

## Sri Lanka: Formally abolish the death penalty

**(Kathmandu/Bangkok, 10 April 2019)** – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) condemns and is deeply concerned over the announcement from the President of Sri Lanka, Maithripala Sirisena that dates have been set for the execution for drug offenders in the country. This would put an end to the country's 43-year moratorium on capital punishment. FORUM-ASIA believes that the decision to resume the death penalty is a violation of the most fundamental human rights, in particular the right to life, as enshrined in all established human rights principle, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

During his recent visit to Philippines in January 2019, the Sri Lankan President praised Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs, which has been marred extrajudicial executions of drug offenders. He said, 'The war against crime and drugs carried out by you is an example to the whole world, and personally to me. (...) Drug menace is rampant in my country and I feel that we should follow your footsteps to control this hazard.'<sup>1</sup>

The authorities are reportedly looking to recruit hangman, as a date for executions has been fixed by the President.<sup>2</sup>

FORUM-ASIA emphasises that the right to life is a fundamental human right, and must be protected by the State at all times. Capital punishment has proven to have no deterrence effect on crime. Additionally, it questionably affects people from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

FORUM-ASIA is gravely concerned about the blatant violation of human rights through the approval of execution. FORUM urges the Government to maintain the presumption of innocence and fair trials for drug offenders, and demands an immediate halt to the planned execution of 25 convicted drug offenders.<sup>3</sup>

FORUM-ASIA further calls up on the President and the Government of Sri Lanka to:

- Immediately halt the preparation of the scheduled executions,
- Formally abolish the death penalty in the country,
- Formulate rules and regulations, as well as introduce alternative instruments to combat drug abuse and smuggling without compromising the right to life and other constitutional guarantees, and
- Respect, protect and promote to international legal obligations and the constitutional parameters that guarantee a fair trial and the right to life.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/18/example-to-the-world-sri-lanka-president-plans-to-copy-dutertes-war-on-drugs>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.onlanka.com/news/date-fixed-to-execute-drug-offenders-says-maithripala-sirisena.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/date-fixed-to-execute-drug-offenders-says-maithripala-sirisena/article26695314.ece>

**About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 67 member organisations in 21 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*

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