Hamburger Stiftung

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**Press Release**

**Shahindha Ismail, Maldivian human rights activist**

**New fellow of the City of Hamburg in 2019**

**Hamburg, 10 April 2019**

14 years ago, Shahindha Ismail (40) founded the “Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)“. This non-governmental organization opposes religious fundamentalism and fights for the restoration of basic democratic values and human rights. It is also committed to protecting the interests of political prisoners, ultimately fighting for their release.

In Europe, the Maldives are a popular dream holiday destination. Little is known about the political and social issues the island state at the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent has been facing for years. This primarily includes the effects of climate change as well as the proliferation of Islamist extremism.

Due to her efforts against religious fanatics, Shahindha Ismail has become a target of radical Islamist groups. Via Facebook and Twitter, she has been receiving threats on a regular basis. Investigations into the MDN founder’s alleged infringement of the Blasphemy law also continue. In the so-called holiday paradise, the proposed sentence level for such a “crime“ ranges between five years in prison and a death penalty.

Although the chances for democratic reforms have slightly improved after the election of a new president and the recent forming of a new parliament, the life of human rights activist Shahindha Ismail is still in grave danger.

For these reasons, the Hamburg Foundation – initially founded by Dr. Klaus von Dohnanyi more than three decades ago and now directed by the acting First Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Dr. Peter Tschentscher – is granting Shahindha Ismail a one-year fellowship in the metropolitan city at the river Elbe. During this time, the South-Asian activist wants to meet and network with German and European representatives in politics and the civil society. At public appearances, she also wants to educate her audience on her home country’s state of affairs.

**On 8 May**,Shahindha Ismail will already voice her thoughts in Hamburg:

Accompanied by journalist John James Ro­binson, she will discuss the topic “**No paradise for democracy“** at 7 p.m. at the **KörberForum**, presented by Wolfgang Krach, Editor-in-Chief at Süddeutsche Zeitung.

The Hamburger Foundation will actively support its fellow in putting her plans into action. Following the end of the fellowship, Shahindha Ismail wants to return to her home country. We highly appreciate the support of the EU-financed initiative “ProtectDefenders“ by financing Shahindha Ismail’s year-long grant.

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