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05 April 2019

H. E Maithirpala Sirisena
The President
Presidential Secretariat,
Colombo 01,
Sri Lanka.

Your Excellency,

SAHR expresses concerns on your call for reviving the use of the death penalty for drug-related offenses.

On behalf of the South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), a regional network of human rights defenders, we are writing to express our deep concern over your decision to revive the death penalty against those convicted for drug-related offenses.

We are aware that the death penalty is not abolished in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan courts impose the death penalty on specific cases, and usually higher courts would commute such sentences to life imprisonment. As a result, since 23 June 1976 no death penalty has been executed even though it is not legally abolished.

We are deeply concerned by your Excellency's speech delivered on Sunday, 31 March 2019 at Colombo advocating the use of the death penalty for those convicted of drug trafficking. Furthermore, your Secretariat called for the imposition of the death penalty through a paid advertisement in the Daily Mirror on 3 April 2019.

Sri Lanka was one of the first countries in South Asia to end the use of capital punishment even though it is legally permissible to do so.

Your government in August 2017 assured to the United Nations at the Universal Period Review that "Sri Lanka has abolished the practice of execution upon judicial order since 1976, and has voted in favour of the periodic UN General Assembly Resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty". Your decision to re-implement the death penalty now would be a breach of this assurance.

Further, we believe that your decision to selectively implement the death penalty to the drug traffickers is not permitted by Sri Lankan law and also violates article 12 of the constitution which guarantees equality of all persons.

We urge your Excellency to rethink on your call for the imposition of the death penalty for drug-related offenses and send a clear message that Sri Lanka would continue to desist from the use of capital punishment.

On behalf of the members of the South Asians for Human Rights,

Sultana Kamal
Chairperson

Mohamed Latheef
Co- Chairperson