

Creating Safer Schools: Addressing Violence Against Children in Educational Institutions

The Child Rights Unit of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) conducted a two-day awareness programme for school principals in the Colombo District under the theme "Creating Safer Schools: Addressing Violence Against Children in Educational Institutes." The programme was held on 27 and 28 May 2025, in Sinhala and Tamil mediums respectively. This initiative was supported by the Support to Justice Sector Project (JURE), funded by the European Union and jointly implemented by UNICEF and UNDP, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice. The programme was aimed at building the capacity of school principals in recognizing and responding to all forms of violence against children in school settings, understanding their legal, ethical, and moral responsibilities in reporting and addressing child rights violations, to promote child-friendly and rights-based school environments, and to break the culture of silence and institutional protectionism around child abuse.



The programme was attended by Dr. Harini Amarasooriya, Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Training, Justice L.T.B. Dehideniya, Chairman of HRCSL, Mr. K.M.G.S.N. Kaluwewa, the Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Commissioners of HRCSL Nimal G. Punchihewa, Prof. Farzana Haniffa, and Prof. Thaiyamuttu Thanaraj, Commissioners, and Secretary of the HRCSL, Ranjith Uyangoda.

The programme featured expert contributions from Dr. Hemamal Jayawardena, Child



Protection Specialist at UNICEF Sri Lanka, Dr. Darshani Hettiarachchi, Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist at Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children, Dr. Ariyaratnam Lavanya, Acting Consultant

Psychiatrist at Base Hospital, Walasmulla and Dr. J. Thatparan, Executive Director of the Office on Missing Persons.

In his opening remarks, Chairman of the HRCSL, Justice Dehideniya, highlighted the tendency of school authorities to under-report or remain silent in child rights violation incidents. He pointed out that such silence creates a culture where abuse can continue unchecked and ultimately undermines public trust in the education system. He urged school principals to contribute to a broader national conversation on child protection and to promote a rights-based, child-friendly approach in their schools.

Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister stressed that children are a responsibility of the state and that all government officials, particularly those within the education system, must always prioritize the best interests of the child. She strongly affirmed that there should be zero tolerance for physical violence against children.



During the discussion sessions, school principals raised several key concerns regarding children, highlighting a range of issues that affect their well-being, academic performance, and overall development within the school environment.

The programme helped step up in building awareness and encouraging school principals to actively engage in creating safer and more supportive educational environments. The HRCSL remains committed to its mission of advancing child rights and fostering inclusive, protective school systems across Sri Lanka.

