

Elections Commission fines MDP, Adhaalath over Nov 27 protest

The Elections Commission has slapped a fine on both the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party and the religious conservative Adhaalath Party over “unlawful activities” carried out during a three-day anti-government protest in late November.

“They were fined because they had involved children in their protest and also for using the UN emblem against the regulations,” EC member Ahmed Akram told *The Maldives Independent* today.

The opposition parties were fined MVR75,000 (US\$4,800) each. Akram said the parties will have seven days to pay the fine.

The MDP had printed the UN emblem on t-shirts and banners urging President Abdulla Yameen to release former President Mohamed Nasheed as recommended by a UN human rights panel in September.

The MDP insists that it had followed the UN’s guideline in using the emblem and denies involving minors in the protest.

The UN office in the Maldives had said in a tweet that impartiality is a key UN principle and reminded political parties to refrain from using the logo. The tweet on December 1 referred to a [guideline](#) published in 2013 on the use of the UN emblem.

Speaking to *The Maldives Independent* today, Shidhatha Shareef, a council member of the Adhaalath Party, called the EC’s move “irresponsible” and unwarranted.

“This is very irresponsible of the commission. The lawful and peaceful protest was held at a public place, so senior citizens and children will be around. However, I never saw any encouragement to involve children in the protest,” she said.

Shidhatha said the party has not yet decided whether to pay the fine.

Riot police had cracked down on the November 27 protest with tear gas and pepper spray, arresting 13 individuals and beating several protesters. The home ministry subsequently [banned street protests](#), a move the MDP and human rights groups described as unconstitutional.

The MDP has also been at loggerheads with the EC since the appointment of new members to the independent body by the ruling party-dominated parliament earlier this year. Last month, the party [sued](#) the commission over a new requirement for all political parties to [re-register](#) members with fingerprinted forms.

In a letter sent to the EC this week, the MDP said: “If taking action against the whole party for the actions of any one individual is the commission’s policy, we inform you that as the government is acting against the UN’s ruling directly because President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom himself is hesitating to act as per the ruling, action should be taken against the party the president represents.”

The EC had told the party that it is looking into issues related to the November 27 and considering punitive action. As the “guardian of political parties,” the EC advised the MDP to ensure that its activities take place within legal bounds.

The commission had also fined the MDP and Adhaalath Party by MVR47,000 and MVR33,000, respectively, in March over alleged incitement to violence at daily street protests.

The allied opposition parties were protesting over the imprisonment of ex-President Mohamed

Nasheed and ex-Defence Minister Mohamed Nazim as well as the targeting of Jumhooree Party leader Gasim Ibrahim's business interests.

The parties at the time refused to pay the fines and asked the EC to review its decision, but the commission said it had the authority to deduct the sums from the state funds paid out annually to political parties.

The November 27 protest was the fourth mass anti-government demonstration staged this year. Adhaalath Party President Sheikh Imran Abdulla is facing trial on a charge of inciting violence at the 20,000-strong mass rally on May 1.