

Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children, Women, Elderly and Persons with Disabilities

2013 - 2018



Ministry of Gender & Family

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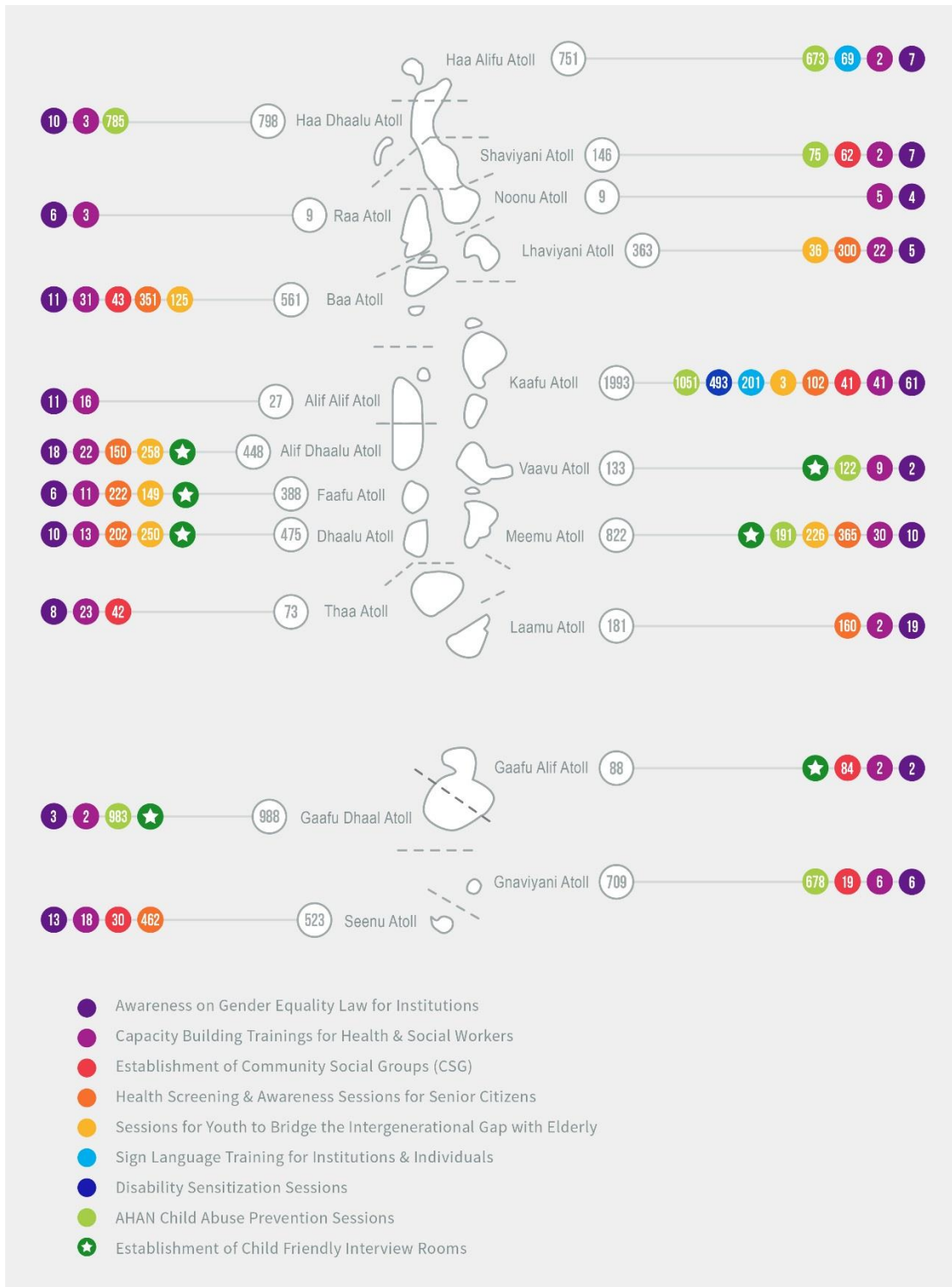
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Prologue

The Ministry of Gender and Family (MGF) has the national mandate to protect and promote the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly. In view of its function and role, the Ministry has established and delivers its services through 19 Family and Children's Service Centers (FCSCs) in all atolls and central office in Male'. The Ministry also runs two shelters, Fiyavathi and Kudakudhinge Hiya.

This report documents Ministry achievements with the four program areas, mainly in legislative and policy development, advocacy and outreach efforts, empowerment programs, national and international engagements, and its efforts to provide social services to vulnerable children, women, elderly and persons with disabilities.

Ministry Outreach between June 2016 – November 2018 Across the Maldives



Chapter 1: Elderly Rights

The 2006 National Census Analysis projected that the Maldives will embark on an ageing process in 2025, which will accelerate in 2050 when the large baby cohorts of the 1980s reach the age of 65, and after that the proportion of elderly persons in the population will keep rising, reaching up to 15 to 20 percent in 2055. The recent Maldives Population Projections 2014-2054, also confirm that the population dynamics of the country will undergo remarkable changes, and further, that the elderly population which accounted for 5 percent of the resident population in 2014, will almost triple by 2054, and will take up a share of 14 percent of the Resident Maldivian Population.

One of the greatest challenges for an aging population, are chronic and complex physical and psychological health problems associated with old age. Health issues for the elderly are also associated with socio-economic and cultural realities. Older persons in the country, often find themselves marginalized from families and societies, especially after retirement. Older persons also, often depend on their families to act as informal caregivers and provide necessary assistance for their health and well-being. As their economic and social roles shift, these can have adverse psychological impacts on their health, particularly for those who become more dependent on their families. This increases their vulnerability, compounds the problems of isolation further and affects their independence and participation. It is therefore, significantly important to help prepare citizens for old age, and to live a life of good health and wellbeing.

The Ministry of Gender and Family, as part of its national mandate to ensuring the rights of elderly, has the primary responsibility to:

- formulate, implement and monitor policies for the protection and wellbeing of elderly;
- assure safer social protection for the elderly;
- coordinate with relevant state authorities to conduct social protection programmes;
- identify emerging issues that hinder protection and rights of elderly, and to coordinate with relevant authorities to eliminate these issues;
- create public awareness on safeguarding the rights of elderly;
- provide psychosocial support to elderly; and
- conduct awareness programmes at island and atoll level to empower and protect the rights of elderly.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

National Elderly Policy

The National Elderly Policy was launched on 1st October 2017 at the event to mark the International Day of Older Persons. The Policy, which was launched by the Vice President

H.E. Abdulla Jihad, targets to address four main goals: Care and Protection; Independence and participation; Health and wellbeing; and Preparation for old age.

National Elderly Action Plan (NEAP)

A National Elderly Action Plan was also compiled as a part of the National Elderly Forum in 2018. The aim of this Plan is to implement the National Elderly Policy. The document, which is yet to be finalized by the Ministry, was prepared in consultation with stakeholders and after a national validation workshop, and was supported by WHO in 2018. Key sectors represented in these consultations include Ministry of Health, Society for Health Education (SHE), National Social Protection Agency (NSPA), Maldives Pension Administration Office (MPAO), Maldives Red Crescent (MRC), Dhivehiraajeyge Israhvehing Jamiyya (DIJ), and Dhamanaveshi.

ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

National Elderly Forum

A two-day National Elderly Forum was held from 15-16 August 2018, by bringing together key stakeholders working with elderly rights in the Maldives. The main objectives of the forum were to:

- Conduct a High-Level Policy Dialogue on Healthy Ageing between the Ministry of Gender and Family and the Ministry of Health to share and explore the existing challenges in areas of mutual concern in relation to healthy ageing, and identify avenues to strengthen collaboration between the stakeholders at all levels; and
- Produce a 2-year result-based Elderly Action Plan in line with the National Elderly Policy.

Accordingly, the first day focused on a Ministerial level policy dialogue and discussed ways to enhance the effectiveness of on-going programs for the elderly and strengthen collaboration between State institutions at the national and local level. The second day focused on policy and technical level discussions, to validate the National Elderly Action Plan.

Ranveyla Campaign

The Ministry of Gender and Family launched the 'Ranveyla Campaign' in August 2016 as a nation-wide awareness campaign to protect and promote the rights and wellbeing of senior citizens in the Maldives. The Campaign aims to increase participation of elderly persons within family and community, enhance care and support provided for them, and improve their health and emotional well-being.

Through its Ranveyla Campaign, the Ministry seeks to improve services provided to senior citizens at community level by providing trainings to health and social service workers. The

Ministry also conducts awareness sessions and health screenings for elderly population, and interactive sessions to bridge the inter-generational gap between youth and senior citizens. Achievements made through the Ranveyla Campaign is available in the Ministry publication “Ranveyla Campaign Report 2016-2018”.

Home-visit Program for Bedridden Persons

In 2015, the Government introduced a “Home-visit Program for Bedridden Persons” at ‘Dhamanaveshi’, to ensure that older bedridden persons are able to access adequate health care from their homes. This program focuses on providing basic health care services for bedridden patients above 65 years of age across the country.

Registered bedridden elderly persons under the programme receive the benefit of home visits by medical professionals, and are provided with basic medical care and counselling if and when necessary. Since its establishment at the end of 2015, 93 persons have registered and received health services under this programme within greater Male’ region.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS IN THE AREA

Below are the international engagements the Ministry had participated in the past 5 years in relation to the rights of elderly persons.

Help-Age Asia Pacific Conference 2018, 23 – 25 October 2018, Tehran, I.R. Iran

This conference examined the theme ‘Family, Community and State in Ageing Societies’, from various perspectives, sharing experience and visions for ageing societies and governments to adapt. The conference focused on three breakout streams, which included social inclusion, income security and long-term care.

Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Third review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 12th – 14th September 2017, Bangkok

The meeting is a key regional platform for reviewing the achievements and challenges in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action.

Asia-Pacific Ministerial Forum of the Management of the Social Transformations Programme, 22 – 23 march 2017, Malaysia

The purpose of this program is to share knowledge, expertise and experience on developing and implementing innovative, evidence-based, effective public policies and to establish relevant and actionable agendas for translating social science knowledge into policy and action in Asia Pacific countries.

Chapter 2: Child Rights

The percentage of children in the Maldives population dropped from 41 percent to 27 percent between the year 2000 and 2014. In 2014, infants or toddlers within the age group 0-4 years noticeably increased from 28 percent (in 2000) to 38 percent (in 2014). Children aged 5 to 9 represented 35 percent and 34 percent of the child population in 2000 and 2014 respectively. The early adolescents (10-14), represented 37 percent of the child population in 2000 compared with the significant decline of 28% in 2014.

Children remain a significant percentage of the Maldives population and therefore, the Government is committed to ensure the four categories of rights, covering all civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of every child.

- *Right to Survival*: A child's right to survival begins before a child is born. The right to survival is inclusive of the child rights to be born, right to minimum standards of food, shelter and clothing, and the right to live with dignity.
- *Right to Protection*: A child has the right to be protected from neglect, exploitation and abuse at home, and elsewhere.
- *Right to Participation*: A child has a right to participate in any decision-making that involves him/her directly or indirectly. There are varying degrees of participation as per the age and maturity of the child.
- *Right to Development*: Children have the right to all forms of development: Emotional, Mental and Physical. Emotional development is fulfilled by proper care and love of a support system, mental development through education and learning and physical development through recreation, play and nutrition.

The country provides 15 years of free schooling, and in that regard, has made considerable progress in achieving universal education and gender parity in education in the country. The Maldives has also made considerable progress in maternal and child health over the last decade. However, under-nutrition and access to specialized health care services for children remain a significant issue across the country.

Violence against children remains one of the most pressing subjects in relation to child rights in the country. Multiple studies, including a national study on violence against children conducted in the Maldives in 2009 (UNICEF 2009, unpublished) indicated high levels of violence against children at home, in school and in the community. According to this study, 11% of Boys and 20% of girls reported experiencing some form of sexual violence. The study also revealed that 40% of children age 13-17 years have been a victim of corporal or emotional punishment.

Although, violence against children has been an identified problem at the national level, a case by case approach to address the matter has led to overlapping, uncoordinated and fragmented responses, and failed to provide comprehensive solutions. Below are details of

Ministry efforts on strengthening legislation and policy, and on enhancing advocacy and outreach efforts to protect and promote the rights of children in the Maldives.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Child Rights Protection Act 1991

The first child rights specific legislation in the Maldives was enacted in 1991, and provided for basic rights of children, based on the social realities in the Maldives at that time. This legislation falls significantly short, in addressing the modern day concerns and realities of child rights in the country.

A new child rights protection bill was introduced to the Parliament on 28 June 2018, by the Government. The Bill, which is currently at its Committee Stage in the Parliament, has been shared with multiple stakeholder organizations for their inputs and comments. The Ministry has also submitted its comments, highlighting multiple areas of concern which includes Ministry concerns on the draft provisions on child protection services, child fostering, and the overall child protection mechanism as envisaged in the bill.

National Conference on Violence against Children (VAC), 15-17 August 2017

The first National Conference on Violence against Children in the Maldives was organized and held by the Ministry on in 2017. The main aim of the national conference was to share knowledge on; the situation of violence against children in the Maldives, approaches to addressing violence against children; roles, responsibilities, inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration; community level systematic and integrated responses to violence against children; sharing experiences at the global and regional level; and discussing a pre-drafted 2-year Action Plan on VAC. This 3-day conference, held in Kurumba Maldives, was attended by all relevant ministries, state institutions, non-governmental organizations and foreign agencies.

The outcome of the conference was the launching of a 2-year National Action Plan on Violence against Children, which was inaugurated at a special ceremony held at Kurumba Maldives, by the Chief Guest First Lady Madam Fathimath Ibrahim.

ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

VAC Child Participation Forum

The Ministry of Gender and Family prioritizes child participation in the planning and development of programmes and policies pertaining to children. Thus, on 9 September 2017, the Ministry held a one-day child participation forum as a follow up action to the National Conference on Violence against Children (held from 15 to 17 August 2017), at Champa Central Hotel.

This Forum brought children from various backgrounds, including children with disabilities, to discuss issues which concern their wellbeing, and to promote national efforts on child participation and engagement. It therefore sought input from children on the planning and implementation of the 5 main action areas under the two-year national action plan that was endorsed at the 2017 VAC Conference.

A total of 31 Students from 5 different schools and colleges, aged between 15 – 17 participated in this forum.

Children’s Consultations on Societal Issues

Ministry held a series of child consultations on the occasion of the Children’s Day 2018. These consultations included children from various schools, children living under state care and children with disabilities. A total of 24 students from GA. Atoll Education Centre took part in the consultation sessions held in GA. Villingili from 2 – 3 May 2018, while a total of 25 students, representing Centre for Higher Secondary Education (CHSE), Villa International High School, Ahmadhiyya International School, Maldives Girl Guide Association as well as children under state care participated in the consultations held in Male’.

The forum, provided these children with the opportunity to share their views and opinions on issues relevant to them, at their homes, community and national level and provided a platform to present their opinions and views based on the discussions held at the consultations carried out in Male’ and GA. Villingili.

Community Social Groups (CSGS)

In 2016, the Ministry of Gender and Family, together with UNICEF Maldives, commenced work on establishing Community Social Groups (CSG’s) across the country. CSGs will work at the community level to share information and help each other to solve issues; stimulate debate and discussion in order to provoke community-led action; bring together a variety of people with different skills, ideas and resources to address particular issues; and help a community to access timely services. Such groups can play a pivotal role in the Maldivian context to create sustainable communities, aide social inclusion and alleviate exclusion.

Members of CSGs in the atolls consist of professionals from various fields includes members from health sector, family and children’s service centers, police, island and atoll councils, and women’s development committees and NGOs. CSGs play a crucial role in identifying vulnerable persons and families, emerging issues, and addressing societal issues at island level. The main roles and responsibilities of CSGs include:

- Providing assistance to children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities in reporting alleged violence to FCSC, Magistrate Court, Island Council, Health Center and Police;

- Providing assistance to victims in cases of violence against children, women, elderly, and persons with disabilities;
- Conducting awareness programs at island level to protect the rights of children, women, elderly and persons with disabilities;
- Identifying emerging issues related to ensuring the rights of vulnerable groups, and work on solutions for these issues at city/island level jointly with the relevant sectors; and
- Conducting capacity building at atoll and island level.

The following activities are conducted under the CSG Program.

- ***Orientation Programme***
The main aim of this programme is to sensitize sectors on the role of CSGs, and strengthen inter-agency collaboration. Existing social issues and emerging issues are discussed, as well as ways to advocate for the well-being of vulnerable groups. This programme helps to develop a platform where professionals can form a network and work together to promote and protect vulnerable groups.
- ***Training Programme***
This programme aims to strengthen the CSG mechanism by providing capacity building to CSGs members. This includes increasing participant knowledge on relevant legislation such as the Domestic Violence Act, Sexual Offences Act, Child Rights Act, Special Provisions on Child Sex Offenders Act, Family Act, Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance Act, and on relevant sectoral policies and guidelines. During the course of this training, CSG members also develop a tailor-made action plan for their respective island.
- ***Monitoring Programme***
The monitoring programme supervises the work of CSGs, and provides the opportunity to revisit their work, review challenges, identify solutions and amend the action plans where necessary.
- ***Skills Development Programme***
The skills development programme helps build skills necessary for fieldwork, in order to identify risk and address existing and emerging social issues within the community.

Ahan Campaign

Ahan Campaign was launched by the Ministry of Gender and Family in May 2015 as a nation-wide awareness campaign to end violence against children. The Campaign aims to empower children against abuse, raise public awareness, encourage reporting and provide support to

victims of child abuse. Through Ahan Campaign, the Ministry conducts awareness sessions for students and parents and workshops for teachers.

Achievements made in outreach and towards child abuse prevention through the Ahan Campaign is available in the Ministry publication Ahan Campaign Report 2015 – 2018.

Girls Lead Initiative

Since 2016, the Ministry has held an annual event titled “Girls Lead Initiative”, on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child celebrated annually on 11 October. The one-day activity organized by the Ministry, provided a unique experience for girls to be attached and work with remarkable female professionals in leadership positions at government, private sector and civil society organizations. The main aim of this initiative is to encourage and motivate girls to achieve their goals and aspirations and to reach decision making levels in various fields. A total of 27 girls of ages 16 & 17 participated in this special initiative to support girls’ empowerment and leadership in 2016. A total of 34 girls in the same age groups participated in this program in 2017.

The Ministry expanded the ‘Girls Lead Initiative’ in 2018 to a six-day programme, conducted from 5 to 11 October 2018. This programme, designed to promote the rights of the girl child and raise awareness on the challenges faced by girls within communities, included awareness sessions on developing leadership skills, girls’ health, physical and mental well-being and on the UN convention on the protection of the rights of women and girls. In addition, activities were held to foster girls’ interest for non-traditional roles as well as to provide career guidance from women working in sectors where women are largely under represented.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

Below are the international engagements the Ministry had participated in the past 5 years in the field of child rights.

Treaty Reporting

The U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child considered the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Maldives (CRC/C/MDV/4-5) at its 2077th and 2079th meetings (see CRC/C/SR.2077 and 2079), held on 19 January 2016, and adopted concluding observations at its 2104th meeting (see CRC/C/SR.2104), held on 29 January 2016.

Meetings and Conferences

Regional Consultation on the SDG Alliance 8.7 – South Asia Launch, 19 – 20 July 2016, Thimphu, Bhutan

Minister Zenysha Shaheed Zaki participated in the two-day South Asia Consultation on Alliance SDG 8.7 focusing on child labour, forced labour, trafficking and slavery. The consultation was hosted by The Royal Government of Bhutan, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources National Commission for Women and Children and NACG Bhutan and was organised by SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat in collaboration with South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Children (SACG).

3rd Asia Pacific High Level Meeting on Child Rights, Malaysia, 7-8 November 2016

Minister Zenysha Shaheed Zaki participated in the 2 day meeting on violence against children, high quality universal health coverage and on boosting sustained economic and social development in Asia Pacific countries to support the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDG). At the side-lines of the meeting, Minister Zenysha also participated in the panel discussion on social protection for children, women and families, and shared the experience of Maldives to establish community social groups (CSGs) at island level in order to provide social protection at the community level.

Cross Frontier Child Protection in South Asia – The Role of The Hague Children’s Conventions, Kathmandu, Nepal from 29 – 31 May 2018

The programme was organized by UNICEF ROSA and Hague Conference on International Private Law, and aimed to examine the role and value of the Hague Children’s Conventions in addressing cross-border child protection issues in South Asia, and to discuss some of the practicalities surrounding implementation of those Conventions. Particular emphasis was given to irregular migration (trafficking, unaccompanied minors), the Malta Process, intercountry adoption, cross-border child support, international child abduction, refugee and displaced children. The Member States of the SAARC (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) took part in this conference.

This conference was attended by Ms. Aishath Ifadha, Senior Legal Officer, Ministry of Gender and Family.

Child Protection Executive Education Course, Boston, USA from 25 - 29 June 2018

Minister Zenysha Shaheed Zaki participated in a 5-day Child Protection Executive Education Course organized by Harvard University. The multidisciplinary course employed a comprehensive approach and aimed to educate its participants on issues regarding child protection in both domestic and international settings by addressing all aspects of child protection to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence experienced by children.

Chapter 3: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Maldives has made remarkable strides in enhancing the situation of women over the past decade. Gender parity in education has been achieved and has also made praise-worthy advancements in reducing maternal mortality and providing antenatal care. The positive changes in women's education and health, has also had positive impact on other developmental goals such as women in formal employment, and poverty reduction.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender, and allows *temporary special measures* to ensure vulnerable groups have equal opportunities to pursue equal rights. The Maldives also has a number of positive legislative developments, such as Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2012, Gender Equality Law 2016, new Family Law Amendments, and Special Provisions Act for victims of abuse and violence, which further seek to ensure protection, and equal rights for women.

However, despite having legal equality and progressive legislation, women's enjoyment of certain rights such as participation in formal employment and decision making are significantly low, and women are still at a disadvantaged position in terms of property rights, family responsibilities, and divorce and custody matters. While participation and equality are curtailed, to varying degrees in various spheres, they are often said to be due to socio-cultural or ideological factors. Religion has thus been used to justify violence against women, to prevent women's participation in public life, and to reinforce discriminatory practices that disadvantage women in almost all spheres. Moreover, despite limited participation and equality in certain areas, the Government is yet to adopt enabling measures to enhance women's rights.

In view of the above challenges for women, the Ministry of Gender and Family continues to work with the national mandate to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment in the Maldives. The following are key achievements made over the last five years.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Gender Equality Act 2016

The Gender Equality Act (Law No. 18/2018) was ratified on 23rd August 2016 to promote and protect women's rights and to encourage greater participation of women in community, economic, political and public spheres. The law prohibits victimization and introduces remedies for discrimination based on gender. In addition, the law highlights the duties and responsibilities of State institutions and other relevant parties to achieve gender equality in the Maldives.

The law, which came into effect on 22nd February 2017, mandates the Ministry to undertake programs and initiatives to achieve gender equality in the Maldives.

The Ministry, by establishing a specific department, must work towards:

- Formulating and implementing a national gender equality policy and an action plan at national level, with the objective of implementing gender equality;
- Reviewing and revising the policy and action plan in consultation with individuals, experts and civil society actors working in the area, every two years;
- Formulate and conduct programs and activities to ensure gender equality;
- Raising awareness on concepts and issues of gender equality;
- Preventing gender-based violence against women and raising awareness on such violence;
- Formulating minimum standards for the complaints mechanisms established by employers under part (g) of Article 20 of the Act;
- Proposing amendments to existing laws or bills in the Parliament, to effectively implement gender equality and prevent gender based violence;
- Collecting and compiling gender segregated data that helps in understanding gender-based discrimination, with the objecting of preventing such discrimination;
- Collecting statistics and publishing relevant data that show the prevalence of gender-based violence against women, the reasons behind such violence and the effects of such violence;
- Establishing a mechanism of cooperation between institutions and entities who have been granted responsibilities under the Act;
- Coordinating the work done by various organizations in the area of gender equality; and
- Establishing a reporting mechanism to report those who violate the Act.

Gender Equality Policy 2017

With the introduction of the new law on Gender Equality, the 2016 Gender Equality Policy (GEP) launched on 8th March 2016, was revised and validated by the Ministry in 2017. The Policy has four main outcome areas; governance and leadership, gender mainstreaming, economic empowerment and gender based violence.

Gender Equality Action Plan 2017

The Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) was developed with the assistance of UNDP Maldives, to fulfil the requirements of Article 42 of the Gender Equality Law 2016, and intends to respond to the state obligations under the national law, international human rights instruments, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

GEAP has five main priority goals; leadership and governance, economic development, institutional gender mainstreaming, gender-based violence and access to justice. GEAP was formulated in consultation with relevant stakeholders and a validation exercise was held on 17th September 2017.

The Ministry is currently developing a monitoring and evaluation framework and establishing the necessary Steering and Technical Committees to implement GEAP. An orientation program and a working session on developing a monitoring and an evaluation framework has been conducted for the members of the National Steering Committee and Technical Committees formed under this action plan. The two-day program held at Maldives Customs Services comprised of participants from 24 organizations including government institutions, political parties, business companies and civil society.

ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

GEL Related Initiatives

(1) GEL Complaints Mechanisms

GEL requires every employer to establish a complaint mechanism (Article 20 (g)) within the organization. The Ministry has published a Minimum Standard on Complaints Mechanisms on 12th June 2017, which should be observed by all public and private sector employers. Individual complaint mechanisms must be established within organisations within 3 months of the enactment of GEL, and the adopted complaints mechanism guideline should be shared with Ministry of Gender and Family (MGF). MGF established its complaints mechanism on 17th June 2017.

Since November 2017, MGF has been monitoring the establishment of complaints mechanism at public and private sector. In the process of monitoring, meetings have been conducted in 57 institutions. By March 2018, 34 institutions had established the complaints mechanism. As at 31 October 2018, 38 institutions have established complaint mechanisms within their institutions.

(2) GEL Awareness Sessions

In order to facilitate the implementation of GEL (18/2016), a number of awareness sessions have been conducted for Ministries and state owned companies. The purpose of these sessions were to sensitize employers on GEL and to accelerate the implementation of GEL.

As at 31 October 2018, more than 78 awareness sessions for a total of 1632 employees have been conducted.

(3) GEL Training for Law Enforcement Officials

In 2017, the Ministry conducted a gender sensitization training programme for investigation and frontline police officers working across the Maldives. The aim of this training programme was to raise awareness amongst police officers on women's rights and gender equality, and provide information on GEL.

A total of 219 officers completed this training, which was supported by the Asian Development Bank.

Ending Violence against Women: Annual Event to Mark 16 Days of Activism

The Ministry participates in the captioned international campaign every year to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. The campaign is run every year from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, International Human Rights Day.

The Ministry actively collaborates with public and private sector to mark the occasion and raise awareness on matters of violence against women. Similar to the celebrations around the world, Maldives also participates in the 'Orange the World' campaign, and uses orange clothing, ribbons and lights up buildings with orange lights on 25 November.

Ministry also organizes and conducts social media campaigns, awareness workshops, door to door campaigns and panel discussions, to raise awareness on violence against women. During the campaign days, the Friday Sermon also focuses on the issue of violence against women from an Islamic perspective.

More information on the 16 Days Activism Campaign is available in the Ministry publication 16 Days Activism Report.

Knowledge Exchange on the Situation of Women's Rights and Equality in the Maldives

The Ministry, together with UNFPA and UN Women, organized a knowledge exchange meeting on the *situation of women's rights and equality in the Maldives*. This meeting aimed to create a platform where all stakeholders can come together to share knowledge, prevalence, theoretical and practical jurisprudence to identify key constraints on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in the Maldives.

The knowledge exchange, which took place as a national validation meeting after compilation of research papers on identified thematic areas, brought together experts from stakeholders and identified urgent challenges and promising opportunities in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. It provided an opportunity to bring to the forefront key perceived 'clashes' between women's rights in international human rights law and women's rights in Islam, and a platform to network with key players in women's rights at the State and non-State sectors.

The topics covered religion and rights, adolescent, sexual and reproductive health, engaging men and boys, access to justice and women's empowerment with a particular focus on unpaid care work.

The validation meeting held on 1 August 2018, was attended by the gender focal points, technical persons and representatives from civil society organizations working on women's rights issues.

EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

Rehendhi Award

The Ministry of Gender and Family has conferred the Rehendhi Award since 2014, in recognition of outstanding contributions and services made by women towards national development. The Rehendhi Award Committee selects awardees. A total of 21 recipients have received this prestigious national award between 2014 and 2018.

More information on the Rehendhi Award is available in the Ministry publication Rehendhi Award Report.

Council for the Economic Empowerment of Women (CEEW)

The Council for Economic Empowerment of Women was established on 16 July 2015. The nine-member council comprises of experts from various fields, including Ministry of Economic Development, Bank of Maldives, Social Sector and members of civil society. The main purpose of the Council is to identify opportunities and challenges faced by women, and in empowering women in the Maldives. Along these lines, the Council is required to:

- Advise and assist MGF on establishing policies related to economic empowerment of women;
- Develop a National Action Plan for Economic Empowerment of Women;
- Advise and provide technical guidance to MGF on developing programs for the Economic Empowerment of Women;
- Provide technical expertise and conduct training programs for women involved in micro, small and medium enterprises and home based programs in collaboration with those conducting such trainings;
- Create awareness on women's participation in technical fields;
- Identify opportunities to market the products of women entrepreneurs and to increase women's role and benefits in tourism, fisheries and agricultural sectors;
- Address issues of financial challenges for women involved in micro, small and medium enterprises; and
- Develop partnership with Government bodies, Government Companies and individual/private business entrepreneurs to ensure opportunities for economic empowerment programs for women.

Empowering Women's Development Committees

Women's Development Committees (WDCs) were first established in 1979 in Male' and in the islands in 1984 under the then National Women's Committee. They remained under the parentage of the Government agencies with the women/gender portfolio in its various forms, until the WDCs were abolished in 2010, to be re-established under the Decentralisation Act. WDCs were elected for the first time under the Decentralisation Act

(Law No. 7/2010) to ensure that the development, planning and implementation of programmes and initiatives incorporates the needs and priorities of women. In addition, to act as an advisory body to the island and atoll councils.

As with the previous WDCs, the current Committees also face the constraints of limited access to decision making at local level, limited financial resources, and also lack of understanding of their mandate. There is also ambiguity in terms of their role in relation to the Councils.

Therefore, in order to build the capacity of the WDCs and to enable them to be more effective in carrying out their mandate, the Ministry has conducted various capacity development workshops for WDC members from 2013 to 2016. The main topics covered in these workshops included basic sensitization on gender equality and women's empowerment through a culturally sensitive approach, role of WDCs and the relationship with Councils, domestic violence, child rights issues, rights of people with disabilities and laws related to vulnerable groups.

Atoll and Island Councils also participated in the workshops.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

Treaty Reporting

Reporting of the 4th and 5th combined report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 27 February 2015, Geneva

The Maldives review meeting was attended by Ministry representatives State Minister Dr. Hala Hameed and Director Ms. Aminath Shirani Naeem.

Follow-up State Party's Report (CEDAW/C/MDV/CO/4-5/Add.1) (09 Nov 2017)

Ministry submitted written information on the steps undertaken to implement its three recommendations on removal of CEDAW reservation (recommendation 9) administration of justice (recommendation 13 (a)-(c) and de-criminalize and abolish flogging (recommendation 45(a), on 20 October 2017, in follow-up to the Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Maldives. The information discussed the measures taken to implement these recommendations.

Full responses to these and the other recommendations made by the Committee must be made in its sixth periodic report in 2019.

Meetings and Conferences

The Seventh Review Meeting of SAARC Gender Info Base (SGIB), 25 - 26 March 2014, Islamabad/ Pakistan

The meeting was attended by Ministry representatives Director Ms. Aminath Shirani Naeem and Program Officer Ms. Mahufooza Waheed

Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing +20 Review, 17 - 20 November 2014, Bangkok / Thailand

The conference was attended by Ministry representatives State Minister Dr. Hala Hameed and Director Ms Aminath Shirani Naeem

Gender Focal Point Conference 2015, Advancing Women & Child Development, 26-27 November 2015, Colombo/Sri Lanka

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Assistant Director Ms. Rishmi Amir.

Capacity Building for Women's Rights and Gender Policies Development, 2-25 June 2016, Korea

The meeting was attended by Ministry representatives Assistant Director Ms. Rishmi Amir and Assistant Program Officer Mr. Hussain Azzam.

Training Course on Empowering Women through Family Planning and Economic Development Interventions, 23-27 May 2016, Pandang & Bukittinggi - West Sumatera, Indonesia

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Program Officer Ms. Mahufooza Waheed.

61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 09 - 18 March 2017, New York / USA

Minister Zenysha Shaheed Zaki participated in the Commission session and shared the achievements and challenges in gender equality and reaffirmed the country's commitment to the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

2nd Gender Focal Point Conference 2017, 3 - 5 May 2017, Colombo/Sri Lanka

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Assistant Director Ms. Rishmi Amir.

Empowering Women through Family Planning & Economic Development Intervention, 15-19 May 2017, Indonesia

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Program Officer Ms. Aishath Mazha Nizam.

Sharing Best Practices on the Implementation of Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting on Indonesia, 25 September- 01 October 2017, Indonesia

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative CEO Ms. Zeenaz Adnan.

Regional Knowledge Exchange - Supporting Policy Coherence for Accelerating Progress towards the 2030 Agenda, 2 - 4 October 2017, Manila/ Philippines

State Minister Dr. Marium Jabyn participated in the Forum and shared the Maldives achievements in gender equality, and on how SDG Goal 5 can be used as an accelerator to achieve other SDGs.

3rd Gender Focal Point Conference 2018, 2 - 4 April 2018, Kathmandu / Nepal

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative CEO Ms. Zeenaz Adnan.

Chapter 4: Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In light of the National Registry of Persons with Disabilities Receiving Financial Allowance from the State, it can be said that Maldives has a significant proportion of PWDs living across the country. However, the actual number of PWDs in the Maldives, prevalence and types of disabilities, is yet to be studied at the national level.

Persons with disabilities face considerable challenges in the Maldives in achieving their most basic rights, including health, education and employment. Major institutions and systems in the country have only started modifying its service provisions to cater to the disability community very recently.

Maldives remains committed to removing barriers faced by persons with disabilities and ensure equality and fundamental rights to all persons with disabilities on an equal basis with the others.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

The 2008 Constitution of the Maldives guarantees equal rights to all persons, including persons with disabilities. The Constitution guarantees special protection and provision of temporary special measures for vulnerable groups including PwDs. The Maldives is also party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) since 2010.

Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance Act 2010

The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance Act (Law No. 8/2010) came into force in 2010 as a significant milestone to introduce the first financial allowance for persons with disabilities and defined the rights of persons with disabilities. Since its ratification, various regulations and guidelines have been established by the Government, to ensure equitable and effective disbursement of the financial allowance.

National Disability Policy

The National Disability Policy was launched in 2013 to implement the Disability Act 2010.

National Disability Council

The first Disability Council was formed under the 'Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance Act' (Law No. 8/2010) (Disability Act) on 9th August 2010 for a term of 5 years. This Act mandates the Disability Council to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities, ensure and monitor the implementation

of the rights enshrined in national laws, provide advice on the subject matter to law and policy makers, and create awareness amongst stakeholders and public.

National Guideline on Identification and Classification of Disabilities ('Disabilities Guideline')

In 2018, the Ministry worked with NSPA to finalize the first 'Guideline on Identification and Classification of Disabilities', drafted in accordance with the Law on Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance Act (Law No. 8/2010), to categorize the types of disabilities and to make standards to determine the disabilities.

This Guideline will be used by NSPA to decide the eligibility of Persons with Disabilities for the financial allowance under Law No. 08/2010.

Guidelines for Goodwill Ambassadors working for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The initial 'Guidelines for Goodwill Ambassadors working for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' was formulated in 2014 to appoint the first goodwill ambassadors with the main aim to give formal status to independent individuals who work for the betterment of PwD's.

This Guideline establishes the ethical standards and the roles and responsibilities of persons acting as Goodwill Ambassadors. The Guideline was revised in 2017, prior to the appointment of the second batch of goodwill ambassadors.

ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

Goodwill Ambassadors

In 2014, the Ministry appointed 3 Goodwill Ambassadors to work for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. The first Goodwill Ambassadors were Mr. Faisal Naseem, Ms. Fathmath Afiya and Mr. Ahmed Hisan.

The current Ambassadors were appointed by the Ministry in 2017. They are Zihnath Hassan, Ahmed Ansaam and Mariyam Faznee.

Amongst other duties, the Goodwill Ambassadors are required to:

- Advocate for equal opportunities in society for persons with disabilities;
- Provide technical and other necessary assistance to the programs undertaken by the Ministry;
- Identify and notify the Ministry about challenges faced by persons with disabilities and emerging issues;
- Create linkages between humanitarian individuals and Non-Government Organization (NGO's) with the families of persons with disabilities; and

- Encourage individuals, institutions, companies, organizations and civil society to assist persons with disabilities.

Goodwill ambassadors are appointed for a term of 2 years, and may be appointed for consecutive terms.

Making Audio Clips of Laws for Persons with Hearing Impairments

The 'Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance Act' (8/2010) mandates the Ministry to make information accessible for persons with disabilities. Hence, in 2017, the Ministry has commenced the production of laws in audio format, to ensure that persons with hearing impairments are aware of their legal rights.

The following laws are now available on the Ministry website in audio format:

1. Act for Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Providing Financial Assistance (8/2010);
2. Gender Equality Law (18/2016);
3. Domestic Violence Act (3/2012); and
4. Child Rights Protection Act (9/91)

EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

National Disability Award

The National Disability Award was introduced in 2012. Since then, it has been awarded every two years, with the aim to honor and appreciate the work done to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and for outstanding PwDs. The award is a joint program of the Ministry and the National Disability Council. The Disability Award is also determined by a Committee of independent individuals with expertise and experience.

More details on the Disability Award is available in the Ministry publication Disability Award Report 2012 – 2016.

Redhan Exhibition

Persons with disabilities in the Maldives have insufficient opportunities to prove their skill and talent. The Government in 2015 therefore, organized Redhan Exhibition to provide a platform for this marginalized group, to display their skill, and also to brand and market their products and to increase public awareness.

Sensitization for Employers and PwDs

In 2016, President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayyoom took an initiative to provide employment for persons with disabilities, in state owned companies. As at 31 October 2018, over 260 persons have been employed in various state owned companies in the Maldives.

The Ministry monitors the employment situation of these persons and regularly meets with the employers to identify and discuss challenges faced by both the employers and the employed persons with disabilities.

To ensure regular monitoring, in 2017, the Ministry identified focal points in all enterprises that employed PwD's. Establishing focal points enhanced communications in matters related to PwD's. Furthermore, job review meetings were conducted by the Ministry along with the Goodwill Ambassadors, with management and employed PwD's.

Sign Language Training

Since the introduction of state facilitated employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, the Ministry has conducted different activities and programs to overcome the challenges faced at the work place by employers and PwDs. One major problem identified through these sensitization sessions was that there were significant communication challenges for persons with hearing impairments, difficulties in providing work related instructions and that other staffs and the management had limited knowledge on disabilities.

For these reasons, the introduction of the Ministry's Basic and Advanced Sign Language Training Program brought lot of improvement to the employed PwD's with hearing impairments, employers and service providers. The main aim of these courses was to minimize the challenges faced by hearing impaired persons in communication and to facilitate easier access to services by minimizing communication barriers faced by persons with hearing impairments.

To date, a total of 9 Basic Sign Language Courses and 2 Advance Sign Language Courses have been conducted. A total of 270 persons have been trained under these programs. In addition, the Ministry has also conducted Basic Sign Language Program in Ha. Atoll. A total of 66 participants from 7 different islands of this Atoll took part in this course.

PwD Empowerment Program

The Ministry conducted a PwD Empowerment Program from 12-29 August 2018, to provide information to persons with disabilities (PwD's), and to strengthen their knowledge and increase their participation in society. The program included sessions on sexual harassment, domestic violence, self-care, mental well-being, legal aid services, gender & socialization and sexual & reproductive health.

The sessions were facilitated by the Ministry of Gender and Family, Family Protection Authority, Society for Health Education (SHE), Family Legal Clinic and Maldives Police Services (Family and Child Protection Department).

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS IN THE AREA

Treaty Reporting

Maldives submitted its Initial Report under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 08 October 2018. This report was prepared in accordance with the Committee's Guidelines on treaty-specific document to be submitted by states parties under article 35, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Harmonized Guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties.

The report covers the period from 2010 to 2017 December, and was prepared after reviewing available literature prepared by international organisations, Government, national human rights institution and civil society, and in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

Meetings and Conferences

Empowering People with Disabilities and Special Needs, 07 – 11 May 2018, Singapore

Attended by Ministry Representative, Deputy Director General, Ms Aminath Shareef

The 2nd CBR World Congress, 27 – 29 September 2016, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Planning Officer Ms. Aishath Siyaana.

Exposure Visit to Odisha, India, 6-12 January 2015, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Assistant Social Service Worker Ms. Fathimath Munasha.

3rd World Assembly for women with disability-South Korea, 3-6 September 2015, South Korea, Seoul

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Assistant Social Service Worker Ms. Fathimath Munasha.

SAARC Regional Training Program on Children Safety including Children with Special Needs in South Asia, 4-14 November 2013, Kashmir, India

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Administrative Officer Ms. Fathimath Munasha.

Economic Empowerment for PWD's through a Community Based Employment, 9th January to 2nd February 2013, Okinawa, Japan

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Administrative Officer Ms. Fathimath Munasha.

Course on Women in Leadership, 9-13 June 2013, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Assistant Social Service Officer, Suneetha Mohamed.

N.S.O participation in expert Group Meeting on Effective Data Generation for The Incheon Strategy Indicates, 6-7 November 2013, Bangkok

The meeting was attended by Ministry representative Assistant Social Service Officer, Suneetha Mohamed.

Chapter 5: Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Research

LEGAL & POLICY AFFAIRS

Providing Legal Opinions

A number of legal opinions were provided on various cases at social services department, ad hoc issues on matters of the Ministry, and on legislative matters, including the commentaries submitted on; the Child Rights Protection Bill to the Parliament, the Mental Health Bill to the Ministry of Health, the General Regulation on Preventing Domestic Violence (2018/R-101) and the Women's Development Committees Regulation to the Local Government Authority.

Amongst others, extensive work was also done by the Division on finalizing the Foster Care Guideline, Under 18 Marriage Assessment Guideline, Minimum Standards of Shelters and the Guideline on Identification and Classification of Disabilities (NSPA), and the Guidelines for Goodwill Ambassadors working for Persons with Disabilities.

The Division also provides assistance to other requirements of the Ministry in contractual matters involving office administration and staff related issues.

Treaty Reporting

The Ministry has the national mandate to report under 3 core human rights treaties: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Between November 2013 and November 2018, the Ministry has been reviewed by the CRC Committee for the Maldives's 4-5th CRC Combined Report and submitted a Follow-up State Party Report (CEDAW/C/MDV/CO/4-5/Add.1) to the CEDAW Committee.

Together with the support of UNFPA, the Ministry is currently working on the 6th CEDAW State Party Report of the Maldives, due on 01 March 2019.

National Human Rights Action Plan

The National Human Rights Action Plan has been a prime target of the Government, designed to create a five-year National Human Rights Action Plan highlighting 14 target areas. Multiple areas of this plan, including, right to safety and social protection, involvement in civil society, and right to gender equality, is highly relevant to the work of the Ministry.

The Ministry has been a key stakeholder organisation of the Plan since it was re-activated in 2015 by the Ministry, then operating under the name Ministry of Law, Gender and Human Rights. The work of NHRAP was moved to the Attorney General's Office with the human rights mandate, when the Ministry was re-named in 2016 with a revised mandate.

The Document is currently pending endorsement at the NHRAP Steering Committee.

Highlighting Gaps in Existing Legislations, Policies & Practices which Prevent Equal Rights to All Persons

Amongst others, the Ministry submitted the following white papers to relevant stakeholder agencies, in order to suggest changes to domestic laws and policies, in view of Maldives's commitments under international human rights instruments and to better ensure protection to vulnerable women, children, elderly and persons with disabilities in the Maldives.

- Modifying State Party's Reservation to CEDAW Article 16;
- Increasing number of days of paternity leave for public servants; and
- Modifying national identification documents to include the name of one guardian to address the issue of discrimination against children born out of wedlock.

Establishing Partnerships with Stakeholders and Private Enterprises

The Ministry establishes MoUs with stakeholders and business organizations to secure assistance, services and opportunities for staff and children living in shelters. In this regard, the Ministry signed 30 MoUs between June 2016 and November 2018.

TRAINING PROGRAMS

Capacity Building Training (CBT)

In November 2015, Ministry conducted training programs for supervisory level staffs/managers in line with the assessment conducted by Dr. Robin Harr on the training needs for the social workers and barriers faced by social workers. Ninety-Nine (99 %) percent of social workers across the country were trained under the program.

Since then regular CBT programs have been conducted in the Ministry to develop the required skills and provide training for social workers. These programs ensure:

- Increased the level of understanding of social workers about how they can apply existing laws and regulations relevant to their work to achieve a more successful outcome when they work on cases;
- Increased knowledge and capacity of social workers on performing tasks involved in their casework, which includes doing home visits and initial assessments, making action plans, interviewing or taking sessions with victims of child abuse or domestic violence etc;
- Increased social workers' familiarity with the procedure manual so that they are more aware of the guidelines that need to be followed; and
- Enhanced the coordination between social workers and respective agencies.

Professional Development Training (PDT)

Ministry conducted a “Professional Development Training on Service Provisions for the Elderly and Victims of Abuse” for health and social workers of three atolls, with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO). The program covered a range of topics including information on relevant laws and regulations, procedures for providing protection to children, women, elderly and persons with disabilities, and standards for provision of support and care for victims.

A total of 24 health and social workers from Vaavu Atoll, Meemu Atoll, and Faafu Atoll participated in the 5-day programme held in Faafu Atoll Nilandhoo from 11 to 15 March. A further 33 persons completed the programme from Alif Alif and Alif Dhaalu Atoll from 8-12 April 2018. The third PDT programme took place in Addu City, where a total of 14 health and social workers participated in the 5-day programme.

A total of 71 health and social workers were trained under the PDT programme.

PLANNING AND MONITORING

Day Care Center Licensing

Daycare centers in the Maldives are required to register at the Ministry of Gender and are required to meet Daycare Licensing Guidelines established by the Ministry to operate. Once the Ministry receives an application, officials visit the site and conduct a background check and inspections, and also checks if the center meets certain building codes. Thereon, Ministry conducts regular inspection of the centers to ensure they continue to confirm to the Daycare Center Guidelines.

Result-Based Management Training (RBM)

A Face-to-Face (F2F) skills training was conducted for selected mid-management to management level staff of MGF in 2017 October, with a view to strengthen knowledge and capacities of MGF staff to apply results-based management to improve programming and demonstrate MGF’s contribution to SDG’s and to the national development of the country.

The training focused on the development of skills for the application of RBM, using adult learning approaches that reinforce learning from the e-module and strengthened participants’ ability to apply what they learned. The 2 day workshop had 3 objectives:

- Be able to apply RBM principles to the design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation of programmes and in the reporting of results for the development of the nation;
- Understand and be capable of using available tools and approaches to strengthen results-oriented programmes in different programming contexts; and
- Identify key actions to undertake to strengthen managing for results in their work.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

United Nations General Assembly

UNGA 72nd Session, New York, USA, 15 – 22 September 2017

Minister Zenysha Shaheed Zaki participated in the High Level Segment of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. During this visit, Minister Zenysha moderated and participated as a panelist in the High-Level Side-Event on ‘Ending Violence against Children’, which was co-hosted by the Maldives, Nigeria, Estonia, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children and Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. The event brought together countries across regions to share different perspectives, challenges, prevention models and innovative strategies in combating violence against children.

Minister Zenysha also participated in the following meetings and side-events:

- High-Level Side-Event on sustainable development, “A Promise to Children and their Rights and well-being in the SDGS”;
- High-Level roundtable discussion on “Women’s Economic Empowerment”;
- High-Level event on “Delivering Together for Healthy and Empowered Women, Children and Adolescents”;
- High-Level event on “Investing in the Early Years: A Roadmap for Sustainable Futures”; and
- Meeting with UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children Ms Marta Santos Pais.

UNHRC 37th Session, Geneva, Switzerland, 24 February – 03 March 2018

Minister Zenysha Shaheed Zaki participated in the High Level Segment of the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council, as part of the Maldivian delegation along with H.E Dr Aishath Shiham, Minister of Education.

Minister Zenysha participated in the following meetings and side-events:

- Side Event co-hosted by Maldives, Vietnam, India, France, Philippines and Bangladesh on the ‘Role of information and telecommunication technologies in ensuring economic, social and cultural rights and reducing inequalities’;
- Meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein;
- Meeting with the United Nations Representative and Head of Office Ms. Anne-Sophie Lois; and
- Meeting with Director of UNICEF Liaison in Geneva, Ms. Marilena Vivani.

Chapter 6: Social Services

CASE SUPERVISION AND MONITORING

The Ministry has the national mandate to ensure the protection of vulnerable children, women, elderly and persons with disabilities. As such, Ministry receives an average 200 cases per month on various issues of neglect, abuse and violence against these vulnerable groups. The Ministry works with the Ministry of Health and Maldives Police Services to ensure timely delivery of services to persons needing assistance, and in the investigation of the cases. The Ministry also provides psychosocial support to individuals involved in reported cases.

Family and Childrens Service Centers have been established in all atolls to ensure decentralized, timely and effective services. Several supervision and monitoring trips have been conducted to all the FCSC in each atoll whereby full reviews of all the ongoing cases are conducted. Case audit's focus on reviewing a sample of cases picked on a random basis, and supervisors focus on the caseworkers to ensure procedures are followed.

High staff turnover, lack of adequate supervision and monitoring present significant impediments to effective and quality service provision. With increased public awareness on violence against children, referrals made to the Ministry, as well as complexity of cases are on the rise and there is an acute demand for value added services to cater for the needs of clientele. It is important that services are systematic, compliant to best practices and result based.

With the necessary infrastructure in place, there is a strong need for strengthening service provision and identifying gaps in service delivery, and to continue close monitoring and evaluation.

FOSTERING AND REINTEGRATION

Fostering was first introduced formally in the Maldives in 2010, to ensure safe family environments for children living under state care. Since then, the system has been strengthened with the establishment of a Foster Care Guideline and an independent 7 member Foster Panel who makes decisions on fostering and reintegration.

More details on fostering and reintegration is available in the Ministry publication Foster Panel Annual Report 2017 and Foster Panel Report dated Jan-Oct 2018.

ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

Ahan Mobile Application and Call Center

Reports of violence against children has dramatically increased over the last few years. However, most cases are reported from the capital Male' and the capital islands in the Atolls.

The low reporting of cases from more remote islands can be associated with the geographical nature of the country. Similarly, providing a timely response to cases from the remote islands is a major challenge, even though each of the atolls has a Family and Children Service Centre (FCSC) established at atoll level.

In view of these challenges, the Ministry of Gender and Family has launched 1412 call centre and an “Ahan” mobile application in collaboration with UNICEF and Maldives Police Service, to facilitate the reporting of violence against children. The 1412 child helpline service was initiated by the government in November 2009 as a toll free number, to assure that cases involving violence against children were reported and conferred to relevant authorities.

Child Sexual Abuse Offenders Registry

Article 57 of The Special Provisions Act to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders (12/2009) allowed for an offenders’ registry to be published. In this regard, the Ministry published www.offenders.mv in 2015, to enhance easy access to the child sex offenders’ database. Offenders in the database are those who have been sentenced under the Act 12/2009, and the information included are those mentioned in Article 66 of the regulation R48/2011. The information is obtained and verified from the relevant authorities including Maldives Police Service, Criminal Court, Maldives Correctional Service, Magistrate Courts and Island Councils.

The database helps parents, school managements, employers and other concerned residents to identify important details of offenders who have been sentenced for sexual offence against a child or children under the Act 12/2009. Viewers of this website can search for the present location of those offenders, their duration and the completion of the sentence. Viewers can search for offenders by their name, national identity card number or the island they belong to. The information of an offender will remain in the database for an additional 10 years even after completion of jail sentence, as stated in the Regulation.

In addition to the database, this website provides visitors with information about child sexual abuse. Moreover, the website also provides answers to frequently asked questions such as reporting mechanisms and services provided.

Disseminating Monthly Case Statistics

Monthly case statistics are published through the ministry’s official website and various other forms of social media on a monthly basis. Ministry representatives also present information on case statistics every month via public media stations in attempt to inform the public regarding the various types of reported cases and to educate them on reporting procedures and the work done by the ministry.

More details on case statistics is available in the Ministry publication Case Statistics Report 2017 and Case Statistics Report dated Jan-Oct 2018.

Chapter 7: Institutional Management

Children taken into State Care in the Maldives are provided shelter in the Children's Homes Kudakudhinge Hiya (includes Amaan Hiya) in Villingili and Fiyavathi in Hulhumale'. The main aim of these institutions is to provide a safe, secure and enabling environments for vulnerable children who have been subjected to various forms of neglect and abuse and have no other means of primary care.

The first residential care facility for children, Kudakudhinge Hiya was opened in May 2006, and Amaan Hiya was established adjacent to the shelter to accommodate more children. With the increase in the number of children taken into state care, the government established a third facility, Fiyavathi in February 2016 and the shelters now specialize as a home for children of different age groups. The Ministry has also published a Minimum Standards for State Care Shelters for Children, on 31 October 2018.

As of November 2018 Kudakudhinge Hiya accommodates 46 children between 13 to 18 years, and Fiyavathi accommodates 99 children below the age of 13.

FIYAVATHI

Staff and Administration

Upon establishment of the Ministry of Gender and Family in June 2016, Fiyavathi was established as a separate institution, which is directly managed by the Ministry. One of the first changes made to the management of the institution was to hire a CEO to the institution, to oversee the day to day affairs of the institution. 49 new staff members were also recruited to the institution with the assistance of sponsors and donors which significantly improved the quality of care and support provided to children living at Fiyavathi.

The following initiatives were introduced by the Ministry to strengthen human resources at Fiyavathi:

Date	Measures Taken
March-Apr 2017	Early Childhood Education Training (Malaysia)
Feb-March 2017	Positive Parenting Program
July 2017	Pediatric Life Support Training
October 2017	Guidance and Recommendation for Institutional Homes in Maldives

Health

Since its establishment in 2016, the facilities at Fiyavathi has been significantly improved to enhance its capacity in terms of space and technical staff to provide health and medical support to children. The following improvements have therefore been made between December 2016 and November 2018, to ensure medical care for children living at Fiyavathi:

Date	Measures taken
December 2016	A medical room was established to attend to children's daily medical needs
December 2016	Full-time nurses were hired to work at the shelter
December 2016	Separate refrigerators were provided for medical room and babies room to store medication according to health and safety regulations
January 2017	Conducted a full health and dental screening for all children in partnership with Senahiya Hospital
January 2017	Following a medical screening, all medical files and records were updated
January 2017	A mechanism was established to monitor administration of medicine and to maintain records of medicines Psychological assessments were conducted on a priority basis through private clinics and hospitals for children
August 2018	Medical regulation for emergency situations was developed
September 2018	Medical room was expanded to a medical unit to isolate children in case of viral illnesses and communicable diseases
April 2018	A counselor was hired to provide children with additional psychosocial support
August 2018	A special needs consultant was hired to provide support to children with special needs

Education

Children taken under State care often need additional educational support, in order to be given an equal chance to perform at school. The following improvements have been made at Fiyavathi to ensure support to children who require additional assistance:

Date	Measures taken
April 2016	Establishment of a computer lab

August 2016	A Young Learner's English Programme was initiated for all children above 7 years to improve their language skills and performance in school
December 2016	Initiated daily Quran classes for all children above 3 years in partnership with the Centre for Holy Quran
January 2017	Fiyavathi management, supervisors and teachers conducted regular meetings with the school management and teachers, to address challenges for children in the school environment.
January 2017	Full-time teachers were hired to provide support to children with schoolwork and give individual attention to children learning how to read and write. Teachers work with all children above 2 and a half years and conduct early childhood education activities for children who attend pre-school. Teachers also organized supplementary programmes such as Quran and madhaha competitions and outdoor educational activities such as nature walks on a weekly basis.
February 2017	Three classrooms were established inside Fiyavathi to facilitate educational activities.
May 2017	A library was established to promote reading amongst children.
September 2017	Children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder were enrolled in the Autism School and sent for regular sessions and therapies.

Safety and Wellbeing

Since July 2016, several safety improvements have been made at Fiyavathi. The building has been made more child friendly, and the shelter has been better furnished with additional facilities.

Staff numbers have also been increased to cater to the needs of the increasing number of babies and toddlers at the shelter, and to provide better quality of care and support.

The following works have been completed to ensure the safety and well-being of children at Fiyavathi:

Date	Measures taken
August 2016	Children's bedrooms and classrooms were air-conditioned
December 2016	Laundry and drying areas were constructed for both boys and girls living areas
May 2017	Installation of a fire alarm system
April 2017	Installation of a CCTV system and security system

	Installation of vinyl flooring in children’s living areas and babies room
December 2017	Living areas and bedrooms were repainted to make them more child-friendly
December 2017 and October 2018	New sofas and bean bags were provided for children’s living areas
December 2017 and October 2018	New beds and mattresses were provided on a need basis

Recreation and Sports

Fiyavathi has also been improved to accommodate sports and recreational needs of the children. As such, a proper space to promote physical activity has been developed inside the shelter, to keep them occupied and engaged during their free time. Children are also encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities offered by the schools such as little maids, cub scouts, and athletics and swimming.

The following changes have been made in this regard:

Date	Measures taken
December 2016	Regular basketball practices were commenced for all children above 7 years
December 2016	A Programme Officer was hired to coordinate and organize children’s recreational activities
January 2017	A life skill development camp was organized during children’s school holidays
February 2017	A playground was established inside Fiyavathi shelter to promote active lifestyles
September 2017	Football trainings for children interested in football commenced
December 2017	An art programme was carried out for children to provide them with an opportunity to express their creativity skills
June 2018	A swimming programme was introduced to teach all children above 8 years how to swim

Infrastructure Developments

Major structural changes have been brought to Fiyavathi between 2016 and 2018, to ensure better services and safety to the children. The following infrastructure developments have been completed:

Date	Measures taken
November 2016	Installation of a new gate and roof for entrance
December 2016	Establishment of laundry and drying areas Establishment of a medical room
February 2017	Establishment of a playground
March 2017	Establishment of 3 classrooms and an office space for teachers
May 2017	Establishment of a library
August 2018	Expansion of medical room into a medical unit
October 2018	Establishment of a separate room to accommodate family visits Establishment of separate staff rooms on both boys and girls side Establishment of storage rooms on both boys and girls side
November 2018	Establishment of a sensory room for children with special needs Establishment of a counseling room

KUDAKUDHINGE HIYA

Staff and Administration

Kudakudhinge Hiya is run as a separate institution since it was first established. Upon its review in July 2016, the adjacent Amaan Hiya building was established as the girls' quarters of the shelter. Since then many improvements have been made to strengthen the administration and human resources at Kudakudhinge Hiya.

The following initiatives were introduced by the Ministry:

Date	Measures Taken
February 2017	Positive Parenting Program
October 2017	Caretakers Wellness Program Guidance and Recommendation for Institutional Homes in Maldives
December 2017	Fire Awareness Training Basic first aid training
March 2018	Capacity Building Training Program
May 2018	Caretakers Wellness Program
October 2018	Awareness Programme on disaster reduction

Health

The facilities at Kudakudhinge Hiya have been improved to enhance its capacity to provide medical and psychosocial support to children.

The following improvements have therefore been made, to ensure health and medical care for children living at Kudakudhinge Hiya:

Date	Measures taken
November 2016	A counselling coordinator was hired to provide children with psychological support.
December 2016	Conducted full health and dental screening for all children in partnership with Senahiya Hospital
January 2017	Following the medical screening, all medical files and records were updated. A mechanism was established to monitor administration of medicine and to maintain records of medicine.
September 2017	Two additional nurses were hired on shift duty basis.
November 2017, December 2017 and July 2018	New Social Service workers were hired and trained.
November 2017	Psychological assessments were conducted through private clinics and hospitals for children on priority basis.
January 2018	New specialized bed and chair was provided for child with cerebral palsy.
February 2018	An eye camp was carried out for all children.
April 2018	Dental screenings were carried out for all children.
May 2018	Thalassemia screening and awareness was carried out for all children.
August 2018	Medical regulation for emergency situations were developed.
October 2018	Psychotherapy sessions commenced for children in need of support.
October 2018	Basic first aid training.

Education

Children taken under State care often need additional educational support, in order to be given an equal chance to perform at school. Ministry also worked with Education Ministry to assess the individual educational needs of the children. In addition, coordination with school management was also strengthened to improve the school experience of children.

In light of the above, the following improvements have been made to ensure adequate support to children who require assistance:

Date	Measures taken
November 2016	Worked with Education Ministry to provide alternative education options for children out of school such as homeschooling, Btech and Dhasvaaru
December 2016	Commenced regular Quran programme
April 2017	Leadership Development Camp
May 2017	A computer lab was established
May to August 2017	A certificate level 3 Multimedia and Web designing course was carried out for children
June 2017 and May 2018	Quran Competition during Ramazan of 2017 and 2018
July 2017	Leadership and Life skills development camp
August 2017	Young Leadership Development camp
September 2017	Meetings were held with school management to discuss issues at the school environment
August 2018	Photography workshop in partnership with UNICEF Life skills programme initiated for girls
October 2018	Life skills programme initiated for boys

Safety and Wellbeing

Since July 2016, several safety improvements have been made at Kudakudhinge Hiya. The building has been made more secure around the premises of both buildings and access is monitored for children, staff and other external parties entering and exiting the premises.

The following works have been completed to ensure the safety and well-being of children at Kudakudhinge Hiya:

Date	Measures taken
December 2016	Development and implementation of incident reporting procedure
June 2017	Repair and maintenance of existing fire safety equipment

July 2017 and February 2018	Children's bedrooms, living areas and the outside walls around the perimeter were newly painted
July 2017 and October 2018	New beds and mattresses were provided on a need basis
August 2017	Children's bedrooms were air-conditioned
August 2017	New water filters were provided for each floor
December 2017	Installation of CCTV
	Installation of Vinyl flooring in children's living areas and bedrooms
January 2018	Started providing perimeter security
May 2018	New sofas were provided for children's living areas
July 2018	Installation of fence around the perimeter
October 2018	Perimeter security guideline developed and implemented

Recreation and Sports

The open spaces around both buildings at Kudakudhinge Hiya has been improved to accommodate sports and extracurricular activities of the children, and to keep them occupied and engaged during their free time.

The following changes have been made in this regard:

Date	Measures taken
May 2017	Commenced a daily physical education programme
September 2017	Provided regular opportunities to play in Villimale' futsal grounds
October 2017	Commenced regular art classes
September 2018	
November 2017	Started a gardening project
December to January 2017	Conducted swimming programmes for all children during school holidays
January 2018	Organized fishing trips for children
April 2018	Conducted group fitness classes for a duration of 3 months for all the children in partnership with TfG
December 2017 and June 2018	Organized picnics and other recreational trips for children to celebrate special occasions such as Eid and school holidays

Internship Opportunities

The Ministry works with private and public sector organizations to provide internship opportunities for children living at Kudakudhinge Hiya.

The following internship opportunities have been provided for children between 2017 and 2018:

Child No.	Age	Duration of internship/training	Details of internship
1	18 years	15 months	Anantara Maldives Graduated Explorer Programme and currently in a permanent job
2	16 years	3 months	Anantara Maldives
3	18 years	1 year	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
4	18 years	1 year	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
5	19 years	1 year	Kurumba Maldives
6	18 years	3 months	Anantara Maldives
7	18 years	Ongoing	Anantara Maldives
8	16 years	3 months	Medhufushi Resort (BTech Programme)

Infrastructure Developments

Many infrastructure and accommodation related developments have been brought to Kudakudhinge Hiya and the adjacent Amaan Hiya to address the needs of the children.

The following are the main improvements:

Date	Measures taken
June 2017	Repair and maintenance of existing fire safety equipment
November 2017	Establishment of Kudakudhinge Hiya as boys' living quarters and Amaan Hiya as girls' living quarters
December 2017	Installation of CCTV system
January 2018	Installment of a fence around the perimeter
October 2018	Establishment of a separate dining area for girls in Amaan Hiya ground floor

Chapter 8: National and International Committees, Councils and Bodies

NATIONAL COUNTER TERRORISM COMMITTEE

The Ministry of Gender and Family is a member of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee, under the Ministry of Defence and National Security. The Ministry is represented by State Minister Dr Marium Jabyn.

The following meetings and sessions have been attended by Ministry officials:

Regional Capacity Building Event on Prevention of Child Recruitment and Exploitation By Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups, 25 – 27 September 2018, Bangkok, Thailand

Attended by Ministry Representative, Deputy Director General, Ms Aminath Shareef

Asian Leadership Learning Exchange on PCVE National Action Plans, 27-28 August 2018, Kuala Lumpur

Attended by member of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee, State Minister Dr. Marium Jabyn.

National Conference on Promoting Dialogue and Creating a Peaceful and Tolerant Community, 13 and 14 August 2018, Islamic Ministry Conference Centre, Male'

Attended by Ministry Representative, Assistant Director, Ms Mariyam Maasha Ahmed

Study Tour on Counter Terrorism for Government Officials (Study Tour), 07 – 14 July 2018, Japan

Attended by Ministry Representative, Deputy Director General, Ms Aminath Shareef

Engaging In Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism and Incitement in Asia, 27 – 29 September 2017, Bangkok, Thailand

Attended by Ministry Representative, Deputy Director General, Ms Aminath Shareef

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE (NHRAP)

Ministry representatives took part in formulating the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP), currently led by the Attorney General's Office, and ensured the plan of action is

in line with the Ministries' mandate, obligations under domestic law and its international commitments.

State Minister Dr. Marium Jabyn is the Ministry Representative on the National Human Rights Action Plan Steering Committee.

SOUTH ASIAN INITIATIVE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

The South Asian Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC) is a SAARC Apex body, which is an inter-governmental regional body comprising of 8 SAARC countries- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, working towards the elimination of all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and discrimination against children. SAIEVAC's activities, decided by its Board Members representing member countries and other stakeholders, mainly focuses on six thematic areas; child marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation, child labor, corporal punishment, trafficking and SAIEVAC mechanism.

SAIEVAC works alongside many partners such as SAARC secretariat, SAARC Development Fund (SDF), South Asian Coordinating Group for Ending Violence against Women and Children (SACG), National Action and Coordinating Group against Violence against Women and Children (NACG), SAARCLAW, The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) and Special Representative of Secretary General (SRSG) on Violence against Children.

SAIEVAC holds several meetings at policy and technical levels. The consultations also bring together children and youth representatives, national and regional representatives of SACG, (International) Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, United Nations and other International Organizations, as well as other key child protection stakeholders and child rights actors from South Asia.

The Ministry is represented in SAIEVAC by State Minister Dr. Marium Jabyn on the SAIEVAC Governing Board and by Programme Officer Ms. Aishath Ashiya Shathir, as the SAIEVAC National Coordinator.

The following SAIEVAC meetings were attended by Ministry officials:

SAIEVAC 3rd Regional Convening on Using Law to End Child Marriage in South Asia and Regional Validation Workshop on the Draft Regional Strategy on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation including Online Safety (CSAE&OS), Colombo, 11-14 September 2018

Attended by SAIEVAC Governing Board Member, State Minister Dr. Marium Jabyn

Sharing Best Practices of Child Friendly City in Indonesia, 10 – 14 September 2018, Indonesia

Attended by Ministry Representative, Director Ms Fazza Fuad and Director Mr Abdullah Ashraf

SAIEVAC 7th Governing Board Meeting, Bhutan, 11-15 May 2018

Attended by SAIEVAC Governing Board Member, State Minister Dr. Marium Jabyn and National Coordinator Ms Aishath Ashiya Shathir from the Ministry of Gender and Family.

SAIEVAC High Level Regional Policy Conference on Environment, Human and Child Labour, and Animal Welfare in South Asia's Brick Kilns: Tackling Challenges and Working Together to change the Industry, 26th-27th January 2017, Pokhara, Nepal

Attended by SAIEVAC Maldives National Coordinator Mr Munzir Ismail, Executive Coordinator, from the Ministry of Gender and Family.

SAIEVAC Meeting to Review the Draft Regional Strategy on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation including Online Safety, 23rd - 24th August 2017, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Attended by SAIEVAC Maldives National Coordinator Mr Munzir Ismail, Executive Coordinator, from the Ministry of Gender and Family.

SAIEVAC Visit to Islamabad for International Human Rights conference hosted by Pakistani PM and Expert Group meeting to Review the Draft Regional Strategy on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation including Online Safety, 19th - 21st February 2018, Islamabad, Pakistan

Attended by SAIEVAC Maldives National Coordinator Mr Munzir Ismail, Executive Coordinator, from the Ministry of Gender and Family.