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இலங்கை சட்டத்தரணிகள் சங்கம்

## BAR ASSOCIATION OF SRI LANKA

08<sup>th</sup> July 2026

### STATEMENT ON THE INCIDENTS AT NEGOMBO PRISON

The Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) expresses its profound concern regarding the tragic incidents that occurred at Negombo Prison between 5th and 7th July 2026, which reportedly resulted in the loss of 27 lives, including 7 prison officers, and with over 100 persons injured.

The BASL unequivocally condemns all acts of violence, irrespective of the source from which they arise. Violence within places of detention undermines the Rule of Law, threatens public confidence in the administration of justice, and places at risk the lives of prisoners, prison officers and all others entrusted with the management of correctional institutions.

It has also been reported that tense situations have also arisen in several other prisons. Therefore, the relevant stakeholders must take all necessary measures to ensure the safety and security of both prison officers and inmates in all prisons.

In the immediate aftermath of this tragedy, when emotions are understandably heightened, it is the duty of the State to take all necessary precautions and positive measures to ensure the safety, security and well-being of both prisoners and prison officers, to prevent any further violence, and to ensure that all detention facilities continue to be managed in accordance with the Rule of Law and with full respect for the dignity and rights of every person.

There have also been reports regarding difficulties encountered by statutory oversight bodies in carrying out their lawful functions. These matters, if established, raise serious concerns and should form part of the independent investigation.

The BASL notes the Government's decision to appoint an independent committee headed by a retired Judge of the Supreme Court to inquire into these incidents. While this is a welcome step, public confidence will ultimately depend upon the inquiry being conducted independently, impartially, transparently and expeditiously. It should establish the full sequence of events, determine whether any unlawful acts or omissions contributed to the tragedy, identify any failures in prison administration, security or oversight, and make recommendations aimed not only at fixing responsibility but also at preventing the recurrence of similar incidents through meaningful institutional reform.

The findings of the inquiry should be made public, subject only to such limitations as may be necessary in the interests of justice or national security.

Any person found to have engaged in criminal conduct or official misconduct, whether a prisoner, prison officer or any other person, must be held accountable in accordance with the law and afforded due process.

Equally, those who have been injured must receive prompt and adequate medical care, and appropriate support should be extended to the families of those who lost their lives.

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## ශ්‍රී ලංකා නීතිඥ සංගමය

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## BAR ASSOCIATION OF SRI LANKA

This tragedy must not be viewed as an isolated incident. Rather, it is symptomatic of longstanding structural deficiencies within Sri Lanka's prison system and the broader administration of criminal justice.

The BASL reiterates that persons deprived of their liberty do not forfeit their fundamental rights or their inherent dignity. Many persons presently held in remand custody have not been convicted of any offence and continue to enjoy the presumption of innocence until proven guilty by a court of law.

At the same time, and importantly, prison officers perform an essential public function under extremely difficult circumstances and are entitled to safe working conditions, adequate resources, facilities and institutional support.

The State bears the responsibility of ensuring the safety, security and welfare of both prisoners and prison officers alike, while ensuring that all persons in custody are treated in accordance with the Constitution and Sri Lanka's legal obligations.

The events at Negombo also serve as a reminder of the urgent need to address chronic prison overcrowding which requires more than expanding prison capacity. It calls for a broader review of remand practices, the timely disposal of criminal cases, the appropriate use of bail, greater reliance on non-custodial sentencing where suitable, strengthened rehabilitation programmes, improved prison infrastructure, adequate staffing, and modern prison management.

The BASL therefore calls upon the relevant authorities to ensure a credible and transparent investigation into these incidents, to hold all those responsible accountable in accordance with the law, and to treat this tragedy as a catalyst to implement meaningful and lasting reforms to Sri Lanka's prison and criminal justice systems.

The true measure of accountability will lie not only in identifying responsibility for what has occurred, but also in ensuring that the conditions which gave rise to this tragedy are comprehensively addressed so that such incidents do not recur.

The BASL extends its deepest condolences to the families of all those who lost their lives and wishes a full and speedy recovery to those who were injured. The BASL remains committed to supporting measures that strengthen the Rule of Law, protect human dignity, and promote a fair, humane and effective system of justice.

**Rajeev Amarasuriya**  
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