



LAWASIA EXPRESSES CONCERN AT CANCELLATION OF SRI LANKAN CONFERENCE

LAWASIA, the Law Association for Asia and the Pacific, was disturbed to learn that a conference arranged by the Bar Association of Sri Lanka and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute had to be cancelled due to actions on the part of Sri Lankan authorities related to issuance of entry visas for speakers of high international repute, including the United Nations Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers.

It records its concern at this development, in particular as the conference material was focused on the role of lawyers in fostering Commonwealth values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

It draws attention to Article 23 of the *United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*, which indicates:

"Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human beings and to join or form local, national or international organisations and attend their meetings."

It further notes the resolution of the LAWASIA Council of 27 October 2013 in support of the freedom of assembly of lawyers.

LAWASIA shares disappointment that the actions of the Sri Lankan authorities appear to indicate resistance towards the right and the obligation of legal professionals, as key players in civil society, to promote discussion and information exchange on these important areas relating to the rule of law.

It notes that these actions give rise to an impression that the fundamental rights of free speech, expression and assembly are currently not encouraged by the Sri Lankan government.

LAWASIA calls upon the government of Sri Lanka to be conscientious in maintaining and protecting the rule of law in all its facets, including ensuring complete independence of the judiciary, which is a cornerstone of the concept. It equally encourages the government to take immediate and meaningful steps to prevent all human rights violations in Sri Lanka.

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