

Call for Action
Campaign to Defend Villimale Funavaa

We request members of the public to **email the following message** to the relevant authorities at the emails below, and help to support the protection and conservation of the last remaining old growth forest, Funavaa, and other irreplaceable mature trees that are endangered in Villimale.

Subject:

Concern Regarding Urban Biodiversity Loss and Non-Compliance with Environmental Laws

To:

thoriq.ibrahim@mote.gov.mv

Copy to:

info@mote.gov.mv

hassaan.mohamed@era.gov.mv

environment@environment.gov.mv

protected.areas@environment.gov.mv

biodiversity@environment.gov.mv

protected.areas@environment.gov.mv

erc@era.gov.mv

eca@era.gov.mv

secretariat@era.gov.mv

secretariat@malecity.gov.mv

ahbb.admin@malecity.gov.mv

ahmed.auzam@mote.gov.mv

staffs@era.gov.mv,

ministers.office@mote.gov.mv,

info@environment.gov.mv,

aishath.gulisthaan@malecity.gov.mv

Dear Minister Thoriq Ibrahim,

I am writing to express grave concern regarding the ongoing destruction of urban vegetation and the rapid loss of biodiversity at Villimale', Greater Male' Area (GMR) for the development of 100-bed tertiary hospital and three 17-storey residential towers (for 300 housing units). While the Maldives positions itself as a global leader in environmental advocacy and conservation, our domestic actions—particularly in urban areas—are increasingly at odds with our international commitments and national laws. In this regard, I would like to highlight the following.

1. Breach of National and International Commitments

The Maldives is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and has pledged to support the "30 x30" goal to conserve 30% of land, waters and seas by 2030 (Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework). Currently, the government is in the process of renewing the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). However, the continued inactivity in the face of urban biodiversity loss is a direct contradiction to the NBSAP's policy objectives. We cannot effectively advocate for global conservation while simultaneously destroying our last remaining natural ecosystems. The Maldives has not produced a State of the Environment report since 2016 which is indicative of the institutional and policy level lethargy of this sector, despite the critical fact that 98% of national exports depend on the biodiversity sector. Meanwhile, our finite natural ecosystems be it on land or sea continue to be under constant assault, with absolute disregard to public concerns.

2. Legal Violations under the Environment Act (4/93)

Of particular concern is the lack of enforcement of the Regulation for Protection and Preservation of Island Vegetation and Flora (No. 2022/R-92). Under this regulation:

- * All trees aged 50+ years are protected.
- * Rare, culturally significant, or ecologically important trees are protected.

While the Male' City Council may not have updated its database due to institutional inefficiency, this does not absolve the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) or the Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA) of their legal mandate. As the authorities responsible for the implementation of the Environment Act (4/93), the Ministry and the ERA have a legal duty to intervene and protect these heritage trees from unlawful removal or damage.

3. Impact on Public Health and the Scientific Evidence

Urban green spaces are not a luxury. They are a critical public health necessity. The Maldives is subjected to regional air-pollution on a regular basis and the residents of GMR are subjected to continuous urban air pollution against which every mature tree and vegetation are indispensable. Scientific research consistently proves that access to green spaces is linked to improve physical and mental functioning and reduced pollution-related health risks.

The loss of urban canopy worsens the "heat island" effect, directly impacting climate resilience, terrestrial biodiversity and everyday life of Villimale' residents and visitors.

A 2018 systematic review by Kondo et al. links urban green space (UGS) exposure to improved attention, mood, and physical activity, alongside reduced mortality and violence

A 2009 study by Taylor and Kuo found that a 20-minute walk in a park significantly improves concentration in children with ADHD compared to walking in urban settings. The cognitive improvement observed was comparable to the peak effects of common medication, suggesting nature exposure as an effective, accessible tool for symptom management.

A 2015 study in PNAS by Bratman et al. found that a 90-minute nature walk significantly reduces rumination and decreases activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex (sgPFC). These findings suggest a causal link between experiencing nature and lower risk factors for mental illness.

I would like to draw your attention to key research that underscores the gravity of this issue:

Kondo, M. C., Fluehr, J. M., McKeon, T., & Branas, C. C. (2018). Urban Green Space and Its Impact on Human Health. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 15(3), 445.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15030445>

Taylor AF, Kuo FE. Children with attention deficits concentrate better after walk in the park. J Atten Disord. 2009 Mar;12(5):402-9. doi: 10.1177/1087054708323000. Epub 2008 Aug 25. PMID: 18725656.

G.N. Bratman, J.P. Hamilton, K.S. Hahn, G.C. Daily, & J.J. Gross, Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation, Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. 112 (28) 8567-8572, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1510459112 (2015).

4. UN Sustainable Development (SDGs) and the Global Climate Crisis

The destruction of mature vegetation and green public spaces directly undermines our progress toward several UN SDGs:

* SDG 3: Good Health and well-being. Focuses on human health, disease prevention, pollution-related health risks and overall well-being.

* SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation.

* SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities: Include urban environmental quality, green spaces, resilience and health.

*SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production: Covers waste, pollution, resource efficiency and sustainable use of natural resources.

* SDG 13: Climate Action: Addresses climate change, which affects ecosystems, species and human health.

* SDG 14: Life Below water: Focuses on oceans, marine biodiversity, coral reefs, fisheries and marine pollution.

* SDG 15: Life on Land: Covers terrestrial biodiversity, forest, land degradation, desertification and species conservation.

I urge the MoTE and the ERA to exercise their oversight responsibility to halt the further unlawful removal of protected vegetation and to ensure the implementation of Regulation 2022/R-92 by all relevant institutions including the Male' City Council. We must align our urban development with the environmental principles we champion on the world stage and actively uphold our international obligations.

I look forward to hearing about the immediate and urgent concrete steps the MoTE and ERA implements to address the above concerns regarding the ongoing violations.

Sincerely,

[insert Your Name/Organization]