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Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

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Press Notice

HRCSL Urges Enhanced Resource Allocation and Institutional Reforms for Sri Lanka Police

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) has formally written to Hon. Ananda Wijepala, Minister of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs, presenting a set of recommendations aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity of the Sri Lanka Police to effectively uphold the rule of law while ensuring compliance with international human rights standards.

Invoking its mandate under Section 10(d) of the HRCSL Act, No. 21 of 1996, the Commission called on the Government to take urgent measures to improve resource allocation, training, performance evaluation systems, and administrative reforms within the Police Department.

HRCSL's Key Observations

The HRCSL recognises that the Sri Lanka Police plays a vital role in maintaining law and order and safeguarding public security. Over the past year, the Commission has engaged in constructive dialogue with the present Inspector General of Police (IGP) and other senior officers, resulting in several positive institutional developments.

These include the issuance of internal circulars based on HRCSL's recommendations, covering areas such as:

- Prevention of custodial and encounter deaths;
- Protection of human rights defenders;
- Safeguarding the rights of transgender persons.

The Commission has also conducted district-level capacity-building programmes for senior police officers on critical themes, including the prevention of torture, the protection of detainees' rights, and community policing approaches. Officers' responses have been positive, indicating an institutional willingness for reform.

Furthermore, through its National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), the HRCSL has conducted regular monitoring visits to police stations across the country to identify systemic challenges and make targeted recommendations to prevent torture and ill-treatment in custody.

Key Recommendations

A. Enhanced Resource Allocation

The HRCSL observed that many police stations are significantly under-resourced, limiting operational efficiency and affecting compliance with human rights obligations. The Commission recommends:

1. Comprehensive Needs Assessment
 - Review human, physical, and technological resource requirements across police divisions and stations;
 - Upgrade infrastructure and working conditions, including providing modern equipment and technology;
 - Improve health and safety standards for detainees by installing CCTV cameras in custody areas and improving ventilation in holding cells;
 - Fill cadre vacancies while prioritising the recruitment of women officers and enhancing Tamil language competence within the police force;
 - Provide continuous training on human rights, gender responsiveness, advanced investigative techniques, and community engagement.

2. Budgetary Measures

The HRCSL urges the Ministry to collaborate with the Treasury to secure increased resource allocations for the Police Department in the upcoming Annual Budget.

B. Institutional Reform in Performance Evaluation

The HRCSL has expressed concern over reports that informal ‘arrest targets’ are still used to measure police performance in some districts, which may inadvertently encourage arbitrary arrests and undermine public confidence in law enforcement.

The Commission reiterates its General Guidelines and Recommendations No. 1 of 2025 to Sri Lanka Police on Preventing Custodial and Encounter Deaths, stating: ‘Arrests should not be carried out in an arbitrary manner. Every police officer who makes an arrest must justify its necessity based on reasonable suspicion, supported by a preliminary investigation.’

Instead, the Commission recommends replacing arrest-based evaluations with objective performance indicators, including:

- Case resolution rates as a measure of operational effectiveness;
- Response times to complaints, particularly from vulnerable groups;
- Arrest-to-conviction ratios to ensure quality investigations;
- Crime reduction statistics in respective police divisions.

These reforms will help ensure that police performance is assessed based on efficiency, professionalism, and public trust rather than purely numerical targets.

The Commission remains committed to providing its advice and assistance to strengthen administrative practices that uphold the protection and promotion of human rights in Sri Lanka. A copy of this letter has also been forwarded to H.E. Anura Kumara Disanayake, President of the Republic of Sri Lanka and Minister of Defence, Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Minister of Justice and National Integration, Mr. Priyantha Weerasooriya, Inspector General of Police, and Dr. Harshana Suriyapperuma, Secretary to the Treasury and Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, for their kind attention and necessary action.

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