



Fair Justice Campaign Statement on Sri Lanka's Prison Crisis and the Commissioner General's Call for the Death Penalty

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The **Fair Justice Campaign** of the **Right to Life Human Rights Centre** expresses profound alarm regarding the dire situation within Sri Lanka's prison system and strongly condemns the recent public statement by the Commissioner General of Prisons, Mr. Jagath Weerasinghe, advocating for the execution of large-scale drug traffickers.

The Commissioner General of Prisons' own statistics, recently disclosed during the 435th session of his "Noya Yuhtu Thana" (The Place Not to Go) lecture series in Nawalapitiya, unequivocally reveal a grave human rights catastrophe within the nation's correctional facilities:

1. Alarmingly Inhuman Prison Overcrowding

The official figures, presented by the Commissioner General during this lecture, starkly confirm an untenable level of congestion, resulting in inhuman conditions that directly violate the fundamental rights of inmates.

Metric	Official Capacity	Current Inmate Population	Percentage Over Capacity
Total Prisons (36)	10,500	Over 36,000	243%

Mr. Weerasinghe further indicated that ongoing police operations could escalate the inmate count to **40,000**, rendering the prisons utterly incapable of holding detainees, warning that conditions would deteriorate to the point where inmates would lack even the space to sit down.

- **Human Rights Violation:** Such extreme overcrowding constitutes **cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment**, directly violating Article 11 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka and international standards, including the **Mandela Rules (UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners)**. The inability to provide basic space is a failure to uphold the dignity of every individual, regardless of their alleged crime.
- **Drug-Related Incarceration:** The Commissioner General noted that **65% of the current inmate population is incarcerated for drug-related offences**, underscoring the need for urgent review of drug policy and alternatives to custodial sentencing for addiction and minor offences.



2. Strong Protest Against the Death Penalty Advocacy

The Fair Justice Campaign vehemently protests the Commissioner General's call for the execution of drug traffickers. As the head of the institution responsible for the safety, rehabilitation, and humane custody of all prisoners, his public endorsement of the death penalty is deeply troubling and completely unacceptable:

- **Undermining Rehabilitation:** Advocating for the death penalty is in direct contradiction with the widely accepted principles of **rehabilitation and restorative justice**. It shifts the focus away from addressing the systemic failures that lead to high rates of crime and recidivism, including the appalling conditions within the prisons themselves.
- **Contradiction of Policy:** Sri Lanka has maintained a **de facto moratorium** on the death penalty since 1976. A public official's attempt to pressure the political authority to resume executions undermines this moratorium and the progressive trajectory towards abolition, which is the global human rights standard.
- **Risk of Abuse and Extra-Judicial Action:** A state of mind within the prison administration that views prisoners as entities to be 'eliminated' rather than individuals to be safely kept and reformed creates a dangerous environment. Such rhetoric may foster impunity among prison staff, potentially leading to increased instances of **torture, ill-treatment, and a heightened risk of extra-judicial killings** within correctional facilities.

The Right to Life Human Rights Centre and its Fair Justice Campaign urge the government to immediately address the severe overcrowding crisis with a focus on **de-carceration measures, bail reform, and alternatives to imprisonment**, while simultaneously ensuring that the leadership of the prison system is committed to upholding the **human dignity and fundamental rights** of all inmates. We call for an official clarification from the Ministry of Justice regarding the Commissioner General's statement on the death penalty.

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