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இலங்கை மனித உரிமைகள் ஆணைக்குழு
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

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Press Notice

HRCSL Engages Civil Society in Dialogue on Refugee Protection

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) held a dialogue on 20th June 2025 with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working with refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, and stateless persons in Sri Lanka to mark World Refugee Day 2025. The consultation brought together local and international non-governmental organisations, UNHCR representatives, and other key stakeholders.

The primary objective of the event was to gain a clearer understanding of the real, on-the-ground situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Sri Lanka, explore avenues for enhanced protection and integration, and identify sustainable and practical solutions to existing challenges. The meeting was chaired by Justice L. T. B. Dehideniya, Chairperson of HRCSL, with the participation of Commissioners, Directors, and officers from the Commission, including those attached to the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM).

Key Recommendations by HRCSL for Refugee Protection

The HRCSL presented four key recommendations to strengthen refugee protection mechanisms in Sri Lanka:

1. Ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol

The HRCSL emphasised the urgent need to ratify the Refugee Convention and Protocol to bring domestic legal frameworks in line with international standards. Collaboration between the state and NGOs is essential to facilitate this process and ensure effective implementation of refugee protection measures.

2. Enhancing strategies and interventions

The Commission called for the development of a comprehensive asylum and refugee policy, ensuring fair refugee status determination (RSD), access to basic services, and protection from refoulement. Legal aid should be available for RSD and appeals, and

legal professionals should be trained on international refugee law and human rights instruments such as the Convention Against Torture and ICCPR.

3. Promoting public awareness and dialogue

HRCSL highlighted the importance of fostering public discourse to build societal understanding and support for refugee rights and integration, including ICCPR Act and International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance Act.

4. Recognition and protection of human rights defenders

The Commission underscored the vital role played by human rights defenders and urged proactive measures to ensure their safety and support, particularly those advocating on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers.

Key Interventions and Suggestions from Civil Society Organisations

Participating organisations made several practical proposals to improve the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Sri Lanka:

1. Nationwide awareness campaigns

CSOs recommended that HRCSL and the government conduct public education initiatives to counter disinformation and foster empathy towards refugees.

2. Reforming domestic legislation

Stakeholders urged legal reforms to incorporate clear refugee protection principles and define the legal status and rights of refugees within national law.

3. Preventing arbitrary arrest and detention

Concerns were raised regarding the arbitrary detention of refugees. CSOs called for adherence to international legal standards and stronger safeguards.

4. Improving camp conditions

The inadequate quality of food, healthcare, and sanitation in refugee camps was highlighted. Immediate improvements were requested, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly.

5. Expanding employment opportunities

Permitting refugees to engage in livelihood activities was seen as crucial to fostering dignity, self-sufficiency, and community integration.

6. Ensuring education for refugee children

CSOs identified significant barriers to education and recommended:

- Admission of refugee children to government schools, including for G.C.E. O/L and A/L examinations.
- Issuance of temporary identity documents to facilitate exam registration and access to public services.

7. Supporting returnees

The reintegration of Sri Lankan returnees was also a key concern. CSOs urged:

- Monitoring their reintegration process.
- Protection from surveillance, harassment, or discrimination.
- Provision of legal aid, livelihood assistance, and psychosocial support services.

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