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My No.

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உமது இல.  
Your No.



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Date. } 20.04.2026

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**கிலங்கை மனித உரிமைகள் ஆணைக்குழு**  
**Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka**

Priyantha Weerasooriya  
Inspector General of Police  
Police Headquarters  
Colombo 02

**Statement by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka on the Continuous Harassment and Rights Violations of Women Activists and Human Rights Defenders in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka**

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka face a set of unique difficulties to which the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) wishes to draw attention. The armed conflict in Sri Lanka (that ended in 2009) created lasting challenges, including issues of disappeared persons, land disputes, ex-combatants, women-headed households, and livelihood development. WHRDs in the North and East work to address these concerns through social work, community engagement, and protests. However, the HRCSL notes that these activists face significant obstacles that hinder their efforts, negatively affecting delivery of services and support to vulnerable groups. Obstacles faced by WHRDs range from gender-based violence, cultural and social stigma, resource constraints to carry out their activism, and mistreatment by law enforcement officials. This statement reiterates the HRCSL's General Guidelines and Recommendations No. 1 of 2024 on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, and specifically highlights the challenge concerning mistreatment by law enforcement officials.

The HRCSL has actively engaged WHRDs on the ground and has carefully documented and entertained complaints. It has noted an increase in the interventions of officers of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Counter-Terrorism & Investigation Division (CTID) of Sri Lanka in 2025. Reports based on formal complaints, field visits, and stakeholder meetings highlight fundamental rights violations involving the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, expression, peaceful assembly, and lawful occupation.

WHRDs in the North and East routinely face harassment and intimidation at the hands of law enforcement officials. First, the principle of gender-responsive law enforcement is violated when male officers predominantly handle inquiries and investigations. The presence of only male officers undermines the safety of WHRDs, prevents and limits the support they receive from communities, and discourages other women from engaging in activism. As women are discriminated against based on gender at the community level and while carrying out their activism, the actions of law enforcement officials further exacerbate the difficult conditions within which WHRDs carry out their work. The HRCSL notes that such gendered forms of harassment in the guise of investigations have become a method of operation for law enforcement.

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The following is a summary of violations brought to the attention of the HRCSL. The HRCSL received complaints stating that an individual who participated in a protest in solidarity with the Rohingya crisis, was summoned to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the CID for questioning and was further harassed via frequent phone calls and unannounced visits to their workplace by the CID. The HRCSL received reports that the CID and CTID have asked individuals and organizations engaged in activism to provide them with beneficiary lists. These actions by law enforcement officials discourage beneficiaries from continued engagement with WHRDs and their organizations, undermining the delivery of some essential support and services. It is reported that the CTID has, on occasion, summoned pregnant mothers, and in 2025, summoned persons during the Ditwah Cyclone. Additionally, law enforcement agents were reported to have visited homes of WHRDs at inappropriate times, causing suspicion and stigmatization by neighbours. An instance of a WHRD being questioned for several hours by a group of four male officers without a female officer present was also reported. Such actions display a lack of adherence to ethical and professional standards by law enforcement agencies. There have also been reports of instances where the CTID has approached accountants of organizations to probe into their funds. The explanation has been that they already possess the information, and the inquiries are for the purpose of confirmation as requested by the CTID headquarters in Colombo. It is reported that accountants too are consistently bothered by requests, the basis of which is not always clear. It is further reported that when ex-combatants are involved in activism, they are subject to surveillance by the CID and CTID.

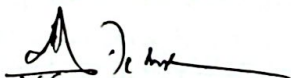
Arrest or detention purely based on exercising the right to protest constitutes a violation of the right to peaceful assembly, the right to the freedom of expression, and the freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention. Moreover, unannounced visits to places of employment hinders the freedoms of movement and lawful occupation. The physical and mental torment of being constantly targeted and harassed because of one's activism and work also violates the right to be free from cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

Sri Lanka is a signatory to multiple conventions that specifically recognize the rights of women including WHRDs. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Additionally, the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms outlines the responsibility of states to protect WHRDs. It is also noted that concluding observations presented by the CEDAW Committee draw attention to violations against WHRDs carried out by law enforcement agencies. Failure to provide swift and effective remedies to these violations will undermine the protection of fundamental rights in Sri Lanka and damage public trust in the country's law enforcement institutions.

## Recommendations

The HRCSL wishes to present the following recommendations to the Government of Sri Lanka and the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to respect, protect and promote the rights of WHRDs:

- **Fully implement the General Guidelines and Recommendations No. 1 of 2024 on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, issued by the HRCSL and re-circulated by the IGP via RTM-568 ICRTM-447.**
- **Ensure that CID and CTID personnel undergo training and awareness programmes and capacity building programmes on the above General Guidelines and Recommendations.**
- **Cease all unnecessary surveillance and summoning of WHRDs for police inquiries and limit such action only to instances where there is reasonable suspicion of an offence having been committed.**
- **Recruit and train women personnel to the CID and CTID to ensure adequate representation for greater gender responsive policing.**
- **Assign women CID and CTID personnel to actively take part in inquiries and investigations concerning WHRDs to minimize the possibility of harassment while ensuring a gender-responsive approach.**
- **Take necessary steps to provide effective remedies to those who have been on the receiving end of rights violations and harassment with the addition of guarantees of non-recurrence.**



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

Justice L.T.B. Dehideniya  
Judge of the Supreme Court (Retired)  
Chairman  
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka