

SRI LANKAN CIVIL SOCIETY CONDEMN MUSLIM MPS ATTEMPT TO DERAIL MMDA REFORMS: MUSLIM WOMEN'S RIGHTS MUST BE PROTECTED BY THE STATE

We condemn the demands made by the Muslim Members of Parliament (MPs), in a letter dated 8th June 2023 to the Minister of Justice, seeking to block crucial reforms proposed to the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA) of Sri Lanka. The letter signed by 17 Muslim MPs¹ endorse discriminatory and harmful practices for which Muslim women have long sought redress².

The MPs recommendations ignore the decades of overwhelming evidence of discrimination and suffering of Muslim women and girls. They will deny justice, equality and dignity for Muslim women and girls in Sri Lanka. The recommendations exclude Muslim women and girls from constitutionally guaranteed rights enjoyed by all other Sri Lankan citizens. The positions also categorically detract from Sri Lanka's international human rights obligations including under CEDAW³. The CEDAW Committee has in Concluding Observations previously, and again in 2017, recommended that the Sri Lankan government amend all personal laws, including the MMDA, as a priority 'Follow-Up Issue'.

We stand firmly with Muslim women and all those supporting progressive MMDA reforms. As civil society, we support women's voices in governance and lawmaking, and the securing of constitutional equality, equal protection of the law and access to justice. We have always stood for the rights of all women in Sri Lanka. When these rights are denied to some women it is denied to all women in this country. When these rights are denied to some citizens of this country it is denied to all of us.

We call on the Minister of Justice and all elected Members of Parliament to uphold the constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination that are due to Muslim women citizens of Sri Lanka.

We call on the Muslim Members of Parliament endorsing the highly problematic recommendations to examine their commitment to the wellbeing of Sri Lankan Muslim communities coping with contemporary economic and social challenges and reconsider their endorsements.

We call on our fellow citizens to extend their support and solidarity to Muslim women and follow their lead in advocating for progressive reforms and positive social change in Sri Lanka. Our solidarity stems from the common goal of securing the wellbeing and dignity of all Sri Lankans, and in this instance for Muslim families and communities.

Endorsed by:

Individuals

1. Emeritus Professor Savitri Goonesekere, University of Colombo and former member of UN CEDAW Committee
2. Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (1994-2003), UN Under Secretary General Children and Armed Conflict (2006-2012) and Chair National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (2003-2006)
3. Prof. M Sitralega, former Professor, Eastern University Sri Lanka, member Consultation Task Force for Reconciliation Mechanisms (2016-2019)

¹ Originally believed to be signed by 18 MPs, it was revealed on 15th July 2023 that Hon Kabir Hashim had struck off his signature on the basis that the contents of the letter did not reflect his positions.

² Please see statement of Muslim Personal Law Reform Action Group (MPLRAG) here:

<https://www.mmdasilanka.org/statement-muslim-mps-betray-mmda-reforms-justice-for-sri-lankan-muslim-women-under-threat/>

³ An international legal instrument that requires Sri Lanka to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promotes women's and girls' rights. Sri Lanka ratified this multilateral treaty in 1981 and is committed to integrate it into national law and policy.

4. Ambika Satkunanathan, Commissioner, National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (2015-2020)
5. Dr. Natasha Balendra, former Chairperson, National Child Protection Authority Sri Lanka
6. Manel Jayamanna, former Executive Director of the National Committee on Women
7. Savithri Wijesekera, former Commissioner, National Police Commission
8. Prof. Camena Guneratne
9. Prof. Chandraguptha Thenuwara
10. Prof. Gameela Samarasinghe
11. Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda
12. Prof. S Jeyasankar
13. Prof. Sumathy Sivamohan
14. Dr. Chulani Kodikara
15. Dr. Dinushika Dissanayake
16. Dr. Kaushalya Ariyaratne
17. Dr. Mario Gomez
18. Dr. Margaret Kuruppu
19. Dr. Jehan Perera
20. Dr. Nimalka Fernando
21. Dr. Pakiasothy Saravanamuttu
22. Dr. Prabha Manuratne
23. Dr. Pradeep Peiris
24. Dr. Sakuntala Kadirgamar
25. Dr. Sepali Kottegoda
26. Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran
27. Dr. Sermal Wijewardene
28. Dr. Sonali Deraniyagala
29. Rev. Sr. Noel Christine Fernando
30. Rev. Sr. Rasika Pieris
31. Rev P. Rajan Rohaan
32. A. Ajitha
33. Akshay Senanayake
34. Anithra Varia
35. Annie Kurian
36. Anushaya Collure
37. Anushka Opatha
38. Anuratha Rajaretnam
39. Aritha Wickramasinghe
40. Ashila Dandeniya
41. B.Gowthaman
42. Balasingham Skanthakumar
43. Bhavani Fonseka
44. Bisliya Bhuto
45. Brito Fernando
46. C. Ranitha Gnanarajah
47. Cayathri Divyakalala
48. Chamila Thushari
49. Chandra Devanarayana
50. Channaka Jayasinghe
51. Deekshya Illangasinghe
52. Dharshani Abeykoon
53. Enoka S Loganathan

54. Ephraim Shadrach
55. Evangeline de Silva
56. G. Sivarajvalavan
57. G.Ushananthini
58. Geetha Lakmini Fernando
59. Harry Fernando
60. Herman Kumara
61. Iromi Perera
62. J. Thayalini
63. J. Varayalini
64. Jayani Abeysekara
65. Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala
66. K. Ajith Hadley Perera
67. K N Abeygunawardana
68. K. Hemalatha
69. K. Nihal Ahamed
70. K. Saththiyaseelan
71. Kalani Subasinghe
72. Kalavathy Kalaimakal
73. Kamala Vasuki
74. Kumudini Samuel
75. Lavina Hasanthi Perera
76. M. Nirmalathevi
77. Mahaluxmy Kurushanthan
78. Marisa de Silva
79. Marisa Fernando
80. Menasha Samaradiwakara
81. Michael. R. Joachim
82. Mirak Raheem
83. N. Arththigan
84. N. Sumathy
85. Nelun Chrisanthi Gunasekera
86. Niroshinin Mahendran
87. Paba Deshapriya, Bakamoono.lk
88. Padma Pushpakanthi
89. Padmini Weerasuriya
90. Peter Rezel, Chartered Accountant
91. Philip Dissanayake
92. Priscilla George
93. Priyalal Sirisena
94. Priyanthi Fernando
95. Queen Juliyat
96. R. Kounthini
97. R. Saththiya
98. R. Sulaxhana
99. Rajany Rajeshwary
100. Ramani Jayasundere
101. Rasika Deepani
102. Rohini Hensman
103. Ruki Fernando
104. Ruwani Rubasinghe

105. S. Annalaksumi
106. S. Easwaray
107. S. Ethayarani
108. S. Ginogini
109. S. Kopika
110. S. Mariyarosalin
111. S. Niththika
112. S. Prabaharan
113. S. Suganthini
114. S. Tharsan
115. S. Thileepan
116. S. Sumithra
117. S. Vanie
118. Saroja Sivachandran
119. Sachini Perera
120. Safiya Riyaz
121. Sarala Emmanuel
122. Shelani Palihawadana
123. Shiranee Mills
124. Shreen Saroor
125. Shyamala Gomez
126. Sinthusha Vijendran
127. Sonali Gunasekera
128. Stella Philips
129. Subathra Yogasingham
130. Sudeepa Gunaratne
131. Sudesh Mantillake
132. Sulochana Peiris
133. Sumika Perera
134. Swasthika Arulingam
135. Taariq Jurangpathy
136. Thahira Cader
137. Thamalini Surendran
138. Tharanga de Silva
139. Thiagi Piyadasa
140. Thiyagaraja Waradas
141. Udaya Kalupathirana
142. Udeni Thewarpperuma
143. V.Inthirani
144. V. Ravinthiran
145. V. Shamini
146. V. Sinthuka
147. Vanamali Kaushalya
148. Vasuki Rajasingham
149. Vanie Simon
150. Violet Perera
151. Visakha Tillekeratne
152. Zahid Aman

Organizations

1. Affected Women's Forum
2. Association Of Women With Disabilities
3. Center for Policy Alternatives
4. Centre for Equality and Justice
5. Centre for Social Concerns
6. Community Welfare and Development Fund
7. Dabindu Collective
8. Eastern Self Reliant Community Awakening Organization
9. Environmental Developmental Foundation
10. Families of the Disappeared
11. Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka
12. Gender and Election Working Group
13. Human Elevation Organization
14. iProbono
15. INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre
16. International Centre for Ethnic Studies
17. Law and Society Trust
18. Mannar Women's Development Federation
19. Mihithala Mithuro
20. Mothers and Daughters of Lanka
21. National Fisheries Solidarity Movement
22. National Peace Council
23. Plantation Rural Education and Development Organisation
24. Progressive Women's Collective
25. RED Organisation
26. Right to Life Human Rights Center
27. Rule of Law Forum
28. Samathai Feminists Collective
29. Savisthri National Women's Movement
30. Shramabimani Kendraya
31. Social Scientists' Association
32. StandUp Movement Lanka
33. Suriya Women's Development Center
34. Third Eye Local Knowledge and Activists group
35. United Mind
36. Vallamai-movement for social change
37. Voice of Migrants Network
38. We women Lanka Network
39. Women's Action for Social Justice
40. Women and Media Collective
41. Women's Centre Sri Lanka
42. Women's Education and Research Center
43. Women's Political Academy
44. Women's Action Network
45. Youth Advocacy Network