamic Ministry vets all preachers that operate inside Maldives. Also the foreign ones that NGOs bring from abroad.

(7) What was changed in the 1-3 syllabus for Islamic Studies textbooks? Have you reviewed them? Do you intend to change those radical narratives in the textbooks? Do you intend to review the existing syllabus? Do you intend to change the radical narratives in existing the textbooks?

The Islamic Minister stated that they have no control over what is published in the Islamic Studies syllabus other than fact checking. And that anything concerning the syllabus is to do with the Education Ministry.

(8) Is there a de-radicalisation program? How is it implemented? What is the content of this program?

There is a rehabilitation program against extremism in co-operation with police. In addition to this rehabilitation program, the Islamic Ministry send scholars to the islands to preach against radicalization and jihad in other countries.

The leaders of the separate praying congregations have been jailed and most rehabilitated by the Islamic Ministry.

(9) There is disagreement between scholars about implementing the death penalty, why does this government support it while the judiciary is allegedly corrupt?

"Maldives is ready for the death penalty" The Islamic Minister did not further expand upon this statement.

## **5.2 Phone Survery Malé & Suburbs**

Baseline Phone Survey conducted in the geographical area Male' City (including Huhumale' and Villimale')

December 2014 – February 2015

The following are the findings of a baseline study conducted by Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) to assess the levels of radicalisation within Islam among those living in the administrative area of the City of Male' in the Maldives.

### **Methodology**

The Maldives is an archipelago of over 1,200 islands, out of which 200 are inhabited and divided into 19 administrative atolls. The total population of the country is close to 400,000 and the capital of Maldives, Male' hold more than 100,000 in the administrative area consisting Male' (1 square mile) which holds over 60,000 people, Hulhumale' which holds approximately 30,000 and Villimale' holding about 10,000 people. The total inhabitants of the City consist a large number of migrant workers, and a large moving population of visitors coming for various dealings such as medical care, visits to government offices and courts and business from the atolls exist.

The survey was conducted by phone in the administrative territory of Male' City. A random sample of Maldivians residing in Male' City area were selected. The total number of participants was 381 (5% accuracy in a confidence interval of 95%). Every hundredth phone number on the phone listings was taken to contact participants and due to the nature of the questions being asked the names of participants were omitted from the phone listings. The requirement was that participants be 18 years and over in order to qualify for the study.

Out of the 381 random selection of participants, 134 were women (35%) and 249 men (65%). The age of participants ranged from 18 to 71 and for the purpose of studying the views of the youth in the City<sup>55</sup> the participants were divided into two age groups, one between 18 and 35 and the other between 36 and 71.

The purpose of the phone call was explained to each of the participants, an introduction of MDN and the enumerator provided, and a verbal consent for participation obtained from each participant.

A questionnaire consisting 11 questions, out of which 9 required a 'Yes' or 'No' response, one question which required the view of the participant and one which tested the knowledge of the participant on a concept before completing the response with a 'Yes' or 'No' question.

The questionnaire is attached as Annexe 1 of this report.

## Findings

The primary finding in the study is that the people in the area of Male' are not sufficiently made aware of the concepts in Islam which have been reviewed in this survey. This is demonstrated by the participants, when answering the questions, contradiction with their own views when responding to different questions. It is seen in the way they answer with very liberal views to some questions but very radically to others, for example by responding by saying that there is more room for radical views presently or that wearing the veil should be a choice for the woman, and then expressing a view that preserving history through exhibiting Buddhist artefacts that Maldivians used should not be allowed.

The study also found that the majority of participants did not understand what was meant by 'Secularism'. However, participants who did feel they understood it felt that it was a concept against Islam, and not necessarily a system that prevented the political abuse of religion.

The views linked to equalities between men and women, and the way women should dress is generally disadvantageous to women. Wearing the veil seem to have become a norm, where people accept that it should not be up to the women to decide whether to wear it, and more thought is given to the face veil and other cultural heritage from the Middle East.

Findings also show that the perception of Islam in the Maldives is mixed when it is compared with the opinions of different sects. This being said, it is clearly stated in the Constitution that Maldivians must follow the Sunni sect. However

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<sup>55</sup> Over 35% of the total population of the country is youth.

views of how Islam should be practiced do not necessarily conform to the Sunni views entirely.

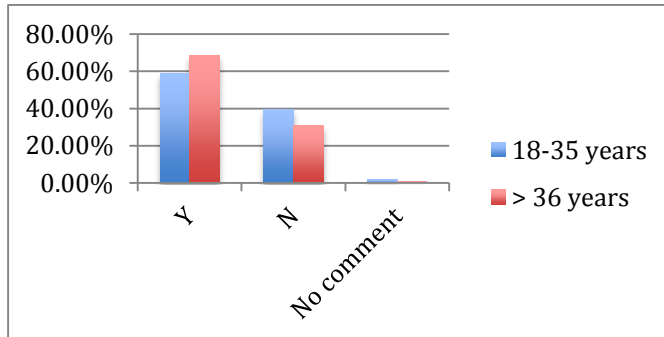
A noteworthy finding of this survey is that while respondents consented to participating in the study, close to all questions had a group which did not wish to respond to it.

It is therefore conclusive that the dissemination of information regarding Islam and its practices may not be uniform, or correct in many instances in the Maldives at present, which may have resulted in the general public having confusion in what the accurate form of practice should be. Outside of this study, when analysed with the broader findings of the project under which this study was conducted, it is highly possible that the dissemination of unverified interpretations of Islam and its practices by more radically opinionated clerics could be a major contributor to this effect.

## Participants Responses To The Questionnaire

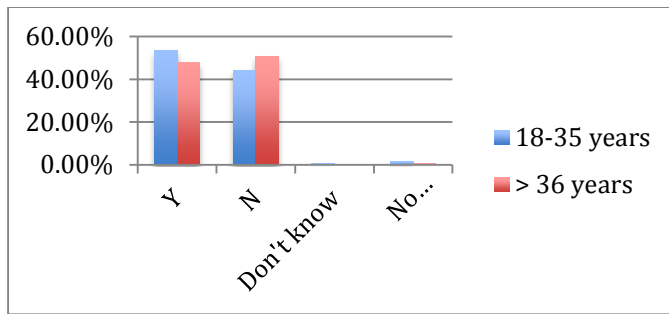
1. When asked if being a Maldivian is inherent to being a Muslim, 62% of the participants felt it was inherent, 36% felt it was not, and 1% did not wish to answer this question.

Out of the youth that responded to this question, 58.80% felt it is inherent, 39.20% felt it is not and 1.90% did not wish to comment on it.



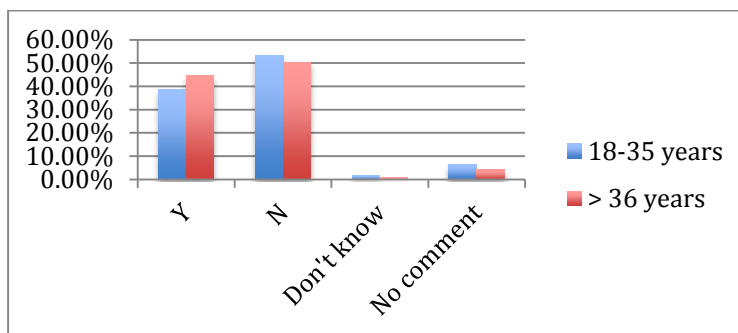
2. When asked if they believed that a woman should be allowed to become the President of the country, 51% felt it should be allowed, 47% felt it could not be allowed and 2% percent of the participants did not wish to respond to this question.

Out of the youth who responded to the question, 53.50% felt it should be allowed, 44.20% said it cannot be allowed and 1.50% did not wish to answer the question.



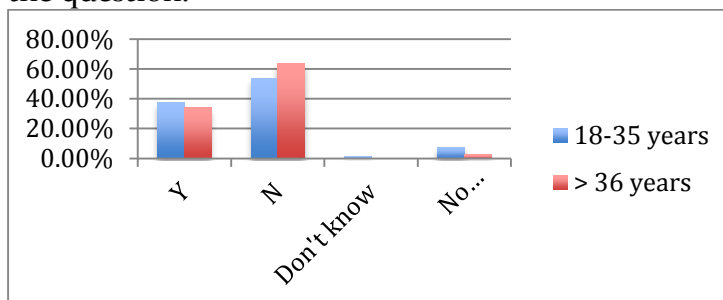
3. When asked if a women could be allowed to become a judge in the criminal justice system, 40% agreed that it should be allowed, 53% disagreed and 7% did not respond to the question.

From the youth group who were contacted for the survey, 38.50% felt it should be allowed, 53.10 felt it cannot be allowed, 1.90% did not know how it should be and 6.50% did not wish to answer the question.



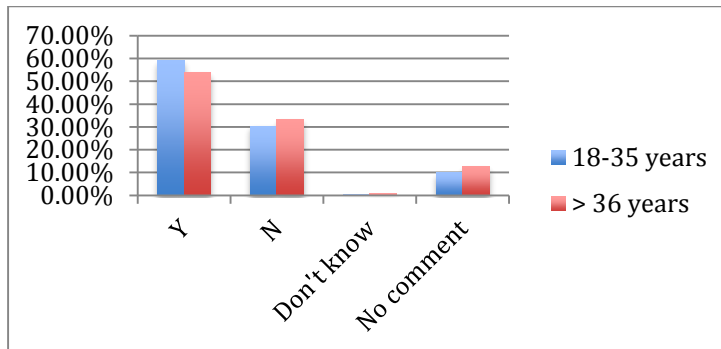
4. When asked if other sects of Islam should be allowed to be practiced in the Maldives, 37% felt it should be allowed, 57% felt it should not be allowed and 6% did not respond to this question.

From the youth who were asked the question, 37.30% said yes, 53.50 said no, 1.50% did not know how it should be and 7.70% did not wish to answer the question.



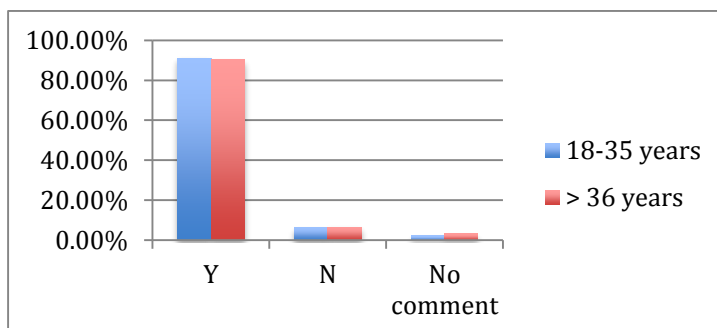
5. When asked if they believed Islam prohibits music, 57.50% felt it is prohibited, 31.20% responded saying it was not, 0.50% said they did not know and 10.80% said they did not wish to comment on it.

From the youth who were contacted for the survey, 59.20% believed music is prohibited in Islam, 30.40% felt it is not, 0.40 did not know an answer and 10% did not wish to comment to the question.



6. When asked if flogging, stoning to death, death penalty and amputation of the arms should be implemented in the Maldives, 90.80% felt it should be implemented, 6.60% felt it should not be implemented and 2.60% did not wish to comment on it.

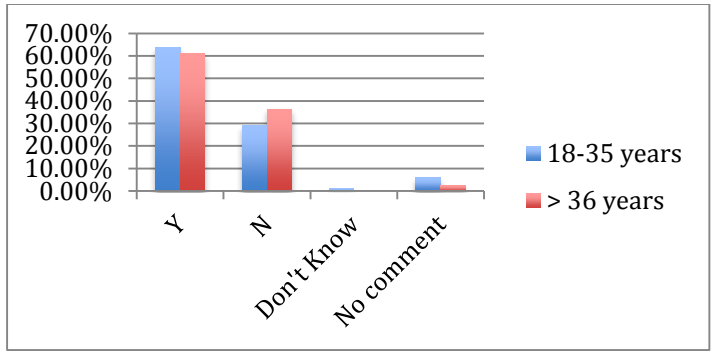
From the youth who were contacted for the survey, 91.20% felt that the penalties should be implemented, 6.50% felt it should not be so and 2.30% did not wish to comment on it.



7. When asked if the present environment in the country created more space for people with radical views, 63% said yes, 31.50% said no, 0.80% did not know an answer to the question and 4.70% did not wish to comment on it.

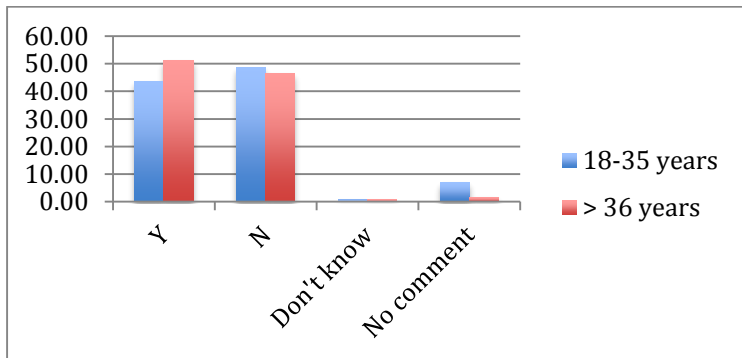
From the youth who were asked the question, 63.80% said there was presently more space for people with radical views in the country, 29.20% said it was not so, 1.20% did not know an answer to the question and 5.80% did not wish to comment on it.





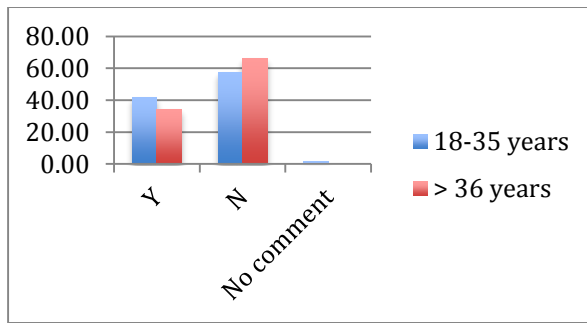
8. When asked if they considered spreading radical views about Islam as harassment of Islam, 45.90% felt it could be considered as harassment of Islam, 47.80% felt it could not be considered harassment of Islam, 0.80% did not know an answer and 5.50% did not wish to respond to the question.

From the youth who were contacted for the survey, 43.50% felt spreading radical views about Islam meant harassment of Islam, 48.50% felt it did not amount to harassment of Islam, 0.80% did not know an answer to the question and 7.30% did not wish to comment to it.



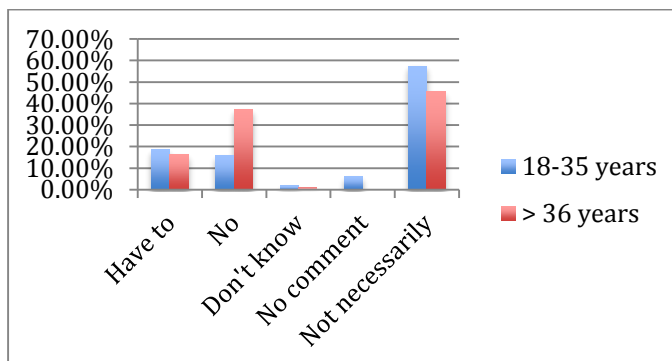
9. When asked if they felt that wearing the veil was a choice for the woman, 38.80% responded saying it was a choice for the woman, 60.10% responded saying it was not a choice for the women and 1% did not respond to the question.

From the youth who were contacted for the survey, 41.20% felt that wearing the veil was a choice of the woman, 57.30% felt it was not a choice for the woman and 1.50% did not wish to comment on it.



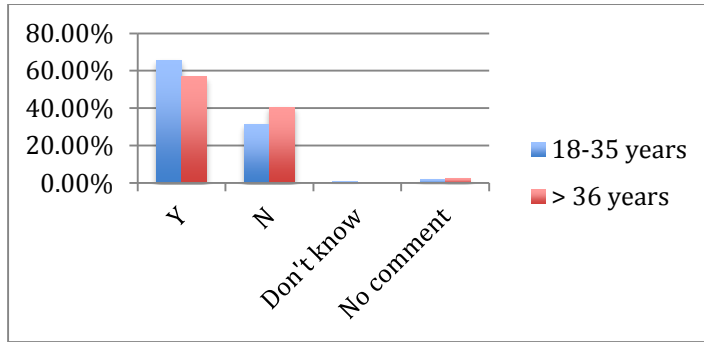
10. When asked for their views on wearing the face veil, abaya (women’s long, black gown), jubba (men’s long, white gown) and the headwear for men, 17.80% felt it is how one should dress, 22.60% felt it should not be worn, 53.50% felt it was unnecessary, 0.30% felt it was based on the sect of Islam, 1.60% did not know an answer to it and 4.20% did not wish to comment on the question.

From the youth who were contacted for the survey, 18.50% felt it is how one should dress, 15.80% felt it should not be worn, 57.30% felt it was unnecessary, 0.40% felt it was based on the sect of Islam, 1.90% did not know an answer and 6.20% did not wish to comment.



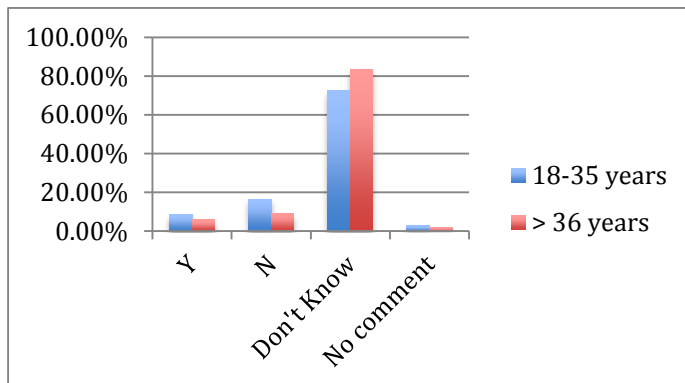
11. When asked if they felt that artefacts and relics from the Maldivian Buddhist history could be exhibited in the museum, 63% felt it could be exhibited, 34.40% felt it could not be allowed, 0.50% felt they did not know an answer and 2.10% did not wish to respond to the question.

From the youth who were contacted for the survey, 65.80% felt that the artefacts and relics from Buddhist history could be exhibited, 31.50% felt it could not be exhibited, 0.80% did not know an answer to the question and 1.90% did not wish to comment.



12. When asked if they were familiar with the term “Secularism”, 75.90% said they were not. Out of those who said they were, when asked if they believed whether Secularism prevented political abuse of religion and allowed equal rights to religion, 7.60% said they agreed it did, 14.20% disagreed and felt it did not, and 2.40% did not wish to respond to the question.

From the youth who were contacted for the survey, 72.30% were not familiar with the term “Secularism”. Out of those who said they were familiar with it 8.50% said they agreed it prevented political abuse of religion, 16.50% said they did not agree and 2.70% did not wish to comment.



## Methodology

The survey was conducted across the Maldives, schools from the islands and schools from Male’ included. Interviews were conducted either in person or through phone. The principal or deputy principal usually along with the school’s head Islam teacher were those giving the information.

## Questionnaire

12. Have you had a shortage of Islam teachers?  
 13. Are school kids compelled to go to religious sermons? Is it mandatory?

14. Are there many parents who are averse to their children learning music and/ arts?
15. Is there a demand for Arabic language? Or Arabic medium education?
16. What percentages of female students wear the veil?
17. Are students tested on prayers?
18. At which grades is it most/less prominent?
19. Do many parents complain about students singing at the school assembly?
20. What emphasis is given to Maldivian poetry and literature?
21. Does the school have any policies or directives regarding religious practices?
22. Does the Education Ministry give policy directives or does it leave it to the school board?

### **Schools' response to the questionnaire (Male')**

12. The schools in Male' have had no shortages of Islam teachers.
13. Religious sermons are also held by the schools however the students are not required to attend. It is entirely up to the parent whether or not the student goes to these sermons.
14. Arts and music classes are held in these schools and there are some parents are averse to their children participating in these classes. For these parents, the school does provide the option of not having the children participate in these classes.
15. Arabic language as a subject is taught at some schools. And at the schools where it is not yet available, parents have requested for the subject to be taught and the schools are taking steps to do so.
16. A lower percentage of female students wear the veil in schools in Male' compared to female students in schools outside of Male'.
17. Students are tested on prayers in all the schools in Male that were interviewed. Some schools have passing these tests as a prerequisite for becoming either a prefect or an elected school post.
18. Most schools test the students on prayer throughout all grades however in some schools it is more prominent in higher grades.
19. In all of the schools in Male' that participated in this survey, there were some parents that complained about their children singing in the school assembly.
20. Not much emphasis is given to Maldivian literature and poetry apart from what is taught in the Divehi subject. Apart from the Divehi subject, the only activities on Maldivian literature and poetry are held by the Divehi club of each school.
21. Some schools noted that they are required to have school policies align with government policies which does include sections on Islam under laws.

22. All of the school policies have to align with the Education Ministry's policies.

### **Schools' response to the questionnaire (Islands)**

12. All schools have had shortages of Islam teachers. Some of the schools have no Islam teacher or have only one Islam teacher from grade 1 – 10.
13. There are religious sermons organised by the schools however in most schools, it is not mandatory for the students to go to these sermons.
14. At some schools there have been complaints from the parents however there are some schools who teach their students arts and music with no adverse reaction from the parents.
15. All of the schools have had requests from the parents for an Arabic Language class however due to difficulties in finding an Arabic Language teacher, none of the schools have yet to teach it as a subject.
16. Almost all of the schools' female students are veiled. The lowest percentage of veiled students is 95%.
17. All of the schools test their students on prayer.
18. Students in all grades are tested however more emphasis in some schools on higher grades.
19. At some schools music is banned outright with the school song being replaced by a recording of Quran recitation.
20. Apart from Divehi as a subject, only activities carried out by the Divehi club promote Maldivian literature and poetry.
21. Schools noted that they are required to follow government policy which does include sections on Islam under laws.
22. Some of the schools have school boards to decide policy. However most school's policies are decided by the Ministry.

## 6. Annexes

### 6.1 Hundred Individuals on Facebook displaying support for Jihad<sup>56</sup>

Name	AFFILIATION	COVER PAGE	COMMENT/UPDATE
<b>Al Gurabaa (Arabic)</b>	NONE	Black Flag	Page Suspended
<b>Abu Ubeydha Al Maldifi</b>	Miadhu News	Black Flag	Page Suspended
<b>AbuDahda Bin-Hassan Bin Adam</b>		Black Flag	Page Suspended
<b>Abu Ansar</b>	Al Insaf	IS	Page Suspended
<b>Adam Waheed</b>	Software Designer/Atoll Tech	IS	
<b>Abu Dhujanaa</b>	Majeediyya	Weapons and fighters	
<b>Saudhu Abdl Ghni</b>	Trans Maldivian Airways Technician	Black Flag	
<b>Shaamil Hussain</b>	NONE	IS	
<b>Muhammadh Maujoodh</b>	NONE		Page Suspended
<b>Ahmed Ismail</b>	NONE	Black Flag & weapons	Page Suspended
<b>Shaim Mey</b>	Kuramathi/Majeediy yaa	Black Flag & weapons	
<b>Ibn Muhammadh Ibrahim</b>	Centre for Holy Qur'an	IS	Page Suspended

<sup>56</sup> This data was collected in July/August 2014, not long after the Islamic State was declared in Iraq. The 4<sup>th</sup> column, 'Comments/Update', notes the number of accounts which have since been suspended. It cannot be said whether they were suspended by Facebook or by the owners themselves.

<b>Shafiu Bin Muhammad</b>	Alia Investments/Majeediyya	Fighter	Page Suspended
<b>Akh Nabeel</b>	GMR Group/Cyryx College	Noose	
<b>Ahmed Nashath</b>	NONE	IS	
<b>Abu Mx (Arabic)</b>	MNU/Islamic Studies	IS	
<b>Ahmed Ilhaam</b>	ADG Textile centre/Majeediyya	IS	Page Suspended
<b>Ibn Shamym(Ibrahim Mamdhoo bin Shamym)</b>	Addu	Black Flag	
<b>Mohamed Firu</b>	Teacher at Billabong High, EPS. Grad MNU	IS	
<b>Fathhulla Muhammadh Didi</b>	Colombo graduate	Black Flag	Page Suspended
<b>Ahmed Ismail</b>		Black Flag & fighters	Page Suspended
<b>Ahmed Faisal</b>	MCHE	Black Flag	Page Suspended
<b>Hussain Afeef</b>	MNDF/Fuammulak	IS Flag	Page Suspended
<b>Ahmed Ibn Jamaal</b>	Gan Int'l Airport	Black Flag	Page Suspended
<b>Ibrahim Isham</b>	CHSE/Ahmadiyya	Black Flag	Page Suspended
<b>Abu Unais</b>	CHSE	IS logo	Page Suspended
<b>Mohammed Hamdhaan (former at Noor)</b>	Villa Int'l High/VP	Fighters	
<b>Ahmadh Abdullah</b>	Customs/MES	Black Flag	Page Suspended
<b>Naufal Muhammadh</b>	NONE	Black Flag + fighter	
<b>Muhammad Ahsan</b>	NONE	IS logo	

<b>Kileekiya Fazy (F)</b>	C for Quran	Black Banner Shahaadhath	
<b>Muhammadh Mansoor</b>	MPS	With black flag	
<b>Abu Layyin (Who-sen Areef)</b>	MNU	'Khilafah is the answer'	
<b>Imthiyaz Ahmed</b>	NONE	IS flag & fighters	
<b>Abu Muhammad</b>	NONE	Black banner Shahaadhath	
<b>Shaun Shareef</b>	MNU	IS	
<b>Naufal Muhammadh</b>	NONE	BLACK FLAG	
<b>Abu Ali</b>	Majeediyya School	IS FLAG	Page Suspended
<b>Hassan ibrahim</b>	MNU	IS FLAG	Page Suspended
<b>Skipper Squadra</b>	NONE	IS Logo	
<b>Haqq bas</b>	Islamic Ministry	Black flag	
<b>Muaa Muaz</b>	Spiritual Healers, EPSS	Fighter pic	
<b>Abu Naushal</b>	Al Wala wal Bara	BLACK FLAG	Page Suspended
<b>Ibn Nasym Nasym</b>	NONE	BLACK FLAG	
<b>Azman Bin Muhammadh (Hassan Azman)</b>	Dhondhooni Little learners/CHSE/Maj [a pre-school teacher]	Flag with Shahadath	Page Suspended
<b>Ibrahim Shimaz</b>	Pilot, Tourists Submarine/MNU	Flag with Shahadath	
<b>Abu Naseebah</b>	MCHE	Mujahedh photo	
<b>Adam Shuzain</b>	PG Office/CHSE/MNU	Shahadat Flag	



<b>Ismail Muaz</b>	Adhaalath/DH.A.E.C	IS fighter	Page Suspended
<b>Abu Majid Al Maldifi</b>	Majeediyya/MNU	Black Flag & Baghdadi	Page Suspended
<b>Ibn Ibrahim</b>	Private	IS on horseback with blag flags	
<b>Muhammadh Ashraf</b>	Private	IS on horseback with blag flags	
<b>Abdulla Bin Mohamed Hameed</b>	MPS/Holy Quran	Saudi flag	
<b>Abu Abdulla Bin Saud</b>	Operations Manager/ETalk	Militant fighter	
<b>Ibn Umar</b>	NONE	Iblack flag	
<b>John Endrew</b>	MNU	IS FLAG	Page Suspended
<b>Saad Blackhat (Now Abu Musab Zarqawi 5/1/15)</b>	R&RSchool of Diving	BLACK FLAG	
<b>Sen Sal</b>	MNU/CHSE	BLACK FLAG	
<b>Mohamed Sofwan</b>	CHSE	BlackFlag	
<b>AbuDahdha Bin-Hassan Bin Adama</b>	NONE	Black background, Guraba	Page Suspended
<b>Ali Al Maldeefi</b>	Madina	IS Flag & blood	Page Suspended
<b>Abu Dharr</b>	NONE	BLACK FLAG	
<b>Abu Hamza</b>	Private	IS	Page Suspended
<b>Muhamed Abdullah</b>	IS	IS FLAG	
<b>Ali Bun Yamin</b>	Majeediyya/Faculty of Hospitality	IS FLAG	
<b>Abu Ubaida Al-Maldeefee</b>	Lives in Syria	Black Flag/Shahadha	Page Suspended

<b>Highsome Rashyd</b>	Dharumavanatha	Black flag with Shahdhath background	Page Suspended
<b>Ibn Rasheed</b>	Airport/MNU	Fighter with sword, face covered	Page Suspended
<b>İbñ Mühämmäd</b>	AMIN construction	Isis Flag and sword	Page Suspended
<b>Abu Unais</b>	CHSE/	IS Flag/Fighters with guns	Page Suspended
<b>Ahmed Faisal</b>	MCHE	Black banner Shahaadhath	Page Suspended
<b>Maisoon Saud (Maii)</b>	Private	Black banner Shahaadhath	
<b>Hussain Shakeeb Bin Ibrahim</b>	MES/Colombo	Black banner Shahaadhath	Page Suspended
<b>Muhamed Abdullah</b>	Private	IS FLAG	
<b>Abu Haliyath Mohamed Shammoon</b>	DhiSalafiyah/Madinah Uni	Salafi (No Isis insignia)	
<b>Abu Zubair</b>	NONE	IS FLAG	
<b>Ahmed Afraah</b>	Ahmadiyya 05	Islamic fighters w/swords	
<b>hassan ibrahim</b>	D'awah Preacher/MNU	Isis Flag DP+Cover	
<b>Ibn Saeed Al Maldifi</b>	Private	Picture in militant clothes/IS balaclava	
<b>Amatullah Bintah Saud (Woman)</b>		Isis Flag DP+Cover is black banner w/Shahaadhath	Page Suspended

<b>Ali Azzam</b>	Private	Black background/Arabic verse (non-Isis)	Page Suspended
<b>Ali Shammakh</b>	CHSE/MNU	Isis Flag DP	
<b>Abu Dujanah Al-Maaldeefi</b>	Idleb,Syria	Non-Isis	Killed in Syria
<b>Abk Umr Azvn</b>	Kulliyya/College of Islamic Studies	Non-Isis	Page Suspended
<b>Ali Nisham The Polymath</b>	Lives in Madina	Isis Flag DP	Page Suspended
<b>Shifaz Bin Hussain Raha</b>	Private	BLACK FLAG	
<b>Ali Thuhthu</b>	Majeedhiyya/MNU	Non-Isis	
<b>Louth Wajdhhy</b>	Cyprea Ticketing	Gaza	
<b>Abu Usaama</b>		Black flag with Shahdhath background/DP gun saying Abu Usaama Al Maldifi	Page Suspended
<b>Ahmed Muhammedh Asim</b>	Colombo grad	Black Flag with Shahdhath background	
<b>Alee Keyolhu</b>	Private	Non-Isis – supports Jabhat	
<b>Axhadh Ahmed</b>	Monox Designs	Lion	
<b>Umar bin Al Maldeefi</b>	Private	Black banner Shahaadhath	Page Suspended
<b>Ali Shameem</b>	Private	Tears of blood	Page Suspended

<b>Mohamed Ahmed Bin Yoosuf</b>	Housing Development/IBS Maldives/EPS/Alifushi	Salafiyya saying	
<b>حسين عبدالله أبو</b>	Private	IS Map of world	
<b>Immako Immako</b>	Ali Investments/Majeediyya	We are all ISIS" t-shirt wearing	
<b>Ibu Ibrahim</b>	Private	Islam will dominate the world'/fighters with black flag	Page Suspended
<b>Sobah Ibrahim</b>	CHSE/Fuammulaku Education Centre	Non-Isis	
<b>Husain Shuhail</b>	GMR Group/Majeediyya	Supports IS	Page Suspended
<b>Imad bin Ibrahim</b>	Private	Jihadi fighters	

## 6.2. Questionnaire for phone survey.

This is an English translation of the questions contained in the questionnaire compiled by the Maldivian Democracy Network for the above mentioned project.

1. Is being a Maldivian inherent to being a Muslim?
2. Do you believe that a woman should be allowed to become the President of a country?
3. Should a woman be allowed to become a Judge in the Criminal Justice System?
4. Should other sects of Islam be allowed to be practiced in the Maldives?
5. Do you believe that Islam prohibits music?
6. Should flogging, stoning to death, death penalty and amputation of the arms should be implemented in the Maldives?
7. Does the present environment in the country create more space for people with radical views?
8. Do you consider spreading radical views about Islam as harassment of Islam?
9. Is wearing the veil a choice for the woman?
10. What are your views on wearing the face veil, abaya (women's long, black gown), jubba (men's long, white gown) and the headwear for men?
11. Are you familiar with the term "Secularism"?
12. Do you believe that Secularism prevents political abuse of religion and allows equal rights to religion?