

Ahmed Shaheed, Maldives

Speaker, Round Table: Iran & the Death Penalty



Dr. Ahmed Shaheed is an internationally recognized expert on foreign policy, diplomacy, democratization and human rights reform especially in Muslim States. He has twice held the Office of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives. During his time in government, Dr. Shaheed played a leading role in the Maldives democratic transition and in its human rights reform process.

After joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1982, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed rose through the Foreign Service ranks. From 1999 to 2004, he held the position of Permanent Secretary. After leaving the Ministry in 2004 to become the Maldives' first Government Spokesperson at the President's Office, he returned in July 2005 when he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs until August 2007.

Throughout his time at the Ministry and as Chief Government Spokesperson, Shaheed was a leading advocate of a new modern country founded upon liberal democratic principles, strong human rights protections, and openness and engagement with the outside world.

Minister Shaheed was instrumental in securing political approval for the creation of a national Human Rights Commission in 2003 and accession to the UN Convention against Torture (CAT) in 2004. In his role as the Chief Government Spokesperson, he also succeeded in reversing the decision of the Government's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs to ban the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 2005. During his first term as Minister, the Maldives acceded to the vast majority of international human rights conventions. During this time, the Maldives became one of the original signatories of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), one of the first countries in the world to establish a National Preventative Mechanisms, and one of the first to host the international Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT). Dr. Shaheed also took the decision to extend a standing invitation to all UN human rights special procedures.

After leaving Office in August 2007, Dr. Shaheed teamed up with his former Cabinet colleagues and fellow members of the New Maldives faction, Dr. Mohamed Jameel Ahmed and Dr. Hassan Saeed, and launched the New Maldives Movement and the Maldives Reform Movement. In September 2008, Minister Shaheed became the running mate of presidential candidate Dr. Hassan Saeed in the country's first multiparty presidential election. They pledged their unconditional support to the presidential challenger, Mr. Mohamed Nasheed, and actively supported the Grand Patriotic Coalition, which ultimately emerged victorious in the election. Soon

afterwards, Dr. Shaheed joined the Maldives Democratic Party (MDP).

During his second spell as Foreign Minister from 2008 to 2010, he focused considerable attention on consolidating democracy and human rights in the country. He also led the national consultation process for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Maldives' human rights commitments, and led the delegation, which presented the Maldives National Report to the UN.

At the international level, he was a Member of the SAARC Eminent Persons Group from 1997 – 1998. He also served as the Maldives Governor to the Common Fund for Commodities from 1999 - 2008. He has also served as a parliamentarian.

In April 2009, the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy in Washington presented Dr. Shaheed with the "Muslim Democrat of the Year Award", and in 2010, the President of Albania awarded him the "Medal of Gratitude" for his contribution to peace and human rights in the Balkans. He was also awarded an Honorary Professorship from the AAB Riinvest University in Kosovo for his contribution to peace and human rights in Kosovo.

The Human Rights Council appointed Dr. Ahmed Shaheed to the office of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran in June 2011, and he began his mandate on 1 August. Dr. Shaheed has produced three reports presented UN General Assembly (September 2011 and 2012) and UN Human Rights Council (March 2012).

Dr. Shaheed has also been a visiting professor of political science at the City University of New York - Brooklyn College since March 2012 and a visiting professor of human rights practice at the University of Essex since October 2012.

Dr. Ahmed Shaheed graduated from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, with a Bachelor's degree in International Politics and Strategic Studies in 1989, and obtained his PhD in 1995 from the University of Queensland, Brisbane, in the field of International Relations. He is an avid writer and academic, and has presented numerous papers at various international conferences covering topics as diverse as economic development, terrorism, diplomacy, and democracy.