



MAKING THE VOTE ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE MALDIVES

The use of **tactile ballot guides** in the Maldives was assessed by the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) deployed in 2023 for the presidential elections as a **significant step** to the effective **participation** of **visually impaired voters** in the political life and an advance for **inclusive elections**.

Full story below 

Maldivians with visual impairments were able to cast their votes in secrecy for the first time thanks to the introduction of tactile ballot guides.

Until then, voting meant relying on someone else to assist them marking the ballot, or not voting at all.

That was assessed by the EU EOM as a significant advance towards the implementation of independent voting for persons with visual impairments.

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This breakthrough came after sustained advocacy by the Blind and Visually Impaired Society of Maldives (BVISM) which successfully engaged lawmakers to amend the electoral law and with the strong support from the Maldives Election Commission in implementing the reform.

“I felt completely liberated” said Mr Hussein Shareef of BVISM, who voted independently for the first time. “Knowing that the vote is secret and that I can vote the way I want was important to me.”

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The EU EOMs always assess the principles of non-discrimination and universal suffrage, along with accessibility as referred in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified by the Maldives in 2010.

The EU EOM welcomed the reform in its report, highlighting tactile guides as a significant measure of progress in the fulfillment of the rights of persons with disabilities.

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***“In an election like this it really matters that international observers including from the EU come and observe how the elections are conducted and give recommendations. It paves the way for progress in the electoral system”
Mr Hussein Shareef added.***

Despite this significant advance, the EU EOM noticed that a limited number of voters had used tactile ballot guides, very likely due to insufficient awareness among visually impaired persons. To respond to that, the EU EOM included in its final report a recommendation for the Maldivian authorities' consideration:

“Enable independent access to the various stages of the electoral process, including through voter information and voter education and increased awareness raising for ECM [Elections Commission of Maldives] officials.”

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