



ශ්‍රී ලංකා මානව හිමිකම් කොමිෂන් කොට්ඨාසය
இலங்கை மனித உரிமைகள் ஆணைக்குழு
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

Message of the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka on International Day of Older Persons 2026

On the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons 2026, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka reaffirms its commitment to the protection and promotion of the human rights and dignity of all older persons. Every older person is entitled to equality, dignity, autonomy, security and meaningful participation in society. Age must never constitute a basis for discrimination or exclusion.

The increasing longevity of human life represents an important achievement of social development, healthcare and improved living conditions. However, longer life expectancy also requires societies to reconsider existing social, economic, healthcare and institutional arrangements. Sri Lanka's changing demographic structure, migration, declining family size and changing patterns of family life have significant implications for the care, social protection and economic security of older persons.

Older persons should not be viewed merely as recipients of welfare or care. They remain active rights-holders and contributors to families and communities through caregiving, knowledge, experience, cultural practices, voluntary activities and other forms of participation. At the same time, the rights of very old persons, including those who are no longer able to work or contribute economically, must be fully protected. Their dignity and rights are inherent and cannot be made conditional upon productivity, employment or economic usefulness. A rights-based approach to ageing requires effective access to healthcare, social protection, adequate income, housing and essential services. Healthcare systems should respond to the specific needs of an ageing population, including preventive care, treatment, rehabilitation and long-term care. Social protection systems should provide adequate income security and community-based support, enabling older persons to live with independence and dignity.

Climate change and disasters present additional risks to older persons, particularly those living alone, in poverty, with disabilities or limited mobility, or without adequate family support. Extreme heat, floods, landslides and other hazards may affect their ability to receive warnings, evacuate safely and access food, water, medicines and healthcare. Disaster-risk reduction, climate adaptation and emergency-response systems must therefore be age-inclusive and

accessible. Older persons should also be recognized as holders of valuable knowledge and experience and be meaningfully included in community resilience and disaster-management processes.

The legal and institutional framework for the protection of older persons should continue to be strengthened in response to changing demographic and social conditions. The National Secretariat for Elders requires adequate human, financial and technical capacity to coordinate national programmes, monitor implementation, support complaints and referrals, and strengthen oversight of services provided to older persons.

Particular attention should be given to residential facilities for older persons. Such facilities must operate within a rights-based regulatory framework that ensures appropriate standards of accommodation, nutrition, healthcare, sanitation, privacy, family contact, safety and freedom of movement. Registration should be accompanied by effective inspection, monitoring, complaints mechanisms and enforcement. Older persons residing in institutions must never be treated merely as recipients of care or sources of revenue; their autonomy, dignity and participation in decisions affecting their lives must be respected.

The protection of older persons also requires effective access to justice and protection from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The Commission reiterates the importance of strengthening mechanisms within the Sri Lanka Police to respond to complaints and concerns affecting older persons, including through the implementation of the recommendation to establish Police Elder Units. Particular attention should also be given to older women, persons with disabilities, persons living alone, persons experiencing poverty and those without adequate family or community support.

The protection of the rights of older persons is a shared responsibility. Families, communities, public institutions and younger generations should promote intergenerational solidarity based on mutual respect, understanding and cooperation. The voices and lived experiences of older persons should be incorporated into policies and programmes affecting their lives.

At the international level, Sri Lanka should continue to participate constructively in efforts towards the development of a dedicated international legal instrument on the human rights of older persons. Such an instrument could strengthen international standards relating to age discrimination, autonomy, healthcare, social protection, long-term care, protection from abuse and access to justice.

On this International Day of Older Persons, the Human Rights Commission calls upon the Government, public institutions, service providers, regulatory authorities, civil society, communities and families to strengthen the protection of the rights of older persons. This includes strengthening legislation and institutions, improving healthcare and social protection,

regulating residential care, ensuring accessible complaints and redress mechanisms, promoting meaningful participation, strengthening intergenerational support, and integrating the rights and needs of older persons into climate-change adaptation and disaster-risk reduction.

Longer lives should be accompanied by longer lives of dignity, equality, autonomy, security and meaningful participation. Protecting the rights of older persons is not simply a matter of providing care; it is an obligation to uphold the inherent dignity and equality of every person throughout the life course. No older person should be excluded, neglected or left behind because of age, dependency or inability to contribute economically.

On this International Day of Older Persons, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka calls upon the Government, public institutions, the National Secretariat for Elders, law enforcement authorities, healthcare and social service providers, regulatory bodies, residential care institutions, civil society organizations, communities and families to strengthen their collective efforts to ensure that older persons can enjoy all their human rights without discrimination.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka particularly calls for:

1. A comprehensive review and strengthening of existing laws and policies relating to older persons in accordance with contemporary human rights standards.
2. Strengthening the National Secretariat for Elders with adequate human, financial and technical resources and sufficient institutional capacity.
3. Stronger coordination among government institutions responsible for the protection, welfare, healthcare and social security of older persons.
4. Effective registration, inspection, monitoring and regulation of residential care facilities for older persons.
5. Implementation of the Commission's 2023 of of the recommendation concerning the establishment of Police Elder Units, together with appropriate training for Police officers on issues affecting older persons.

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

1st October 2026