



Purpose -

The undersigned organizations are concerned about the continuing instability in Sri Lanka, about the partners we support, and the ability for the vital civil society organizations to continue their work during this critical time. We express our unwavering solidarity with the people of Sri Lanka who are peacefully demanding their human rights and political reform.

As such, we submit the following input and recommendations and strongly urge Norway to take the recommended action in support and solidarity with the people of Sri Lanka.

Background and situation -

Early in 2021, Sri Lanka's economy began to present the dire consequences of poor policy making on agricultural and pandemic policies in the past few years. The country was facing extreme shortages in food and fuel and hyperinflation that reversed the leaps made in reducing the unemployment rate since 2014/2015. For the first time in history, Sri Lanka defaulted on paying its foreign debt. Inflation is expected to increase further to 40 percent in the coming months and an increase in fuel prices went into effect on May 24, 2022.

The country that was once self-sufficient in rice production had to import more than USD 600 million of foreign rice in 2021 triggering inflation. The ban on fertilizers and subsequent process of introducing organic farming systematically in certain regions of the country has failed, negatively affecting farmers' ability to produce sufficient food. On 31 May 2022, it was said that Sri Lanka's city dwellers are likely to be the worst hit by the food shortage. The effects of the food crisis is expected to set in from October 2022. Improved connection and transportation between cities, suburbs and the countryside is required to ensure access to food.

In combination with daily power outages, the lack of food, fuel and medicines is negatively impacting the populations' health. Adolescent nutrition is plummeting, substance abuse and mental health-related issues are increasing, and little or no aid is provided for disability-affected lives. Consequently, the gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy is drastically widening. Adequate responses to these issues are becoming increasingly strained, as the budget allocated for the health sector is decreasing. Greater funding is crucial.

The economic crisis rapidly shifted to a political uprising as the people of Sri Lanka began protesting the continuing downward spiral of the economy and a corrupt government and practices. The people of Sri Lanka rose up against the government and Sri Lanka's recently elected President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Clashes between pro- and anti-government forces quickly escalated leading to casualties and the resignation of many government officials, including Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe planned to introduce the 21st Amendment to the Constitution to empower Parliament over the executive president. This has however been met with resistance within the ruling SLPP coalition party members. In a move to push for the 21st amendment to be accepted by the party leaders, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will lobby for it at the party leaders' meeting. If enacted, this will reduce the powers of the President and remove dual citizens from holding a parliamentary seat, which in turn will end Basil Rajapaksa's political career in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's new administration is set to propose a new relief-based budget in June 2022 to present a more realistic picture of the economy. In light of these rapid changes to the economy, the former budget is set to be revised due to its unrealistic objectives, as the predicted expected growth rate was 46 percent, which will need at least double the expected nominal GDP growth.

The Asian Development Bank has changed its current investment plans and redirected USD 150 million, which is around 54 billion rupees to help the food insecurity problem in Sri Lanka. The US aided action plans on increasing the livelihood and cash transfer projects in Sri Lanka to the most vulnerable and poor populations. Litro Gas Chairman Vijitha Herath has stated that arrangements are being made to supply 80,000 cooking gas cylinders daily to the market. He said the supply could last for one week but a loan from the World Bank will also be utilized to purchase gas for the next three months. However, the World Bank has said that it is not planning to provide any new financing to Sri Lanka until an adequate economic policy framework has been put in place.

INPUT & RECOMMENDATIONS -

The undersigned organizations submit the following recommendations for supporting and standing in solidarity with the people of Sri Lanka during this critical time:

- Stand with and support the will and voice of the people for change and political reform for a democratic and representative government that respects human rights and the ethnic diversity of the Sri Lankan people.
- For States working with the Sri Lankan government on economic agreements, in particular, to address the prevalence of corruption in the government and its practices, including the judicial system.
- Promote and support the will of the people of Sri Lanka for constitutional reform that incorporates the democratic infrastructure of checks and balances, accountability, and transparency and the introduction of the 21st Amendment to the constitution, with a total abolishment of the Executive Presidency.
- For States to call for an immediate cessation of arbitrary arrests, threats, and intimidations of Sri Lankans, including human rights defenders, in all their diversities. All efforts in this regard must have a gendered and inclusive approach to ensure the unique and varied experiences of all facing such threats and violations.
- To release funds for humanitarian and human rights needs during this critical time; to support the important work of local NGOs and CSOs operating in all regions of the country. At times like these, monitoring and documentation of human rights and other violations are essential for justice and accountability.
- To keep sustained attention and support to the situation in the country until as the situation continues to develop and hopefully stabilize.
- To keep sustained attention to and solidarity with the ethnic minorities in Sri Lanka when communicating and engaging with local CSOs, religious institutions and academia working on ethnic issues, as there is a continued unwillingness by the Sinhalese majoritarianism and government to address minorities' rights.