



Statement on Sri Lanka

The Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA) is a pan-Commonwealth professional association of lawyers that exists to maintain and promote an independent legal profession and the rule of law throughout the Commonwealth.

The CLA welcomes the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) latest report on Sri Lanka and notes with regret its finding that “...in recent years there has been an escalation of threats and physical attacks against lawyers filing fundamental rights applications and representing terrorist suspects, as well as cases of intimidation and harassment by the Government and the police authorities.”

The CLA notes the IBAHRI conclusion that attacks against human rights lawyers form part of a pattern of intimidation routinely expressed against those perceived to be critical of the Government and that this has created a climate of fear amongst the legal profession, journalists and civil society.

The CLA calls upon the Government of Sri Lanka to respect the role of lawyers, as detailed in the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (adopted in 1990) and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (adopted in 1998), and to ensure that lawyers are able to access their clients without any hindrance and freely discharge their duties in the interest of effective administration of justice.

By virtue of its membership of the Commonwealth, Sri Lanka is committed to the shared fundamental values and principles of the Commonwealth, at the core of which is a shared belief in, and adherence to, democracy, good governance, human rights and the rule of law. An independent legal profession is vital in safeguarding the separation of powers underpinning democracy and the rule of law as is underscored by the Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principles.

The CLA urges the Government of Sri Lanka to implement the recommendations of the IBAHRI report and calls upon the Bar Association of Sri Lanka to increase their efforts to uphold the independence of the legal profession and respect for the rule of law.

Commonwealth Lawyers Association
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