



RIGHT TO LIFE
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

රයිට් ටු ලයිෆ් මානව හිමිකම් මධ්‍යස්ථානය | රෆර් ටු ආයෝජ්‍ය මනිත උග්‍රිමයන් නිලධාරීන්



09/06/2026

Media Statement

Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act, Which Permits Torture and Repression, and Subverts Justice

Alongside the developments following the arrest of former Military Intelligence Chief Major General Suresh Sallay under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, public discussion regarding the legislation has once again emerged.

Mr Suresh Sallay is not the only person to be arrested and detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act since the current government came to power. From the Arugam Bay bomb scare to the putting up of posters against Israel, among various other grounds, the Prevention of Terrorism Act has been implemented without hindrance during the short period since this government took office.

The tragic irony is that President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and the current government, having come to power on the promise of repealing repressive laws, including this Act, are now utilising it as they please. Neither the current president nor the government has taken any action to amend or repeal any repressive law or Act, as they promised.

The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act, No. 48 of 1979, has been in operation in Sri Lanka for over thirty-five years and has contributed to serious human rights violations. Specifically, detaining suspects upon the orders of the executive without producing them before a court, thereby subjecting them to physical and mental torture during detention, has been a severe issue in Sri Lanka over this period.

Although civil society and citizens have mounted serious opposition demanding the repeal of this Act, and despite certain governments pledging to repeal it before coming to power, the legislation has not been repealed to date. Therefore, this still-existing, repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act continues to extend its arm of repression towards various parties. Initially utilized against sections of the Tamil community, subsequently against Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurgents or those suspected to be from the JVP, thereafter against Tamil citizens once again, and then against the Muslim community, the Act is now being targeted at the Sinhala community once more.

A few days ago, a Tamil singer was arrested and detained under this Act; simultaneously, submissions regarding the abuse suffered by Major General Sallay during his detention under this Act were presented to the court, along with a judicial medical report. Arresting a Tamil



RIGHT TO LIFE
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

රයිට් ටු ලයිෆ් මානව හිමිකම් මධ්‍යස්ථානය | රාජ්‍ය උසාවි මගින් උදාහරණයක් ලෙස නීතියට



youth on the one hand for allegedly singing songs that promote the LTTE, while simultaneously arresting former Military Intelligence Chief Sallay, is symbolic.

Detaining a citizen through executive intervention without judicial oversight is a practice unsuited for a civilized society, and one that challenges the rule of law.

It is our stance that the arbitrary power vested in the executive to detain a person under this Act leads to physical and mental torture, as well as to inhumane and degrading treatment.

A judicial medical officer has reported that torture had occurred in the case of Suresh Sallay as well, and we emphasize that mental torture is also included under the right to freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, as guaranteed by the Constitution.

Throughout the recent past, the unhindered utilization of this Act has been observed on numerous occasions, including the recent incident involving the Tamil singer arrested under this repressive legislation.

We also recall that the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has provided clear recommendations to the relevant divisions of the police, specifically regarding the incident of the youth who was arrested under this Act for putting up a poster against Israel.

Although attempts have been made on several occasions by various governments, including the current government, to repeal this Act and substitute it with another Act, they have not materialized due to certain continually repressive provisions contained within those proposed Acts. In a context where the current government has also presented a new anti-terrorism bill based on the proposals of an expert committee, it is our view that the government must immediately recommence discussions regarding it with civil society. All these incidents indicate that a new anti-terrorism law that respects human rights and features broad judicial oversight, in accordance with the guidelines of the United Nations Human Rights Council, is necessary. We emphasize to the government and all parties that a broad public discourse must be initiated immediately for this purpose.

Alongside this, we emphasize that detentions carried out under this repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act should be halted immediately, that detained individuals should be treated humanely, and that indictments should be filed and these individuals produced before the courts as quickly as possible or, if that is not possible, they should be released.

Just as the current government has previously acknowledged, the Prevention of Terrorism Act is a draconian and repressive law, and the golden opportunity to repeal it has now arisen.

Right to Life Human Rights Center



RIGHT TO LIFE
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

රයිට් ටු ලයිෆ් මානව හිමිකම් මධ්‍යස්ථානය | ரைட் டு லைஃப் மனித உரிமைகள் நிலையம்



+94 112 669100
right2lifelk@gmail.com
www.right2lifelanka.org

No. 4/71, Thalakotuwa Gardens, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.