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இலங்கை மனித உரிமைகள் ஆணைக்குழு  
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

## Chairman's Message - International Women's Day 2026

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) joins the international community in commemorating International Women's Day 2026 and reaffirms its continued commitment to the promotion, protection, and advancement of women's human rights in Sri Lanka. This important occasion provides an opportunity not only to celebrate the invaluable contributions made by women in all spheres of society, but also to reflect on the persistent inequalities and barriers that continue to impede the full realization of women's rights.

This year, the Commission observes International Women's Day under the theme **“Women, Climate Change, and Disasters: A Rights-Based Response with Lessons from Cyclone Ditwah.”** The theme highlights the urgent need to examine the human rights implications of disasters through a gender-responsive lens and to acknowledge the particular challenges faced by women in disaster contexts.

Recent experiences following Cyclone Ditwah have demonstrated that while natural disasters affect entire communities, their impacts are not gender-neutral. Pre-existing social and economic inequalities often place women in more vulnerable positions during disasters. Women who are engaged in small and micro enterprises, informal employment, agriculture, fisheries, and home-based economic activities frequently experience severe disruptions to their livelihoods during such crises. These sectors, which play a vital role in sustaining families and communities, often lack adequate financial security and institutional protection.

In the aftermath of disasters, many women face the loss of productive assets, interruptions to income-generating opportunities, and difficulties in rebuilding their livelihoods. At the same time, disasters tend to increase women's unpaid care responsibilities, as they assume key roles in caring for children, elderly family members, and persons with disabilities while managing household recovery under extremely challenging circumstances.

Displacement, damaged infrastructure, and temporary shelter conditions can also give rise to heightened concerns relating to safety, privacy, dignity, and access to essential services. These realities underscore the importance of ensuring that disaster preparedness, response, and recovery processes are guided by gender-sensitive and human rights-based approaches that recognize and address the distinct experiences and needs of women.

As Sri Lanka's National Human Rights Institution, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka remains committed to highlighting the human rights implications of national crises and advocating for policies and institutional responses that uphold the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and human dignity. Disaster recovery must go beyond physical reconstruction and short-term relief. It must also ensure the protection of fundamental human rights, including the rights to livelihood, social security, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Through this year's International Women's Day programme, the Commission seeks to provide a platform for dialogue among affected women, policymakers, experts, and representatives of state institutions. By bringing women's lived experiences to the centre of policy discussions, the Commission hopes to contribute to more inclusive, responsive, and rights-based approaches to disaster management and recovery.

On this occasion, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka calls upon all stakeholders—including state institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, and community leaders—to work collaboratively to ensure that disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts fully integrate gender equality and human rights considerations.

Building resilient communities requires not only reconstruction but also a sustained commitment to justice, equality, and the meaningful participation of women in shaping decisions that affect their lives. By recognizing women's resilience and ensuring that their voices are heard, Sri Lanka can move towards more inclusive and sustainable pathways of recovery and development.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka remains steadfast in its mandate to promote and protect human rights and will continue to work with all relevant actors to ensure that women's rights are safeguarded, particularly in situations of vulnerability and crisis.

Justice L. T. B. Dehideniya  
Chairman  
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

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