



RIGHT TO LIFE
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

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Date: 17 July 2026

URGENT CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY, MEANINGFUL JUSTICE REFORMS, AND AN END TO CUSTODIAL VIOLENCE IN SRI LANKA'S PRISONS

We, the undersigned civil society collective, express our profound concern and unequivocally condemn the tragic incidents that occurred at Negombo Prison between 5 and 7 July 2026. These clashes resulted in the loss of at least 31 lives, including 10 prison officers, and left over 100 individuals injured. Moreover, we are deeply alarmed by verified reports that inmates transferred from Negombo Prison to other facilities are being subjected to retaliatory violence and systematic torture.

Reports confirm that deaths have occurred within Boossa and Welikada Prisons, while severe assaults have taken place at Angunakolapelessa Prison. There, officials are accused of sanitizing crime scenes and engaging in cover-ups to destroy forensic evidence of physical abuse.

The State bears absolute responsibility for ensuring the safety, security, and welfare of all prisoners and officers. Custodial torture is a direct violation of Article 11 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, which guarantees absolute freedom from torture, and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. It also directly contravenes the Convention Against Torture (CAT) Act No. 22 of 1994.

These tragedies are not isolated incidents. Deep-seated structural deficiencies, drug-related unrest, and overcrowding within the Sri Lankan prison system can be identified as the root causes. Prison congestion has been severely exacerbated by systemic flaws in the criminal justice process. Specifically, the weaponization of the law by law enforcement agencies is a primary factor. We note with grave concern the widespread filing of fabricated charges by corrupt police officers, who routinely misuse Section 54 of the Poisons, Opium and Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (PODDO) by deliberately inflating the weight of drugs in false reports. By doing so, they bypass the authority of the Magistrate Court and the High Court to grant bail, with the objective of trapping innocent citizens in remand prison for months or years to exact revenge or instil fear.

To address these immediate human rights violations and long-term structural crises, we urgently demand the implementation of the following solutions:



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1. Immediate Protection and Accountability Mechanisms

Medical and Forensic Intervention: The State must immediately provide necessary medical treatment for all transferred inmates and suspend all cleaning activities to preserve forensic evidence. Independent post-mortem examinations by Judicial Medical Officers are mandatory to challenge fabricated narratives such as ‘sudden illnesses’ or ‘suicides’.

Oversight and Special Protection: Inmates transferred to other locations must be placed in secure facilities under strict judicial custody and the oversight of senior officers. As mandated by law, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) must be granted permanent and unrestricted 24-hour access to continuously monitor all detention centres.

2. Practical Solutions to Eliminate Prison Congestion

Addressing Fabricated Cases Filed by Police: We demand immediate legal reforms to protect citizens from false charges. Strict criminal action must be taken against police officers proven to have filed fabricated charges or altered drug quantities, and they must be summarily dismissed from service. Additionally, as stated by the Minister of Justice in Parliament on 7 July, the legislative amendments recently approved by the Cabinet to return bail-granting authority to the High Court based on ‘gross weight’ (under 100g) rather than ‘net weight’ must be expedited.

Implementation of Home Remand Systems: A significant proportion of individuals in custody have not been convicted and are entitled to the presumption of innocence. We strongly urge the swift drafting and implementation of a ‘Home Remand’ (house arrest) framework as an alternative to pre-trial detention. Minimizing prison congestion can be rapidly achieved by prioritizing non-custodial sentencing.

Modernizing Support Institutions: Due to severe staff shortages, receiving reports from the Government Analyst's Department often takes more than six months, leading to the unnecessary imprisonment of thousands of individuals. The Government Analyst's Department and prison facilities must be modernized immediately. Staffing shortfalls must be resolved, and these institutions must be equipped with advanced technology to expedite drug testing and improve facility management.

The true measure of accountability relies not only on identifying those responsible for the violence but also on addressing the underlying conditions that caused this tragedy. We urge the



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authorities to ensure a credible investigation and call upon them to treat this crisis as a catalyst for meaningful and lasting reforms in Sri Lanka's justice system.

We, the undersigned, express our support for this joint statement and endorse its contents and the calls to action set out herein.

Organization

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3. Mr. Herman Kumara,
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4. Dr. Jehan Perera
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5. Mr. Harsha Gunasena
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6. Ms. Padmini Weerasuriya
Executive Director
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7. Mr. E.M.S.N. Ekanayaka
Executive Director
SAMADANA
8. Mr. Nimal Dissanayake
Secretary
Anuradhapura District Citizens Committee (ADCC)



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4. Mr. Suranga Rupasinghe
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6. Mr. Ajith Perakum Jayasinghe