



Women and Media Collective
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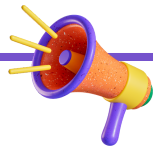
ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RIGHTS AND THE CURRENT CRISIS

WHAT IS A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO IMF NEGOTIATIONS?



To understand the implications of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) negotiations in light of the Sri Lankan crisis, **the Women and Media Collective (Sri Lanka)** cosponsored a discussion with **NYU Gallatin Human Rights Initiative (New York)**. Chaired by **Radhika Coomaraswamy** and **Vasuki Nesiah** the panel comprising of **Deepika Udagama, Philip Alston and Michael Fakhri** discussed the erosive effect of the potential austerus measures on social spending and the violation of human rights in the country.

Economic, social and cultural rights are what provide economic stability and are not the result of economic stability. Setting forth an appropriate plan with a prioritized focus on both social & economic rights of the people is the ultimate way forward.



The economic crisis is also a crisis in governance and the type of Executive Presidency in existence through the 20th amendment to the Constitution which removed many checks and balances. **There is, therefore, a need to focus on the indivisibility of rights on freedom of expression, association and assembly to be able to demand for all rights including economic and social rights.** Historically the human rights community has paid little attention to economic and social rights. Therefore as much as the human rights community should be able to engage with the IMF, **it is also important for protestors to be informed of the importance of economic and social rights as human rights.**

Institutional reform lies outside the IMF's official remit and the negotiations will not inform deep institutional reform that is needed to move from an authoritarian system. Additionally the **IMF and the World Bank promote neo-liberal values and policies that never served the poorer sections of the community.** The Social Safety Nets referred to in the consultation report bear a very limited relationship to economic and social rights that are recognized constitutionally and form a foundation for policy analysis. Whilst understanding that the Sri Lankan constitution has not recognized this, how we push for this immediate action and prevent further erosion should be considered. However, standing by for the constitutional reform process is time consuming as by then, privatisation would've taken place and the public in the lowest deciles are simply served with grossly inferior services at a hugely inflated cost.

The organic protests led by youth are therefore key to the struggle along with a plan for innovative mechanisms of gathering and expanding solidarity. Transparency in negotiations between the IMF and the National Government followed by inclusive negotiations with people's movements and trade unions as part of the decision-making process is key. **Human Rights is ultimately people's power, and our concerns must be shaped in the language of Human Rights.**

The IMF treats economic stability as a precondition for human rights. However economic, social and cultural rights are what provide economic stability and are not the result of economic stability. Proposals, such as the one by the Feminist Collective for Economic Justice, along with assistance from special rapporteurs and special procedures can be used to **hold the government and IMF accountable.**

Keeping public pressure on the IMF is vital. They must be measured against such plans that are public and have been created by the people themselves, since the negotiation processes are far from democratic. **The human rights community must embrace economic and social rights** as a starting point in order to **make sure that the demonstrations have a practical target,** one that actually is going to bring a better life to those who have suffered from the corruption and self-serving policies.