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Press Conference: 2 August 2022

1. We are a group of women's rights activists committed to democracy, justice and equality in Sri Lanka, who have come together across ethnic, religious, and geographical differences. Many of us have long histories challenging the repressive practices of the Sri Lankan state whether during the 2nd southern insurrection, the civil war, and following the easter bombings.
2. We unequivocally condemn the declaration of emergency by the present government and the repression of protesters by labeling them as drug addicts, fascists, terrorists, extremists, etc. We call on the government to stop hunting down protesters and arbitrarily arresting them on trumped up charges. We call on the government to desist from deploying the law relating to hate speech to arrest and intimidate protesters who are exercising their right to dissent and critique the actions of the government.
3. These tactics of repression are of course not new. The Sri Lankan state has a long history of quelling democratic and peaceful protests, particularly in the north and east. Tamil people of north and east have long experienced the repressive apparatus of the state and continues to do so. For instance, family members of the disappeared continue to be harassed and placed under surveillance because of the struggle waged by them for truth and justice.
4. In the wake of the easter bombings, the govt also arbitrarily arrested hundreds of innocent Muslims under the PTA depicting them as extremists.
5. The Aragalaya protests have received the support of a broad cross-section of Sri Lankan society. Women have enthusiastically participated in these protests. It is a movement of citizens who mobilized to protest against economic hardship imposed by the government, which no longer enjoys the trust or faith of the people
6. The right to peaceful assembly, protest and dissent are critical to democracy. We are committed to working in solidarity across ethnic and religious differences to challenge the repression of these fundamental rights.
7. We call on the government to uphold the rule of law and equality before the law. We call on the government to hold to account those who were responsible for attacking peaceful protesters and their tents on 9th May 2022. There is sufficient video evidence to arrest those perpetrators.
8. We call on the government to heed the call of the Aragalaya for systemic/structural changes including the abolition of the executive presidency, and more involvement of the people including women and youth in democratic decision-making through the implementation of a People's Council. We also call on the government to obtain a fresh mandate from the people by dissolving parliament and calling for an early general election.