



20 May 2022

## LAWASIA STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE BAR ASSOCIATION OF SRI LANKA

LAWASIA's objectives include the promotion of the administration of justice, the protection of human rights and the maintenance of the rule of law within Asia and the Pacific region.

LAWASIA has been closely monitoring the unfolding events in Sri Lanka with much concern, especially since the issuance by the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) statement titled "Statement on the Economy" on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2022 where the BASL cautioned on the looming economic crisis in Sri Lanka and its possible impact on the rule of law and democracy.<sup>1</sup>

LAWASIA has followed the rapidly deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka which has culminated into a grave economic, social and political crisis within the country. The current situation in Sri Lanka indicates serious violations of international human rights law and standards, which LAWASIA calls on the Sri Lankan Government and the opposition to remedy.

We were initially deeply concerned upon receiving reports of the fatality during the protest in Rambukkana on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and, having closely followed the proceedings, we were pleased to see that there was an immediate inquiry into this fatality and the arrest of the Police personnel who were alleged to be involved in the shooting of the protestors.

We were similarly concerned upon receiving reports of the incidents and acts of violence that took place on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2022 against peaceful protestors outside the official residence of the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and at Galle Face Green with further allegations that the violence which took place had the support of the State and State Officials. We have received reports that violence ensued across the country for several days, which has resulted in 9 fatalities and with over 200 people injured.

These acts of violence have been perpetrated during an island-wide state of emergency. LAWASIA supports the BASL's view that a declaration of a state of emergency is not the answer to the present situation and should not be used to stifle peaceful protests, dissent, arbitrary arrests, and detention.

In these circumstances, LAWASIA recognizes the need for all stakeholders in Sri Lanka to take note of the 13 Proposals made by the BASL to restore political and economic stability in the Country which LAWASIA supports.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bar Association of Sri Lanka, *Statement on the Economy*, dated 14 January 2022.

<sup>2</sup>Bar Association of Sri Lanka, *Proposals to Restore Political and Economic Stability in the Country*, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2022.

In this respect, we observe that the preliminary objectives to the proposals are compatible with the promulgation of fundamental human rights and the protection of the rule of law. We restate the objectives as follows:

1. *To create political, economic and social stability in the country.*
2. *To create an environment to address the fundamental problems that have brought about the current crisis (and imperil future reforms).*
3. *To restructure external debt and enter into appropriate programs with multi-lateral institutions including the IMF and for that purpose to appoint the financial and legal advisers and negotiate a debt standstill pending debt restructuring.*
4. *To obtain bridging finance. The bridging finance together with the savings arising from the debt standstill to be used to procure uninterrupted supply of essentials to the People until such time the debt restructuring, and the IMF program is in place. This will eliminate the shortages in power, fuel, gas, medicines, food, etc.*
5. *To create an environment to combat corruption and to ensure accountability and strengthening independent institutions.*

We also support the BASL's calls upon the people of Sri Lanka to remain calm and to act in a peaceful manner so that their fundamental rights which form part of their intangible cultural heritage remain protected.

Noting the above, LAWASIA implores the Sri Lankan Government to:

- take all lawful steps and measures to restore the rule of law,
- enforce the law expediently and equally against all those responsible for the acts of violence and the loss of life and property during this period,
- take note of the 13 Proposals made by the BASL to restore political and economic stability, and
- revoke the State of Emergency and ensure that fundamental rights are upheld at all times.

**The Law Association for Asia and the Pacific (LAWASIA)**