

# National Collective of CSOs and NGOs

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## PRESS STATEMENT

### **CSO-NGO Collective Urges Government to Protect Fundamental Freedoms when Contemplating the Need for Legislation relating to NGOs**

Colombo, July 2, 2025 – On Wednesday June 11, 2025, representatives of the CSO NGO Collective on the invitation of the Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs met with the Deputy Minister of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs Hon. Sunil Watagala. The Director General of the NGO Secretariat sought to seek the response of the Collective on a draft law dated 7th October 2024. The draft law appeared largely similar to the law developed under the previous government dated 12th January 2024. The Collective inquired into the reasons for a new law that the current government sees, in order to respond constructively to any proposed new law. The Ministry agreed to provide the reasons for any proposed legislation. The Collective expressed concern that the administration continues to advocate for one supervisory law and urged the Government to reconsider this.

The Collective, reaffirming the foundational principles of Freedom of Association, Assembly and Expression, provided the Deputy Minister with copies of the guiding principles formulated in 2019 and updated in 2023 by the Collective, based on international standards, that should govern any legislation relating to civil society as well as a proposed law drafted by the Collective in the event the government considers it imperative to repeal and replace the Voluntary Social Service Organisations (Registration and supervision) Act No. 31 of 1980.

The Collective explained to the Ministry and government officials that the current legal framework allows for multiple diverse registrations which is responsive to the different legal personalities. The concern about stifling voluntary groups and collectives responding to community concerns was also strongly raised and attention drawn to the constitutional safeguard for such endeavours. The Collective also urged the Government to resist broad one size fits all legal regimes, to consider the current NGO environment and the need to protect fundamental freedoms when proposing any new law. The Collective also brought to the attention of the Government that Financial Action Task Force (FATF) regulations particularly require that no supervisory powers be legislated in the name of monitoring anti-money laundering and suppression of terrorism financing activities and that only risk based measures are acceptable, adhering to the international standards.

After the meeting, on the same day, the Collective formally received the draft dated 7th October 2024 (ref. L. D. O. 27/2023) in English. The Collective has called on the Ministry and the NGO Secretariat to make the draft public, with Sinhalese and Tamil translations, along with rationale for a new law, including the gaps within existing legal framework. And call for feedback from the public and also concerned and interested persons and groups, especially from all organizations registered with the NGO Secretariat, providing at least 3 months.

### **Convenors**

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