

# URGENT ACTION

## GRAVE FEARS FOR PRISONERS ON DEATH ROW

Amnesty International has received reports indicating that the President was due to consider signing execution warrants as early as the week of 24 June. Should this be confirmed, up to 13 prisoners would be put at imminent risk of execution. There is completely secrecy around the dates of any scheduled executions, as well as identities of the death row prisoners most at risk. Amnesty International has not been able to confirm whether the individuals had fair trials, access to lawyers or whether they were able to engage in a meaningful clemency process. Sri Lanka has not implemented this ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment for more than four decades. It should continue to honour a tradition that chooses life instead of vengeance.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

*President Maithripala Sirisena  
Presidential Secretariat  
Galle Face  
Colombo 01  
Colombo, Sri Lanka  
Fax: +94 (11) 2340340  
Email: ps@presidentsoffice.lk*

Dear H.E. President Maithripala Sirisena,

*I write to you to express my concern about the decision to consider signing execution warrants to execute the 13 prisoners who are currently on death row.*

*Executions are not a show of strength, but a display of weakness. They represent the failure to create a humane society where the right to life is protected. Sri Lanka does not need more lives to be taken in the name of vengeance.*

*We understand that you are determined to combat drug use and drug-related crime in Sri Lanka. However, there is no evidence that implementing the death penalty will help achieve that goal.*

*By seeking executions for drug-related crimes, the death penalty in Sri Lanka is being used in circumstances that violate international law and standards. Executions have failed to act as a unique deterrent to crime in other countries, could claim the lives of people who may have been convicted through unfair trials, and could disproportionately affect people from minority and less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds.*

***We implore you to reconsider your decision to hang these 13 prisoners, and commute their sentences. Please retain Sri Lanka's positive death penalty record and establish a moratorium on all executions with a view to abolish the death penalty entirely.***

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In March 2019, Sri Lankan President Sirisena confirmed that he had set the dates for execution but did not reveal what they were. There was a pause in the public pursuit of the death penalty after multiple violent attacks shook the country on 21 April, but on 20 June 2019, he announced the National Drug Eradication Week, that will last until 1 July 2019. There have been several news media reports, that have been independently verified by Amnesty, that indicate that moves are being made to implement the hangings within this time frame.

Amnesty International is concerned that judicial proceedings in Sri Lanka may have not met international standards for a fair trial and resulted in the imposition of the death penalty. The National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka noted, on the basis of, the complaints it received that "torture is routinely used in all parts of the country regardless of the nature of the suspected offence for which the person is arrested. For instance, those arrested on suspicion of robbery, possession of drugs, assault, treasure hunting, dispute with family/spouse, have been subjected to torture. The prevailing culture of impunity where those accused of torture is concerned is also a contributing factor to the routine use of torture as a means of interrogation and investigation." The widespread use of torture, and possible reliance on "confessions" extracted under torture to convict, directly violates the right to a fair trial and not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of every individual. The UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment following his mission to Sri Lanka has similarly commented on the use of torture that could lead to "confessions" extracted under torture: "Most torture survivors indicated that the acts of torture ceased after they confessed, which sometimes included signing blank papers or documents in a language they could not read."

The possibility that a skewed justice process could lead to a cruel and irreversible sentence being handed out, and even worse, the possibility that such a sentence could be implemented, is alarming.

The secrecy surrounding President Maithripala Sirisena's plans to resume executions heightens the risk that due process might be violated in the cases of those most at risk – no information is presently available on the details of their cases, including judicial and clemency reviews.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and under any circumstances, as a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. The organization has been campaigning for global abolition of the death penalty for over 40 years.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** English or Sinhalese  
You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 6 August 2019  
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** [group of men] (he/him)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa37/0183/2019/en/>