

Press statement:

Mental Health is a universal human right - World Mental Health Day 2023

10 October 2023

This year's world mental health day theme “**mental health is a universal human right**” underscores its centrality for the full realization of the right to health. Health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a state of **complete physical, mental and social well-being**, and not merely the absence of disease.

On this day, we call on Maldivian stakeholders to protect and ensure the fundamental rights of persons with mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities, without discrimination.

We call on the state to:

- Introduce sick leave for mental health conditions.
- Establish a robust accountability and redress mechanism for mental health service providers and professionals, with measures to protect victims' identity and a safe redress process.
- Incorporate the rights and needs of persons with mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities in policy making — particularly in the areas of health, employment and education.
- Ensure full participation of persons with mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities, and associations of persons with disabilities in all stages of the development and implementation of policies and laws impacting our lives.

We call on mental health service providers to:

- Ensure minimum standards in line with international conventions and Maldivian laws, particularly the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

- Establish data management systems which protect client identities and ensure help-seekers receive timely care.
- Establish internal and external accountability mechanisms that ensure responsible practice by employees and other relevant service providers.

While there has been improvements in mental health awareness over the past decade, service provision remains inadequate and accountability is entirely lacking. The only existing avenue for complaints regarding mental health professionals is neither functional nor safe for victims of irresponsible psychiatric services. This lack of accountability is contributing to the lack of trust in service providers and negatively impacting help-seeking behavior of those in need of mental health services.

The Maldives is party to international conventions which protect the rights of persons with mental health conditions and disabilities, and our laws provide provisions for the realization of the rights of such persons. However employment and human resources policies in the Maldives have yet to incorporate the rights and needs of persons with mental health conditions and disabilities — particularly psychosocial disabilities. Employees are forced to give non-mental health related reasons when requesting sick leave instead of stating their true mental health needs.

Additionally, state policies and strategies affecting persons with mental health conditions and disabilities do not include effective participation of such persons in development and implementation. As a result, these policies and strategies are unable to address our needs. For example, while housing schemes allocate categories and points for families which include disabled persons, the housing provided is not designed or built accessibly.

There remains a significant need in the Maldives for advocacy, accountability, policy reform and societal changes in order to ensure the fundamental rights of persons with mental health conditions and disabilities (especially psychosocial disabilities).