



## **Oral Statement**

Human Rights Council 46<sup>th</sup> session

Agenda Item 6: Universal Periodic Review

Adoption of the UPR outcome of Maldives

15 March 2021

Delivered by Kateryna Shynkaruk

Madam President,

We thank the Government of Maldives for engaging in the Universal Periodic Review.

We regret that none of the recommendations related to Freedom of Religion or Belief were accepted.

Freedom of Religion or Belief belongs to inalienable human rights and freedoms.

We, therefore, call on the Government of Maldives to withdraw reservation to Article 18 of the ICCPR, and to ensure the respect of the right to have or adopt a religion or belief of one's choice. Leaving Islam should no longer be considered a criminal offence.

We also call on the Government of Maldives to repeal Section 617 of the Criminal Code on "criticizing Islam." In addition to limiting the freedom of expression, it does not specify what is intended by the word "criticizing", and thus can be applied in arbitrary ways.

We appeal to the government to ensure the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief in community and have places of worship for all; as the freedom of conscience is a precondition for human development and flourishing societies.

Thank you.