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Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

Message of the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka on Children's Day 2026

Children are not merely the beneficiaries of protection and care, they are rights holders whose dignity, equality, voices and best interests must be respected at all times. The protection and fulfilment of children's rights is a fundamental human rights obligation and a shared responsibility of the State, families, communities and society as a whole. On Children's Day 2026, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka reaffirms its unwavering commitment to ensuring that every child in Sri Lanka can enjoy their rights without discrimination and grow up in an environment of dignity, safety, equality and opportunity.

Children's Day calls upon us to renew this commitment and to reflect on whether the rights we affirm in principle are being realized in the everyday lives of children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the fundamental framework for this responsibility, requiring that children's rights, dignity and best interests remain central to decisions and actions affecting them. Respecting children's rights requires more than protection from harm; it requires creating the conditions in which every child can develop to their full potential, participate in matters affecting their lives, and have their views heard and given due consideration.

This year, the international observance places particular emphasis on listening to children and hearing their views about their lives, their rights and their future. This is an important reminder that meaningful child participation cannot be limited to occasions when adults choose to hear children. Children must be provided with safe, inclusive and age appropriate spaces in which they can express their views, and those views must be given due consideration in matters affecting their lives.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka recognizes that the effective realization of children's rights requires not only a strong legal and institutional framework, but also sustained commitment to implementation, accountability and meaningful protection in practice. While important progress has been made, many children continue to experience barriers to the full enjoyment of their rights, including violence and abuse, corporal punishment, discrimination, poverty and inequality, barriers to education and essential services, and difficulties in accessing effective remedies when their rights are violated. Addressing these concerns requires a

coordinated and sustained response from State institutions, families, schools, communities, civil society and all other actors entrusted with responsibilities towards children. The protection of children's rights must therefore remain a shared and continuing responsibility, grounded in the principles of dignity, equality, non-discrimination and the best interests of the child.

The HRCSL has continued to strengthen its institutional engagement with children's rights. The Child Rights Unit of the HRCSL, established in 2022, serves as a dedicated mechanism within the Commission for advancing the promotion and protection of children's rights. The Commission's Child Rights Sub Committee also provides a platform for sustained consideration of issues affecting children. In 2025, the Commission convened a National Consultation on Advancing Child Rights, bringing together key government institutions, United Nations agencies and civil society to review progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to identify continuing challenges and mechanisms for monitoring and accountability.

In 2026, the Commission further strengthened its institutional mechanisms through the launch of the Standard Operating Procedure on Complaints Involving Children. This provides a standardized framework for receiving, handling and responding to complaints involving children, with an emphasis on child-friendly, rights-based and trauma-informed approaches. Such mechanisms are essential to ensuring that children who experience violations of their rights are able to approach institutions safely and that their complaints are addressed with sensitivity and accountability.

The Commission has also continued to advocate for stronger legal protection of children. In March 2026, the HRCSL recommended that Sri Lanka should ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure. Such a mechanism would provide an additional avenue for children to seek remedies when their rights have been violated, subject to the applicable international framework. The Commission has also consistently emphasized the need to protect children from all forms of violence and degrading treatment.

However, laws, policies and institutional mechanisms alone cannot fully protect children. A culture of respect for children's rights must be built within our homes, schools, communities and institutions. Adults must recognize that children are not merely recipients of protection and care, they are individuals with their own rights, views, dignity and evolving capacities.

On this Children's Day, I therefore call upon all institutions and individuals with responsibilities towards children to place the best interests of the child at the center of their decisions and actions, to protect children from violence, exploitation, abuse and discrimination, to ensure equal opportunities for all children; and to create meaningful opportunities for children to express their views and participate in matters affecting them. Particular attention must be given to children who experience greater barriers to realizing their rights, including children with disabilities,

children living in poverty, children in institutional or alternative care, children in conflict with the law, children affected by displacement or other emergencies, and children from marginalized and disadvantaged communities. A child rights approach requires us to ensure that no child is left behind.

The HRCSL remains committed to strengthening monitoring, human rights education, advocacy, institutional accountability and collaboration to advance children's rights throughout Sri Lanka. We will continue to work with State institutions, independent institutions, civil society, international partners, professionals, parents, educators and, most importantly, children themselves to promote a society in which every child can enjoy their rights without discrimination.

Justice LTB Dehideniya
Chairperson
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka
Colombo

1st October 2026