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இலங்கை மனித உரிமைகள் ஆணைக்குழு
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

Press Notice No: HRC/P/i/E/15/07/26

Press Notice

Discussion with Officials of Welikada Prison on the Denial of Access to the Commission and Other Matters

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka summoned several officials attached to the Welikada Prison including the Prison Superintendent and Chief Jailer on 14 July 2026 to discuss the denial of access to the Commission's staff on the night of 7 July 2026 and other matters. The discussion was chaired by the Chairman of the Commission, Justice L.T.B. Dehideniya, and attended by the commissioners, senior staff members of the Inquiries & Investigations Division, and the two legal officers who visited the Welikada Prison on 7 July.

At the discussion, the Commission reiterated its deep concern expressed in its letter to the Commissioner General of Prisons (Covering Up Duties) dated 8 July 2026, and emphasized that the denial of access to the Commission staff at Welikada Prison on 7 July amounted to a serious and inexcusable violation of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka Act, No. 21 of 1996. The Act unambiguously authorizes the Commission to enter any place of detention at any time without prior notice. It was also observed that the denial of access severely undermined the authority of the Commission to make necessary inquiries into the welfare of prisons, particularly when it received information on allegations of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. The denial of access during a crucial juncture on 7 July deprived the Commission of the opportunity to investigate allegations in an effective and timely manner.

The officials of the Welikada Prison explained that, at the time of the visit on 7 July, i.e., at approximately 9.15PM, a situation had arisen in the Welikada Prison in which the security of the officers of the Commission could not be guaranteed. The officials claimed that only around six prison officials were on duty at the time, and they were dealing with an escalating situation in which tensions had arisen among inmates within the Prison. It was also claimed that the officials had received information that a group of prison officers had planned to assault the inmates who were transferred from the Negombo Prison as an act of reprisal for the killing of prison officers during the violence at the Negombo Prison. It was intimated that the prison officers were 'divided' and that the situation in the Welikada Prison was extremely tense as a result. However, it was admitted that these matters were not clearly communicated to the officers of the Commission who had visited the Prison. The said officials expressed their regret for the lapse in

communication and undertook to ensure that similar incidents of this nature would be avoided in future.

The Commission observed that the decision-making and behaviour of the officials of the Welikada Prison disrespected the mandate of the Commission. It observed that it was not satisfied with the explanation provided by the said officials and that, in any event, the failure to communicate any breakdown in security within the prison premises was unacceptable.

The Commission raised several other matters with the officials of the Welikada Prison. It was observed that, during subsequent visits to the Prison, several inmates who were transferred from the Negombo Prison complained to the officers of the Commission that they had been subjected to reprisals, including torture and other forms of ill-treatment, such as the denial of medical treatment. The officers of the Commission reported that they observed that some inmates had sustained injuries for which they were yet to receive medical treatment. Some inmates had claimed that they were reluctant to seek medical treatment, as they feared being assaulted when separated from the general prison population.

The Commission also raised concerns with respect to delays in the processing of inmates transferred from the Negombo Prison to ensure that their whereabouts are known to their next-of-kin. The Commission observes that the prolonged failure to disclose the whereabouts of any person in detention could potentially amount to a prosecutable offence under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance Act, No. 5 of 2018. Moreover, the Commission had received information that some inmates transferred from the Negombo Prison were due to be released following the completion of their prison sentences, but were yet to be released. It was observed that the continued detention of such inmates was unlawful.

The Commission stated that it will continue its investigation into allegations of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, as well as deaths in custody, in relation to the violence in the Negombo Prison and subsequent events at other prisons, and directed the officials of the Welikada Prison to extend their fullest cooperation to the ongoing investigation. The Commission also issues the following recommendations to the officials of the Welikada Prison and calls upon the Commissioner General of Prisons (Covering Up Duties) to ensure the full implementation of these recommendations:

- 1. Take immediate action to issue a written circular and raise awareness among prison officers that the Commission has the statutory authority to enter and inspect places of detention at any time and without prior notice.**
- 2. Issue orders to all prison officers to refrain from any form of reprisals against inmates transferred from the Negombo Prison (including torture, and other forms of ill-treatment, such as denial of essential medical treatment), strictly monitor compliance with such orders, take immediate disciplinary action against any officer**

who engages in such acts of reprisal, and report any incident of reprisal to the Commission and law enforcement authorities for necessary action.

- 3. Take immediate steps to disclose the whereabouts of all inmates transferred from the Negombo Prison to their next-of-kin.**
- 4. Take immediate steps to ensure that inmates who have served their prison sentences are released without delay.**

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