

Visiting Professor Clive Williams from the Centre for Military and Security Law ran a professional development course for the Maldives Police Service (MPS) at its Institute for Security and Law Enforcement Studies (ISLES) in Male (the capital) during 23 June-4 July. ISLES is keen to lift professional standards and become a regional security and law enforcement training centre for South Asia.

The course was attended by 24 students, mainly police officers, but also included officers from Customs and Immigration. The course format was unusual to cater for local Muslim requirements. Friday and Saturday are the weekend in the Maldives and because the officers were working during the day, the course ran Sunday to Thursday from 1600-2000, with half an hour for prayers at 1820. The course was also timed to be completed before Ramadan which began on 9 July.

The Maldives comprises about 200 inhabited islands in the Indian Ocean, and a population of about 330,000; a third of the population live in Male. At this time of year (the monsoon period), the main tourist flow is from China, Japan and the Gulf states, while in the northern winter the main and more lucrative tourist flow is from Europe. The Maldives is about 6,000 kilometres west of Perth, but most flights from Australia arrive via KL, Singapore, Colombo, or the Gulf states.

The Maldives has been experiencing political turbulence in recent years with President Nasheed controversially displaced in 2012, and Vice President Hassan sworn in as President, with a contentious presidential election due on 7 September 2013.

Recent years have also seen a growing move to religious conservatism in the Maldives. The law prohibits the practice by Maldivian citizens of any religion other than Islam, and the Constitution precludes non-Muslims from voting, obtaining citizenship, and holding public positions. Non-Muslim foreigners are prohibited from worshipping publicly, or from encouraging local citizens to participate in any religion other than Islam. The president must be a Sunni Muslim. In 2007 there was an Islamist extremist bombing in Male that wounded 12 foreigners. In February 2012, most of the national museum's Buddhist artefacts, which predated the arrival of Islam in the Maldives, were destroyed by Islamist extremists.

On the crime front, there are many violent criminal street gangs in Male, mainly due to narcotics and the high level of youth unemployment. According to police, growing serious crime issues relate to gang violence, human trafficking, organized financial crimes, crime against women and children, cybercrimes, human rights violations, homicides, abductions and extortions. That said, most of the homicides seem to be gang against gang-related and there is no overt animosity towards foreigners in the streets of Male, in fact quite the opposite. In any case, most international tourists arrive at Male International Airport on Hulhulé Island, and go by boat or float plane direct to the resorts where there are few security problems.

The 3,000-strong MPS, which is based on a British policing model, is well regarded by the population according to a survey conducted by Transparency International in 2012, and seems objective and impartial in its application of the law. However it is difficult to successfully prosecute politicians and gang leaders, even with substantial evidence. The Transparency International survey showed the population had a low regard for politicians and political parties due to widespread perceptions of political corruption. There is also public concern that the activities of religious extremists could affect the tourist industry - the Maldives' main income earner.