



**fidh**



# ANATOMY OF A CRACKDOWN

The repression of Sri Lanka's *aragalaya* protest movement

# Table of contents

<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Background: Economic mismanagement triggers protests .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. The <i>aragalaya</i>: Nationwide protests against economic and political mismanagement.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3. Cracking down on protests: Key incidents .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4. Human rights violations against <i>aragalaya</i> protesters .....</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1 Restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly.....	19
4.1.1 Unnecessary declaration of State of Emergency .....	19
4.1.2 Disproportionate Emergency Regulations .....	20
4.1.3 Sweeping restrictions on places of assemblies .....	21
4.2 Notification requirement used to stifle peaceful assemblies .....	23
4.3 Protest participants not protected .....	24
4.4 Protests disrupted, blocked .....	26
4.5 Modalities and expressive content of assemblies restricted .....	27
4.6 Abusive policing of assemblies .....	28
4.6.1 Military deployed to police protests .....	28
4.6.2 Counter-terrorism unit, “men in black”, used for crowd control.....	29
4.6.3 Crowd-control police not properly trained in human rights.....	30
4.7 Use of force against peaceful assemblies .....	31
4.7.1 Firearms kill, injure protesters .....	31
4.7.2 Teargas, water cannons used indiscriminately .....	33
4.7.3 Protesters attacked, beaten .....	37
4.7.4 Bystanders, journalists, and lawyers targeted; medics obstructed .....	38
4.7.5 Barricades pose danger to protesters, journalists .....	39
4.8 Arrest and detention of protest organizers and participants .....	40
4.9 No accountability for human rights violations .....	43
<b>5. Harassment of protest organizers and participants .....</b>	<b>45</b>
5.1 Protest participants and organizers arrested, prosecuted .....	45
5.2 Lack of due process following arrests .....	47
5.3 Protesters abducted.....	47
5.4 Judicial harassment.....	48
5.5 Police intimidation.....	49
5.6 Travel bans imposed.....	50
5.7 Surveillance of journalists.....	50
5.8 Harassment of family members and associates.....	50
5.9 Crackdown forces protest participants, organizers, and a journalist into hiding .....	51
<b>6. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>7. APPENDIX: Chronology of key developments in 2022 .....</b>	<b>55</b>

# List of acronyms

CCTV = Closed-circuit television

CHRD = Center for Human Rights and Development

CID = Criminal Investigation Department

CRC = Convention on the Rights of the Child

CRPD = Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities

DIG = Deputy Inspector General

EU = European Union

FIDH = International Federation for Human Rights

GGG = Gota Go Gama

HRCSL = Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

HSZ = High Security Zone

ICCPR = International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

IGP = Inspector General of Police

ISIS = Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

IUSF = Inter University Students' Federation

LGBTIQ = Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer

LTTE = Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

OHCHR = Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PSO = Public Security Ordinance

PTA = Prevention of Terrorism Act

SLPP = Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna [Sri Lanka People's Front]

SSP = Senior Superintendent of Police

STF = Special Task Force

SYU = Socialist Youth Union

TID = Terrorism Investigation Division

UN = United Nations

UNICEF = United Nations Children's Fund

VAT = Value added tax

# Executive summary

Overwhelmingly peaceful street protests that began in early and mid-2022 in Sri Lanka were met by acts of relentless repression by the authorities. This report, “*Anatomy of a crackdown - The repression of Sri Lanka’s aragalaya protest movement*,” provides a comprehensive record of the serious and systematic human rights violations committed by Sri Lankan authorities against the protesters. These actions were inconsistent with Sri Lanka’s international legal obligations stemming from its ratification of key human rights treaties.

The protest movement, called *aragalaya* [“struggle” in Sinhala], was born in response to the government’s protracted economic mismanagement and the growing public discontent over corruption and nepotism. The protests, which initially started in the capital, Colombo, quickly spread across all nine provinces of Sri Lanka. The protesters’ key demands were the resignation of then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the reform of the political system.

The main protest site in Colombo, Galle Face Green, became an open and free space where all Sri Lankans could express themselves. It also became a dynamic venue for political discussions and a creative place for art exhibits and for musicians and performing artists to produce music and plays in the form of political dissent and satire. As the *aragalaya* gained momentum, the Colombo protest site evolved into a space for the public to call for recognition of, and accountability for, injustice and human rights violations that had long been unaddressed. It also allowed for the inclusion and equal participation of traditionally marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) community. Similar to the protest site in Colombo, protest sites for continuous demonstrations were set up in public places in other cities and towns around the country.

Instead of engaging in dialogue and addressing the protest movement’s grievances, the government responded to the demonstrations by cracking down on protesters and repeatedly violating their right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Such violations included the imposition of unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions on assemblies by resorting to emergency powers, and curbs on the places, modalities, and expressive content of assemblies. In addition, authorities abused national laws to block or prevent protests and arrest protesters.

In several critical incidents, such as on 9 May 2022 in Colombo, Western Province, and Kandy, Central Province, the authorities failed to intervene and prevent unprovoked attacks by pro-government elements on peaceful *aragalaya* protesters. In many other cases, instead of facilitating the exercise of the protesters’ right to freedom of peaceful assembly, police disrupted, blocked, and interfered in the demonstrations.

Members of the military and the Special Task Force (STF), a police unit specialized in counter-terrorism, organized crime, and counter-insurgency operations, were repeatedly deployed to supervise assemblies. In many cases, police officers deployed for crowd control engaged in actions that evinced an absence of adequate human rights training and lacked guidance for the specific needs of vulnerable groups at protests, including persons with disabilities and children.

The most disturbing pattern of human rights violations against *aragalaya* protesters was the authorities’ frequent use of unnecessary and/or disproportionate force to disperse their peaceful assemblies. In many cases, such actions violated the protesters’ fundamental human rights, including the right to life. For example, in at least two key incidents, law enforcement personnel used firearms to disperse protesters, resulting in the death of one person and injuries to many others.

Police also used teargas and water cannons indiscriminately against peaceful *aragalaya* protesters, without adhering to prerequisites and modalities prescribed by relevant international standards. Between 31 March 2022 and 16 January 2023, police used teargas and/or water cannons in at least 25 protests, mostly in Colombo. Authorities often targeted protest observers, including bystanders, journalists, and lawyers.

In addition, police routinely arrested *aragalaya* protest organizers and participants. In most instances, those arrested neither engaged in violent behavior nor incited others to violence. Three peaceful student protesters were arbitrarily detained for a prolonged period of time under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) - Sri Lanka's anti-terrorism legislation. Authorities also subjected *aragalaya* protest organizers and participants to a systematic campaign of arrests, prosecutions, and other acts of harassment, including judicial harassment, intimidation, and surveillance.

Amid these serious and systematic human rights violations, members of law enforcement agencies have not been held accountable for abuses they committed against *aragalaya* protesters.

This report, which has been produced with the support of the Sri Lankan non-governmental organization Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), is based on interviews conducted by FIDH with a total of 42 people (32 men and 10 women) between August and October 2022. Interviews were conducted in-person with 31 people during an FIDH international fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka from 9 to 19 September 2022. Interlocutors were interviewed in Colombo (Western Province), Kandy (Central Province), and Galle (Southern Province). The remaining interviews were conducted remotely or in-person. Interviewees included: protest participants, organizers, and observers; journalists; medical professionals; and lawyers. They also included persons with disabilities and members of the LGBTIQ community. The names of the interviewees have been withheld for security reasons. The report also relies on information published by independent Sri Lankan institutions, reliable national and international news outlets, and United Nations (UN) agencies and human rights monitoring mechanisms. Lastly, FIDH reviewed and analyzed photographs and video footage taken by independent news organizations to corroborate some of the information provided by the interviewees.

FIDH would like to thank all those who generously gave their time to provide testimonies, information, and experiences that have proven invaluable for the production of this report.



DEPLOYMENT OF MILITARY  
AND COUNTER-TERRORISM UNIT

WATER CANNONS

ARRESTS AND  
PROSECUTIONS

LIVE AMMUNITION  
AND TEARGAS

SURVEILLANCE  
AND INTIMIDATION

**SRI LANKA**  
ANATOMY OF A CRACKDOWN

# 1. Background: Economic mismanagement triggers protests

The government's protracted economic mismanagement and the growing public discontent over corruption and nepotism<sup>1</sup> during the previous decade were the two primary factors that contributed to the birth of the *aragalaya* ["struggle" in Sinhala].

"To do something properly, officially, and simply to abide by the law and get something done in Sri Lanka is very hard," a protester told FIDH, expressing his frustration over corruption in the country.<sup>2</sup>

After being elected President in November 2019, Gotabaya Rajapaksa implemented his election campaign promises to cut taxes on personal income and corporate profits and to reduce the value added tax (VAT). The tax cuts resulted in the loss of more than US\$1.4 billion in government revenues a year.<sup>3</sup> The loss of tax revenues were compounded by the negative economic impacts of the April 2019 Easter Sunday attacks<sup>4</sup> and the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which severely hit the country's tourism industry and contributed to a significant loss of foreign currency inflow. At the same time, the country faced a massive foreign loan repayment burden. In February 2021, foreign exchange reserves declined to an 11-year low.<sup>5</sup> In another ill-advised policy, in April 2021, President Rajapaksa's administration abruptly banned the import of chemical fertilizers with no prior warning to farmers. In addition, farmers were not provided any training in methods of organic farming. The ban resulted in a dramatic fall in harvest yields for essential food items in the country.<sup>6</sup>

By April 2022, the government's protracted economic mismanagement resulted in the acceleration of the country's economic collapse. The depletion of foreign exchange reserves triggered the inability of the country to service its external debt obligations. The daily life of Sri Lankans came to a near standstill amid severe shortages of fuel, medicine, cooking gas, and electricity. Long lines at gas stations continued for weeks, and daily power cuts occurred nationwide for up to 10 hours a day. On 12 April 2022, for the first time in its history, Sri Lanka suspended debt repayments to foreign creditors.<sup>7</sup> In June 2022, public and state-approved private schools indefinitely closed because of a lack of fuel for transportation. On 22 June 2022, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament that the economy had "completely collapsed."<sup>8</sup> By August 2022, annual inflation had surged to 70%, with food prices increasing by 84.6% compared to a year before.<sup>9</sup>

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1. Mahinda Rajapaksa served as President from 2005 to 2015. His brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa served as Sri Lanka's Secretary to the Ministry of Defense during this time. In 2019, Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected as President. Mahinda Rajapaksa was appointed as Prime Minister. By July 2021, there were four Rajapaksa brothers serving in the cabinet of ministers: Gotabaya, Mahinda, and their brothers Chamal and Basil, appointed as Minister of Irrigation and Minister of Finance, respectively. In addition, Mahinda's son, Namal Rajapaksa, was appointed as the Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs. Chamal Rajapaksa's son, Shasheendra Rajapaksa, was appointed as a non-cabinet minister as State Minister of Organic Fertilizer Production.

2. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

3. BBC, *Sri Lanka: why is the country in an economic crisis?*, 14 July 2022; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-61028138>

4. On 21 April 2019 (Easter Sunday), a series of coordinated suicide bombings at three luxury hotels and three churches in Colombo killed 269 people. The attacks were carried out by Islamic extremists with ties to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

5. World Bank, *As Sri Lankan economy recovers, focus on competitiveness and debt sustainability will ensure a resilient rebound*, 9 April 2021; <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/04/09/sri-lankan-economy-recovers>

6. Reuters, *Fertiliser ban decimates Sri Lankan crops as government popularity ebbs*, 3 March 2022; <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/fertiliser-ban-decimates-sri-lankan-crops-government-popularity-ebbs-2022-03-03/>

7. Wall Street Journal, *Sri Lanka suspends foreign debt payments*, 12 April 2022; <https://www.wsj.com/articles/sri-lanka-to-suspend-external-debt-payments-11649773145>

8. AP, *Sri Lanka's prime minister says economy has 'completely collapsed'*, 22 June 2022; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/23/sri-lanka-prime-minister-economy-completely-collapsed>

9. BBC, *Sri Lanka: Inflation rate jumps to 70.2% in August*, 22 September 2022; <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-62990385>



The severe economic burden and high inflation was felt by all segments of society. In response to the economic crisis, and amid a perception of rampant corruption and nepotism within the Rajapaksa administration, large numbers of citizens took to the street to call for the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and for the reform of the political system.

“We really need a change. Our people want some honorable people to become members of Parliament. We want the honorable people, those who love the country,” a lawyer told FIDH.<sup>10</sup> “We are trying to do something to build this country, we don’t want to destroy it,” a protester declared.<sup>11</sup>



*Aragalaya* protesters gather outside the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo on 9 July 2022. © AFP

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10. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based senior lawyer*, 16 September 2022.

11. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022.



## 2. The *aragalaya*: Nationwide protests against economic and political mismanagement

The leaderless *aragalaya* movement was a wave of sustained public protests that began in early and mid-2022 in response to the severe economic hardship experienced by all segments of society [See above, *Chapter 1*]. The use of social media platforms was crucial to mobilize protesters and share information among participants.<sup>12</sup> “There were some key organizers, but [protests were] mostly spontaneous. When something was shared on social media, people would say: ‘We should go there, we should join them,’” a protester recounted.<sup>13</sup> In some places, word of mouth was also used.<sup>14</sup> The protests, which initially started in the country’s capital, Colombo, quickly spread across the country. The protesters’ key demands were the resignation of then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the reform of the political system.

### ***Predominantly peaceful protests***

Throughout the *aragalaya* protests, organizers and participants sought to ensure that the demonstrations were held in a peaceful manner. For example, in Galle, Southern Province, protest organizers intervened to facilitate dialogue and negotiations between protesters and law enforcement officials to ensure that there would not be any violent incidents.<sup>15</sup> “We needed to do this in a peaceful way, we did not want to get violent,” a Galle-based protester explained.<sup>16</sup> Isolated and sporadic incidents of violence by the protesters took place only on a few occasions.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Diverse groups converge for a common cause***

The protests began in March 2022 at various locations in Colombo, including Kohuwala, Independence Square, and in the vicinity of Parliament. On 9 April 2022, a protest was organized at Colombo’s Galle Face Green, a seaside public promenade located near the Presidential Secretariat [See below, *Chapter 3 - Map of key incidents in Colombo*]. On that day, different individuals and groups gathered to call for the resignation of then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The protesters came from various strata of society. “Everybody was there, all the genders, all the ethnic groups - everybody was represented,” a lawyer confirmed.<sup>18</sup>

Professionals - including doctors, lawyers, and IT experts - also organized protests to call on the President to resign. “Lawyers got interested in it [the *aragalaya*], mainly because [the situation] was affecting them personally. Fuel was not available, so they could not travel to court - the crisis was hitting them directly, and courts were being closed for various reasons,” another lawyer recounted.<sup>19</sup>

The protests united people belonging to different religious and ethnic groups, persons with a broad spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identification, and persons with disabilities, with the common goal of pressing for the reform of the political system. The united voice of the protest

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12. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based journalist*, 11 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based senior journalist*, 14 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protester*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022.

13. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

14. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based journalist*, 11 September 2022.

15. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 17 September 2022.

16. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protester*, 16 September 2022.

17. For example, during a protest on 13 July 2022 at the Polduwa junction near Parliament in Colombo, protesters engaged in clashes with law enforcement officials. Weapons of law enforcement officers were allegedly stolen during this protest.

18. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based lawyer*, 11 September 2022.

19. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.

movement was a significant development in a society with ethnic and religious divisions that emanated from the traumatic experience of a 26-year civil war.<sup>20</sup>

“For the first time in Sri Lanka’s history, Sri Lankans were able to come out of their mental structure of their ethnicity, religion, and political ideologies. For me, that’s the victory of the whole struggle of Sri Lanka. For the first time we were able to sit together, listen to each other, and discuss what the way forward is,” a protest organizer said.<sup>21</sup>

As the number of protesters grew, demonstrators started erecting tents around the Presidential Secretariat, with the common objective of holding continuous protests to pressure then-President Rajapaksa to resign. The protest site was called “Gota Go Gama” (GGG) [roughly translated from Sinhala as “village to chase Gota” - a nickname used for Gotabaya Rajapaksa]. Through public donations, the protest site was set up as a village, which featured a community kitchen, a library, medical clinics, a cinema, a community garden, an art gallery, and a radio station. “People were reluctant to go to Galle Face Green at the beginning, because they were told there would be violence, but once they were in Galle Face, the vibes and the energy were amazing - it was so welcoming. People made sure that the place was clean. There were times at around 1:30 at night, I walked from one corner [of the protest site] to the other by myself, no cat-calling, nothing – in Sri Lanka, for the first time!” a female protester related to FIDH.<sup>22</sup> “Those [first days of April] were some of the magical days in my life. I will never forget those days. I met some of the most interesting people, who really care about our country,” another protester recounted.<sup>23</sup>

### ***A free space for expression, accountability, and inclusion***

GGG became an open and free space where all Sri Lankans could express themselves. It also became a dynamic and creative space for art installations and for musicians and performing artists to produce music and plays in the form of political dissent and satire.

As the *aragalaya* gained momentum, the protest site evolved into a space for the public to call for the recognition of, and accountability for, injustice and human rights violations that had long been unaddressed. For example, for the first time in Sri Lankan history, on 18 May 2022,<sup>24</sup> a public remembrance ceremony was organized at the GGG site to commemorate the lives of those who died during the civil war.<sup>25</sup> “That was very significant, even though the turnout was [only] around 40 people,” a lawyer told FIDH.<sup>26</sup>

The protest site was also a safe space to call for accountability for the missing persons and murdered journalists during the civil war, as well as for the victims of the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks.

GGG allowed for the inclusion and equal participation of traditionally marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) community. Protest tents were set up by members of the LGBTIQ community, the deaf, and civil war veterans living with disabilities. The largest pride parade ever organized in Sri Lanka took place during the *aragalaya*, with the participation of over 1,000 people who displayed a 15-meter-long rainbow flag with a black stripe, the symbol of the protest movement.

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20. Sri Lanka’s civil war (1983-2009) was marked by the insurgence conducted by the armed group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which sought to establish an independent Tamil state in the North and East of the country. The civil war ended with the killing of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran by government security forces in May 2009.

21. FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

22. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female protester*, 13 September 2022.

23. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

24. 18 May marks the day when Sri Lanka’s civil war ended in 2009.

25. The day is normally celebrated as a “War Victory Day” to mark the Sri Lankan armed forces’ victory over the LTTE. In the North and East of the country it is celebrated as a “Remembrance Day” by those belonging to the Tamil community. Law enforcement officials have often subjected those who conduct Remembrance Day ceremonies to surveillance, intimidation, and other acts of harassment.

26. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.



A member of the LGBTIQ community applies lipstick at the Galle Face Green protest site near the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo on 17 July 2022. © ARUN SANKAR / AFP

The participation of women was also significant. “There were a lot of women speaking up, which is not very common in Sri Lanka. Even when people were chanting slogans, you would see a woman on a stage or women standing on a table – that energy was there throughout [the protests],” a female protester told FIDH.<sup>27</sup> “There were even women who camped there despite restrictions on sanitary facilities,” she added.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Advancing political literacy***

Another key feature of the *aragalaya* protest movement was its emphasis on increasing the political literacy of citizens through forums, political talks, and libraries. Protesters were able to set aside their political differences in their quest to achieve the *aragalaya*’s goals. “We had a lot of political groups working in the *aragalaya*, but the political agendas never came up. We had common objectives and values,” a protest organizer related to FIDH.<sup>29</sup>

At the GGG protest site, dedicated areas, called the People’s University and the People’s Forum, became spaces for discussions to raise public awareness and understanding of Sri Lanka’s Constitution and the proposed political reform processes. These discussions were led by academics, constitutional lawyers, and political experts.

“We believe [reform] in Sri Lanka is not a matter of changing a President with another President. We can’t have a Superman solution. We need to change the thinking of our people,” another protest organizer affirmed.<sup>30</sup>

A large number of books were donated by the public to set up a library at GGG. This library, which housed a collection of hundreds of books, was later moved inside the Presidential Secretariat after its occupation on 9 July 2022 [See below, *Chapter 3*].

27. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female protester*, 13 September 2022.

28. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.

29. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based activist and protest organizer*, 12 September 2022.

30. FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

## *Aragalaya spreads around the country*

During the *aragalaya*, protests took place in all nine provinces of Sri Lanka [See below, *Map of key aragalaya protests in Sri Lanka*]. In Colombo, beginning on 9 April 2022, when the GGG protest camp was first set up in front of the Presidential Secretariat, daily protests were held for more than 100 consecutive days. Many protesters camped at the protest site until the violent raid that removed them from the area on 22 July 2022 [See below, *Chapters 3 and 4.7.3*]. The GGG camp in Colombo continued in smaller numbers until 10 August 2022.

Similar to the GGG protest site in Colombo, protest sites for continuous demonstrations were set up in public places in other cities and towns around the country, including: Kandy, Central Province; Kurunegala, North Western Province; Negombo, Western Province; and Galle and Matara, Southern Province. These protest sites also echoed the sentiments of the GGG protest camp by conducting peaceful continuous protests and facilitating space for libraries, educational talks to increase political literacy, and modes of artistic expression. In Galle, environmental issues were also raised by the *aragalaya* protest movement.<sup>31</sup>



Map of key *aragalaya* protests in Sri Lanka ©FIDH

31. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022.



In Kandy and Galle, beginning in April 2022, protests were held every day for approximately three months. In Kandy, the police asked the camping protesters near the clock tower to vacate the area in order to facilitate the Kandy *perahera* in August.<sup>32</sup> In places that did not have dedicated protest camps, there were protest marches and demonstrations organized on an *ad hoc* basis. On two occasions (28 April and 6 May 2022), general strikes occurred across the country to call for the resignation of then-President Rajapaksa.



Protesters wear masks of then-Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa, then-Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, and then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, as they demonstrate against the government's economic mismanagement in Peradeniya, near Kandy, Central Province, on 26 April 2022.

© ABHISHEK CHINNAPPA / GETTY IMAGES via AFP

After Ranil Wickremesinghe replaced Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the country's President in July 2022, the government significantly increased efforts to end the *aragalaya* protests. Following the dismantling of the GGG protest camp in Colombo in mid-August, civil society groups began to organize smaller protest marches and demonstrations to continue demanding meaningful reforms of the political system and the release of detained protesters. Such protests, which occurred mostly in Colombo, were still occurring in January 2023. "Police told us that we are no longer allowed to come to the protest ground where we were camping out. If we come, they will attack us," a protest organizer told FIDH.<sup>33</sup>

32. The Kandy Esala Perahera is an annual Buddhist procession held in July and/or August to pay homage to the sacred tooth relic of the Lord Buddha. The Sinhalese term "*perahera*" means a procession of dancers, acrobats, and other performers who are accompanied by elephants parading the streets in celebration of a religious event.

33. FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

### 3. Cracking down on protests: Key incidents

Numerous protests that took place during the *aragalaya* were met with unnecessary and disproportionate force by the authorities, including the military.

Up to 31 March 2022, when police and military personnel cracked down on peaceful protesters and journalists near the President's private residence in Mirihana, Colombo, *aragalaya* demonstrators in the capital and around the country had been able to assemble without experiencing significant acts of interference by the authorities. Various interlocutors interviewed by FIDH praised the authorities' behavior and the police's cooperation in allowing for the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in the early stages of the *aragalaya*.

"Two traffic police officers didn't see any problems [with the demonstrations] and told us: 'You guys are doing peaceful protests, you should get to the streets and do some powerful demonstrations,'" a Colombo-based protester recalled police telling protesters after a demonstration in the capital.<sup>34</sup> "The Kandy police were very cooperative," a Kandy-based protest organizer said.<sup>35</sup>

The Mirihana crackdown marked the beginning of an increasingly repressive behavior by the authorities against the protesters. The 9 May violent attacks by pro-government elements on *aragalaya* protesters in Colombo and Kandy represented another significant turning point, according to several people interviewed by FIDH. "Initially, until 9 May, no authorities came to disturb or intervene but we knew, right from the beginning, that intelligence services, CID [Criminal Investigation Department], police officers were all there," a protest organizer said.<sup>36</sup> "In the first weeks, police were not confrontational. From 9 May I realized: 'OK, they [the police] were not with us,'" a protester remarked.<sup>37</sup>

Several people interviewed by FIDH believed the repressive trend worsened after Ranil Wickremesinghe became President in July 2022. "After Ranil Wickremesinghe became President, things took a violent turn," a protester said.<sup>38</sup> "After Ranil [Wickremesinghe] became President, some people were afraid to join the protests," a lawyer recalled.<sup>39</sup>

Below are short summaries of key incidents involving the use of violence by the authorities and pro-government elements in response to peaceful protests. In some cases, violence was directed not only at protesters but also at journalists, lawyers, and bystanders.

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34. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

35. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based activist and protest organizer*, 12 September 2022.

36. FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

37. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

38. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

39. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based lawyer*, 16 September 2022.



Map of key incidents in Colombo ©FIDH

### **Mirihana, Colombo - 31 March 2022** **Protesters, journalists attacked and arrested**

A candlelight vigil was organized at 6:30pm near the Jubilee Junction in Mirihana, Colombo, to protest against the economic mismanagement caused by then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's administration. At about 7:30pm, a large crowd joined the protest and started moving towards the President's private residence, which is located approximately two kilometers away. The police used teargas and a water cannon to disperse the protesters. Nine journalists were assaulted by police - including personnel from its Special Task Force (STF)<sup>40</sup> - and the military.<sup>41</sup> At least 53 people who participated in the protest were arrested, while 37 others were injured and hospitalized.<sup>42</sup>

### **Rambukkana, Sabaragamuwa Province - 19 April 2022** **Protester killed by police fire**

A group of approximately 200 people who had gathered at a gas station to purchase fuel in Rambukkana, Sabaragamuwa Province, began protesting fuel shortages and demanded fuel at the price prior to its increase. As the crowd increased to around 2,000 people, police fired teargas and live ammunition to disperse them.<sup>43</sup> One person, Chaminda Lakshan, died as a result of a gunshot wound. At least 14 others were injured,<sup>44</sup> including five who sustained gunshot wounds.<sup>45</sup>

40. The Special Task Force (STF) is an elite force of the police specialized in counter-terrorism, organized crime, and counter-insurgency operations.

41. Reporters without Borders, *At least nine journalists injured during Sri Lanka protests*, 7 April 2022; <https://rsf.org/en/least-nine-journalists-injured-during-sri-lanka-protests>

42. News First, *CID takes over Mirihana protest investigation*, 1 April 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/04/01/cid-takes-over-mirihana-protest-investigation/>

43. Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, *Interim Report of the Committee of Experts appointed by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to investigate the Police shooting incident that took place in Rambukkana on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022*, 28 June 2022; <https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Interim-Report-of-the-Committee-of-Experts-appointed-by-the-Human-Rights-Commission-of-Sri-Lanka-HRCsl-to-investigate-the-Police-Shooting-incident-that-took-place-in-Rambukkana-on-19th-April-2022.pdf>

44. FIDH and CHRD, *Sri Lanka: Hold police accountable for use of lethal force against protesters*, 20 April 2022; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-police-use-lethal-force-against-protesters>

45. Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, *Interim Report of the Committee of Experts appointed by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to investigate the Police shooting incident that took place in Rambukkana on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022*, 28 June 2022; <https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Interim-Report-of-the-Committee-of-Experts-appointed-by-the-Human-Rights-Commission-of-Sri-Lanka-HRCsl-to-investigate-the-Police-Shooting-incident-that-took-place-in-Rambukkana-on-19th-April-2022.pdf>



## ***Galle Face Green, Colombo - 9 May 2022***

### **Pro-government supporters attack, injure peaceful protesters**

Supporters of then-Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa<sup>46</sup> attended a meeting at the Prime Minister's official residence (commonly known as "Temple Trees") in Colombo. After the meeting, a mob of hundreds of Mahinda Rajapaksa's supporters violently attacked protesters who were demonstrating in front of the Prime Minister's official residence. The mob then proceeded to Galle Face Green, near the Presidential Secretariat, where they assaulted about 100 peaceful *aragalaya* protesters [See below, *Chapter 4.3*]. Police deployed at Galle Face Green failed to intervene to protect the *aragalaya* protesters as attackers destroyed their tents and assaulted them. Among those attacked were disabled persons, catholic priests, and journalists. At least 141 people were injured and hospitalized as a result of the attacks.<sup>47</sup> Some of the *aragalaya* protesters who were hospitalized sustained serious injuries, including head and spinal cord trauma.<sup>48</sup>

## ***Various locations, Colombo - 9 July 2022***

### **Live ammunition, teargas, water cannons used against protesters**

In the largest *aragalaya* demonstration, a crowd of protesters, estimated to number nearly one million, peacefully gathered near the Presidential Secretariat, the President's official residence, and the Prime Minister's official residence in Colombo to pressure then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign. The mass influx of people led to the protesters breaking through the barricades erected by police near all three locations. Water cannons, teargas, and live ammunition were used by law enforcement in attempt to deter the protesters from moving forward. Large groups of protesters subsequently managed to break through the barricades and proceeded to occupy all three sites. At night, police continuously fired teargas to disperse protesters who had gathered in front of then-Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's private residence to call for his resignation. Police assaulted at least eight journalists in the crackdown. Four journalists were subsequently hospitalized [See below, *Chapter 4.7.4*]. In total, approximately 103 people, including 11 journalists, were injured in the 9 July protests.<sup>49</sup> Among those hospitalized, at least three people were treated for gunshot wounds [See below, *Chapter 4.7.1*].

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[the-Human-Rights-Commission-of-Sri-Lanka-HRCSL-to-investigate-the-Police-Shooting-incident-that-took-place-in-Rambukkana-on-19th-April-2022.pdf](#)

46. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned on 9 May 2022, after the attacks by pro-government supporters on *aragalaya* protesters took place. On 12 May 2022, Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed as Prime Minister.

47. Ada Derana, *Over 100 hospitalized amidst tensions at Galle Face*, 9 May 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/82302/over-100-hospitalized-amidst-tensions-at-galle-face>

48. Daily Mirror, *Wounded protesters push for justice through blood, sweat and pain*, 9 June 2022; <https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/recommended-news/Wounded-protesters-push-for-justice-through-blood-sweat-and-pain/277-238697>

49. News First, *Over 100 injured in July 9th Mass Protest*, 10 July 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/07/10/over-100-injured-in-july-9th-mass-protest/>



## Occupation of government buildings

After the 9 July 2022 occupation of the President's official residence, the Presidential Secretariat, and the Prime Minister's official residence, on 13 July 2022, protesters also occupied the Prime Minister's office in Colombo to express their dissatisfaction with then-Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. On 14 July 2022, protesters withdrew from the President and Prime Minister's official residences as well as the Prime Minister's office.<sup>50</sup>

Following the aforementioned incidents, authorities engaged in a relentless campaign of arrests of those who were accused of entering and/or occupying the government buildings and destroying public property. This campaign was accompanied by heightened surveillance of protesters who had allegedly occupied the government buildings. Those arrested in connection with the illegal occupation of government buildings were hit with various criminal charges, including: trespass; unlawful assembly; theft; obstructing the duties of a police officer; offenses against the Public Property Act No. 12 of 1982; and offenses under the Antiquities Ordinance No. 9 of 1940. Under the Public Property Act, bail can only be granted under exceptional circumstances.<sup>51</sup>

Interlocutors interviewed by FIDH appeared to have divergent views with regard to the appropriateness of the occupation of government buildings. "I think the majority [of protesters] was supportive of breaking into buildings, because that was a political message. We knew that legally speaking [it] was wrong, but what was happening was not legal, [it] was political," a lawyer argued.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, a protester termed the occupation as "really bad" and "very stupid."<sup>53</sup> Several eyewitnesses recounted how certain protest organizers and participants had attempted to stop protesters from occupying the buildings but were overwhelmed by the wave of demonstrators.<sup>54</sup> "Originally, people from IUSF and some youth organizations at the GGG tried to protect these buildings. [...] At the Prime Minister's office, we were all standing in front of these glass doors, asking people to leave. But we couldn't stop anyone because there were too many people," a protester related to FIDH.<sup>55</sup>

## Parliament area, Colombo - 13 July 2022 Police fire teargas, arrest protesters

On 13 July, at the Polduwa Junction, police fired teargas to disperse protesters who were trying to break through the police barricades placed along the road leading to the Parliament complex.<sup>56</sup> At least 35 people were hospitalized following clashes between police and protesters. A police officer and an army soldier were also injured. Previously, on 4 May, ahead of the introduction in Parliament of a no-confidence motion against then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, a group of 13 youths held a peaceful protest near Parliament to urge parliamentarians to support the no-confidence motion.<sup>57</sup> The protesters were arrested on various charges, including violating the Parliamentary (Powers and Privileges) Act.<sup>58</sup>

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50. Asia News, *Protesters vacate occupied government buildings in Colombo*, 14 July 2022; <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Protesters-vacate-occupied-government-buildings-in-Colombo-56262.html>

51. Offenses against Public Property Act No. 12 of 1982, Section 8.

52. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.

53. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

54. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

55. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

56. Ada Derana, *Tear gas fired at protesters near parliament entry road*, 13 July 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/83624/police-fire-tear-gas-at-protests-near-polduwa-junction>

57. Daily Mirror, *Dozen arrested for protesting near Parliament*, 4 May 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/top\\_story/Dozen-arrested-for-protesting-near-Parliament/155-236256](https://www.dailymirror.lk/top_story/Dozen-arrested-for-protesting-near-Parliament/155-236256)

58. News First, *Youth protestors who were arrested near the parliament, released on bail*, 4 May 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/04/youth-protestors-who-were-arrested-near-the-parliament-released-on-bail/>

## ***Presidential Secretariat, Colombo - 22 July 2022***

### **Violent raid on protest camp**

In the early hours of the day after Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in as Sri Lanka's President, a military raid was launched to forcefully remove protesters from a room in the Presidential Secretariat and the protest camp in the vicinity of the building. The raid was carried out despite a pledge by protesters that the occupation of the Presidential Secretariat area would cease on the afternoon of 22 July.<sup>59</sup> At about 1:00am, without prior warning, military and other unidentified personnel [See below, *Chapters 4.6.2 and 4.7.3*] violently assaulted protesters, journalists, and lawyers during the raid. Nine people were arrested and at least 50 others were injured, including three who were hospitalized due to the excessive force used by the authorities.<sup>60</sup>

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59. FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Brutal attack against peaceful protesters by security forces*, 23 July 2022; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-brutal-attack-against-peaceful-protesters-by-security>

60. Guardian, *Sri Lanka security forces raid protest camp as Ranil Wickremesinghe flexes muscles*, 22 July 2022; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/22/sri-lanka-security-forces-raid-protest-camp-as-ranil-wickremesinghe-flexes-muscles>

## 4. Human rights violations against *aragalaya* protesters

Serious and repeated violations of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly characterized the Sri Lankan authorities' response to the *aragalaya* protests. Authorities failed to respect and protect the rights of protest participants and often acted in a manner that was inconsistent with international human rights law and standards. This included the imposition of unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly through the declaration of a State of Emergency, the adoption of Emergency Regulations, and curbs on the places, modalities, and expressive content of the assemblies. In addition, authorities abused national laws to block protests and arrest protesters. In numerous instances, authorities also resorted to the use of force to disperse peaceful protests.

### 4.1 Restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly

The numerous restrictions imposed by the authorities on the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in the context of the *aragalaya* protests were in contrast with Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Sri Lanka is a state party. Article 21 stipulates that no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly "other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

In its General Comment No. 37 on Article 21 of the ICCPR, adopted in July 2020, the UN Human Rights Committee provides authoritative guidance to states parties to the ICCPR and other actors on the measures they should adopt to ensure their conduct is in full compliance with Article 21.<sup>61</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Unnecessary declaration of State of Emergency

The invocation of emergency powers by Sri Lanka's Presidents to quell public protests was unnecessary and unjustified.

Under Article 4 of the ICCPR, a declaration of a State of Emergency should only be made in response to a situation that "threatens the life of the nation."<sup>62</sup> According to the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37, restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly on the grounds of "national security" may be invoked to protect the "existence of the nation, its territorial integrity or political independence against a credible threat or use of force."<sup>63</sup> Such thresholds were never met by the *aragalaya* protests.

On three different occasions during the *aragalaya* protest movement, Sri Lanka's Presidents declared a State of Emergency in response to the demonstrations. Then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa first declared a State of Emergency on 1 April 2022, following sporadic and isolated incidents of violence that took place during a demonstration in front of the President's private residence in Mirihana, Colombo, on 31 March 2022.<sup>64</sup> This declaration of a State of Emergency was revoked by President Rajapaksa on 5 April.<sup>65</sup> On 6 May 2022, President Rajapaksa declared a second State of Emergency

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61. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on Article 21: The right of peaceful assembly – Background*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/general-comment-no-37-article-21-right-peaceful-assembly>

62. ICCPR, Article 4 (1), and its interpretation by the UN Human Right Committee in its General Comment No. 29.

63. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 42.

64. Gazette No. 2273/86 dated 1 April 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/4/2273-86\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/4/2273-86_E.pdf)

65. Gazette No. 2274/10 dated 5 April 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/4/2274-10\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/4/2274-10_E.pdf)

amid a nationwide strike to call for his resignation.<sup>66</sup> This declaration was made after police fired teargas and arrested students who were protesting in front of the Parliament complex in Colombo.<sup>67</sup> The third State of Emergency was declared by Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe on 18 July 2022, ahead of a parliamentary session to elect the new President.<sup>68</sup> This State of Emergency was declared amid relative calm in the country, a day after Gotabaya Rajapaksa resigned the presidency and protesters withdrew from several occupied government buildings.

On 23 November 2022, President Ranil Wickremesinghe insisted that he would declare a State of Emergency again to prevent the emergence of “another *aragalaya*.”<sup>69</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Disproportionate Emergency Regulations

Broad and sweeping Emergency Regulations issued by Sri Lanka’s Presidents, pursuant to the declaration of a State of Emergency under the Public Security Ordinance (PSO),<sup>70</sup> imposed disproportionate restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.<sup>71</sup> As such, these curbs were inconsistent with Article 21 of the ICCPR.

A first round of Emergency Regulations was issued by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on 9 May 2022, back-dated to 6 May, when the State of Emergency was declared.<sup>72</sup> As the State of Emergency was not ratified by Parliament, the Emergency Regulations that were promulgated never came into effect.<sup>73</sup>

A second round of Emergency Regulations was promulgated by Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe on the same day that a State of Emergency was declared on 18 July 2022.<sup>74</sup> The State of Emergency and Emergency Regulations were ratified by Parliament on 27 July 2022 and were in effect until 18 August 2022, when the State of Emergency lapsed.

The Emergency Regulations promulgated on 6 May and 18 July 2022 were essentially identical in nature and provided the police and armed forces with sweeping powers of arrest and detention without adequate judicial oversight. In addition, the Emergency Regulations allowed the President to ban public processions or assemblies, restricted citizens’ access to public places, and curtailed freedom of expression.

In all three instances of the declaration of a State of Emergency and the adoption of Emergency Regulations, the Sri Lankan government failed to notify the UN Secretary-General of any derogations of its obligations under the ICCPR, as required by Article 4 of the Covenant.<sup>75</sup>

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66. Gazette No. 2278/22 dated 6 May 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2278-22\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2278-22_E.pdf)

67. Guardian, *Sri Lankan president calls second state of emergency in five weeks*, 6 May 2022; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/06/sri-lankan-president-calls-second-state-of-emergency-in-five-weeks>

68. Al Jazeera, *Emergency in Sri Lanka ahead of parliament vote for new president*, 18 July 2022; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/18/sri-lankas-acting-president-declares-emergency>

69. Daily News, *No room for another ‘aragalaya’*, 24 November 2022; <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/11/24/local/291784/no-room-another-%E2%80%98aragalaya%E2%80%99>

70. The Public Security Ordinance (PSO) is a law that grants Sri Lanka’s President the authority to adopt sweeping measures to declare a State of Emergency and adopt Emergency Regulations in the interest of national security.

71. Public Security Ordinance No. 25 of 1947, Section 5; [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl-nat/a24d1c-f3344e99934125673e00508142/afad7ae740f9b625c12577370039c9e1/\\$FILE/Public%20Security%20Ordinance.pdf](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl-nat/a24d1c-f3344e99934125673e00508142/afad7ae740f9b625c12577370039c9e1/$FILE/Public%20Security%20Ordinance.pdf)

72. Gazette No.2278/ 23 dated 6 May 2022: [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2278-23\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2278-23_E.pdf)

73. According to the PSO, a declaration of a State of Emergency must be immediately communicated to Parliament for its ratification. Failure to ratify the State of Emergency by Parliament within 14 days automatically annuls the declaration of a State of Emergency. On 20 May 2022, the Presidential Secretariat confirmed that the government had decided not to present the Emergency Regulations to Parliament and that the State of Emergency had been lifted.

74. Gazette No.2289/ 7 dated 18 July 2022: [http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/7/2289-07\\_E.pdf](http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/7/2289-07_E.pdf)

75. UN Treaty collection, *Depositary Notifications (CNs) by the Secretary-General*, last accessed on 11 January 2023; <https://treaties.un.org/pages/CNs.aspx?cnTab=tab1&clang=en>



## ***Blanket restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly***

The blanket prohibitions on assemblies and the penalties for those participating in unlawful assemblies imposed under the Emergency Regulations were disproportionate.

The Emergency Regulations authorized the President to prohibit public processions or public assemblies in any areas for any period of time.<sup>76</sup> Under the regulations, a participant in an unlawful assembly, with the common objective of causing destruction to property, death, or injury, could have been imprisoned for up to 20 years or sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>77</sup>

The overbroad provisions of the regulations allowed for arbitrary and forcible removal of individuals from public places by police or armed forced personnel, without providing any justification for their removal.<sup>78</sup> A person removed from a public place could also be subject to arrest and detention.

## ***Freedom of expression curtailed***

Sweeping and vaguely worded provisions of the Emergency Regulations sought to severely curtail the right to freedom of expression by allowing for the prosecution of individuals under the pretext of preventing the spread of false rumors or false information. For example, the public distribution of leaflets or posters, the content of which were “prejudicial to public security, public order, or the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life of the community,” were prohibited.<sup>79</sup> The communication of false rumors, statements, or images that were likely to cause public disorder and communicated verbally or through social media was also prohibited.<sup>80</sup>

### **4.1.3 Sweeping restrictions on places of assemblies**

President Ranil Wickremesinghe imposed sweeping restrictions on places where public assemblies could be held.

Such restrictions were inconsistent with the UN Human Rights Committee’s General Comment No 37, which stipulates that prohibiting assemblies within the perimeters of public places such as Parliament, official buildings, and courts should be avoided.<sup>81</sup> According to the General Comment, restrictions around such places must be “specifically justified” and “narrowly circumscribed.”<sup>82</sup>

On 23 September 2022, President Wickremesinghe invoked provisions of the Official Secrets Act<sup>83</sup> to issue an order that declared areas surrounding the Parliament complex, the Presidential Secretariat, the President’s official residence, the Prime Minister’s office, the Prime Minister’s official residence, and other areas in Colombo as High Security Zones (HSZs).<sup>84</sup> The designation of public streets and government buildings as HSZs prohibited any public gatherings or processions on any road, ground, or open area within the HSZs without prior written permission of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) or the Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police.<sup>85</sup> On 1 October 2022,

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76. Gazette No.2289/ 07, Emergency (miscellaneous Provisions and Powers) Regulations, No. 1 of 2022, Regulation 11 (11).

77. Gazette No.2289/ 7, Emergency (miscellaneous Provisions and Powers) Regulations, No. 1 of 2022, Regulation 12 (1).

78. Gazette No.2289/ 7, Regulation 36 (1).

79. Gazette No.2289/ 07, Regulation 14.

80. Gazette No.2289/ 07, Regulation 15.

81. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 56.

82. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 56.

83. Official Secrets Act, No. 32 of 1955.

84. High Security Zone Order No. 1 of 2022, Gazette No.2298/ 53 dated 23 September 2022: [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/9/2298-53\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/9/2298-53_E.pdf)

85. High Security Zone Order No. 1 of 2022, Regulation 5.

President Wickremesinghe revoked the order declaring HSZs.<sup>86</sup> No official reason was publicly given for the revocation.

In addition, pursuant to the PSO, authorities imposed frequent curfews that unnecessarily restricted the right to freedom of movement and amounted to a blanket ban on assemblies.

The sweeping prohibition of assemblies in public places is inconsistent with General Comment No. 37, which states that there can be no “blanket ban on all assemblies in the capital city [...] or on all the streets in a city.”<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the General Comment states that blanket restrictions on peaceful assemblies are “presumptively disproportionate.”<sup>88</sup>

The day after the 31 March 2022 incident in Mirihana, Colombo [See above, *Chapter 3*], then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a 26-hour nationwide curfew.<sup>89</sup> Another nationwide curfew was declared by the President for 36 hours after the 9 May attacks on protesters by pro-government elements [See above, *Chapter 3*].<sup>90</sup> The curfew was extended several times from 11 May to 16 May.<sup>91</sup> Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe declared a nationwide curfew for 17 hours each on 13<sup>92</sup> and 14 July,<sup>93</sup> after President Rajapaksa fled the country. These nationwide curfews declared under Section 16 of the PSO prohibited the public from staying on any public roads, public parks, playgrounds, or any public places without prior written permission by the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Public Security, or the IGP.<sup>94</sup> Anyone who contravened a curfew order could be imprisoned for up to a month and/or fined.<sup>95</sup>

The police also declared curfews on several occasions. On 8 July, on the eve of a large protest planned in Colombo, the IGP imposed an indefinite curfew on seven areas in the Western Province from 9:00pm until further notice.<sup>96</sup> The declaration of the police curfew was vehemently criticized by several bodies, including the Bar Association of Sri Lanka, which stated that the declaration of a curfew was illegal because the Police Ordinance did not contain a provision that enabled the police to impose a curfew.<sup>97</sup> On 9 July, the police lifted the curfew at 8:00am.<sup>98</sup>

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86. Daily Mirror, *High Security Zones removed*, 1 October 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/top\\_story/High-Security-Zones-removed/155-245971](https://www.dailymirror.lk/top_story/High-Security-Zones-removed/155-245971)

87. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 55.

88. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 38.

89. Gazette No. 2273/89 dated 2 April 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/4/2273-89\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/4/2273-89_E.pdf)

90. Gazette No. 2279/11 dated 9 May 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-11\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-11_E.pdf)

91. The curfew was extended for another 24 hours on 11 May [Gazette No. 2279/13 dated 10 May 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-13\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-13_E.pdf)]; 16 hours on 12 May [Gazette No. 2279/16 dated 11 May 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-16\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-16_E.pdf)]; 16 hours on 13 May [Gazette No. 2279/19 dated 12 May 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-19\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-19_E.pdf)]; 11 hours on 14 May [Gazette No. 2279/22 dated 13 May 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-22\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2279-22_E.pdf)]; and six hours on 16 May 2022 [Gazette No. 2280/10 dated 16 May 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2280-10\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2280-10_E.pdf)].

92. Gazette No. 2288/21 dated 13 July 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/7/2288-21\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/7/2288-21_E.pdf)

93. Gazette No. 2288/22 dated 14 July 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/7/2288-22\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/7/2288-22_E.pdf)

94. Public Security Ordinance No.25 of 1947, Section 16; [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_22A/May09\\_1652118492CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_22A/May09_1652118492CH.php)

95. Public Security Ordinance No.25 of 1947, Section 16 (3).

96. NewsWire, *Police curfew imposed to 7 areas in Western Province from 9 PM*, 8 July 2022; <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/07/08/police-curfew-imposed-to-7-areas-in-western-province-from-9-pm/>

97. Colombo Page, *Bar Association of Sri Lanka says the police curfew is illegal and a violation of fundamental rights*, 8 July 2022; [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_22B/Jul08\\_1657300329CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_22B/Jul08_1657300329CH.php)

98. Economy Next, *Sri Lanka police curfew lifted at 0800am ahead of protest*, 9 July 2022; <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-police-curfew-lifted-at-0800am-ahead-of-protest-97129/>

## 4.2 Notification requirement used to stifle peaceful assemblies

Authorities often claimed *aragalaya* protest organizers failed to notify police of planned assembly and processions to prevent demonstrations from taking place. In many cases, authorities misconstrued the notification requirement under the Police Ordinance as an authorization procedure, in order to prohibit protests.

The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37 states that the failure to notify authorities of an upcoming assembly does not render the act of participation in the assembly unlawful, and must not be used as a basis for dispersing the assembly or arresting the participants or organizers.<sup>99</sup> The General Comment also states that notification procedures must not function as authorization systems.<sup>100</sup>

Section 77 of the Police Ordinance requires that written notice should be given six hours prior to the commencement of a procession in any public place.<sup>101</sup> It stipulates that any procession that takes place in contravention of the notification requirement is subject to sanction, with procession organizers or participants liable to a fine of up to 1,000 rupees (US\$2.73) or imprisonment of up to three years.<sup>102</sup> However, the Police Ordinance only requires prior notice of the procession and does not establish a system for the police to authorize or prohibit a procession.

On 30 August 2022, the police assaulted and arrested protesters to disperse a peaceful protest march in Maradana, Colombo, because there was “no prior permission” for the march.<sup>103</sup> On 10 October 2022, despite a prior written notification to the police of a planned protest march organized at Colombo's Galle Face Green by lawyers and other professionals, police announced that the march was illegal.<sup>104</sup> On 2 November 2022, police erected barricades and prevented a large peaceful protest march from proceeding towards the Fort Railway station in Colombo, saying that permission for the procession had not been granted.<sup>105</sup> Protest organizers had notified the police in writing six hours prior to the protest march.<sup>106</sup>

The misinterpretation of the Police Ordinance was perpetuated by President Ranil Wickremesinghe. On 23 November 2022, he told Parliament: “Anyone has the freedom to protest. But, go to the police and take the permission and then walk on the roads.”<sup>107</sup>

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99. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para. 71.

100. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para. 47.

101. Police Ordinance No. 16 of 1865, Section 77. The Police Ordinance is a British-era colonial piece of legislation that was promulgated in 1865.

102. Police Ordinance No. 16 of 1865, Section 77 (2) and (5).

103. News First, *25 IUSF activists arrested during protest*, 30 August 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/08/30/25-iusf-activists-arrested-during-protest/>

104. Daily Mirror, *Obstructing peaceful protest: SSP Roshan Dias and ASP Dilruk noted to appear in court as accused*, 21 October 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/Obstructing-peaceful-protest-SSP-Roshan-Dias-and-ASP-Dilruk-noted-to-appear-in-court-as-accused/108-247246](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Obstructing-peaceful-protest-SSP-Roshan-Dias-and-ASP-Dilruk-noted-to-appear-in-court-as-accused/108-247246)

105. News First, *Colombo mass protest ends at the Police blockade*, 2 November 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/11/02/colombo-mass-protest-ends-at-the-police-blockade/>

106. News First, *Colombo mass protest ends at the Police blockade*, 2 November 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/11/02/colombo-mass-protest-ends-at-the-police-blockade/>

107. Economy Next, *Sri Lanka President warns against unlawful anti-government protests*, 23 November 2022; <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-president-warns-against-unlawful-anti-government-protests-103856/>

## 4.3 Protest participants not protected

In several critical incidents, the authorities failed to intervene and prevent unprovoked attacks by pro-government elements on peaceful protesters.

The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37 states that authorities have a duty to protect participants of assemblies from abuse by non-state actors through possible interference or violence.<sup>108</sup>

On 9 May 2022, pro-government elements launched a violent attack on peaceful protesters in front of the Prime Minister's official residence and then at Galle Face Green in Colombo. A similar attack on *aragalaya* protesters occurred in Kandy, Central Province.<sup>109</sup>



Pro-government elements use sticks to attack *aragalaya* protesters outside the Prime Minister's official residence in Colombo on 9 May 2022.  
© BUDDHIKA WEERASINGHE / GETTY IMAGES via AFP

According to eyewitness accounts and video footage of the Colombo incident, police were present at the sites of the attacks, witnessed the attacks taking place, but failed to intervene to stop the violence.<sup>110</sup>

Protesters interviewed by FIDH said information suggesting the likelihood of an impending attack by government supporters in Colombo had been widely circulated on social media in the days leading up to 9 May.<sup>111</sup> This included threatening social media posts shared by supporters

108. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 24.

109. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based lawyer*, 11 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based senior lawyer*, 11 September 2022.

110. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

111. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 18 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 October 2022.



of then-Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa.<sup>112</sup> Some protesters had informed the police of the likelihood of such attacks and asked for their protection.<sup>113</sup> Eyewitnesses stated that the attacks on the *aragalaya* protesters were carried out by pro-government supporters of then-Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in front of his official residence and then at Galle Face Green. Protesters, including women, persons with disabilities, and catholic priests, were assaulted, trampled, and kicked by government supporters.<sup>114</sup> “They just came. No mercy, no humanity, nothing - they just attacked, attacked, and attacked,” one eyewitness recounted.<sup>115</sup>

A female protester told FIDH that she was attacked by around 25 men, shoved to the ground, and hit on the head with an iron rod.<sup>116</sup> A war veteran with disabilities stated that a government supporter had taken away his crutches and attacked him in the presence of a police officer.<sup>117</sup> Protesters also witnessed the attackers dismantling the protest camp and destroying tents and equipment.<sup>118</sup> “It [the 9 May attack] was well organized and well scripted. It was well programmed, well planned in order to eradicate and totally remove the protest ground,” a prominent protest organizer said.<sup>119</sup>

Throughout the incident, police failed to intervene to stop the violence. A journalist covering the protest and wearing a jacket that identified him as a journalist, called for help from the police while he was being attacked by government supporters but the police did not intervene.<sup>120</sup> “Police didn’t care,” he said.<sup>121</sup> Another protester begged the police to prevent the attacks as he saw the government supporters approaching, but the police did not take any action.<sup>122</sup>

The violence by government supporters ceased only when office and construction workers, doctors and nurses, and other members of the community in the vicinity of Galle Face Green rushed to the protest site to chase the attackers away – as reported by several witnesses interviewed by FIDH.<sup>123</sup>

In Kandy, in a seemingly coordinated attack that one journalist described as “well-prepared and planned,” a group of pro-government elements assaulted and beat with sticks and clubs at least 10 *aragalaya* demonstrators at the protest site near the city’s clock tower.<sup>124</sup> Several protesters, including a senior Buddhist monk, were injured in the attack and were hospitalized.<sup>125</sup> At least nine attackers were arrested and subsequently released on bail, pending the investigation.<sup>126</sup>

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112. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 18 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 October 2022.

113. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 October 2022.

114. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 12 October 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 October 2022; FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 16 October 2022.

115. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

116. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 October 2022.

117. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 16 October 2022.

118. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 12 October 2022; FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 16 October 2022.

119. FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

120. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 13 September 2022.

121. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 13 September 2022.

122. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

123. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

124. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based journalist*, 11 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based lawyer*, 11 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based senior lawyer*, 11 September 2022.

125. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based journalist*, 11 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based lawyer*, 11 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based senior lawyer*, 11 September 2022.

126. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based lawyer*, 11 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based senior lawyer*, 11 September 2022.

## 4.4 Protests disrupted, blocked

In many cases, instead of facilitating the exercise of the protesters' right to freedom of peaceful assembly, police disrupted, blocked, and interfered in *aragalaya* demonstrations.

Such actions were inconsistent with international standards. The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37 states that authorities have an obligation not to prohibit, restrict, block, disperse, or disrupt peaceful assemblies "without compelling justification."<sup>127</sup>

### ***Army stops Galle protest***

On 29 and 30 June 2022, army personnel disrupted two peaceful protests that took place in Galle, Southern Province. Both protests were held at the Galle Fort ramparts overlooking the Galle International Cricket Stadium, while an international cricket match was taking place. A group of army personnel, in the presence of police officers, seized a #GoHomeGota banner and placards from the protesters and forced them to disperse.<sup>128</sup> An army spokesman justified the crackdown by stating that the removal of protesters from the ramparts was necessary to ensure that the cricketers would not be distracted by the protesters.<sup>129</sup> On 1 July 2022, the police blocked the entrance to the ramparts and prevented protesters from demonstrating for a third time.<sup>130</sup>

### ***Police interfere with candlelight vigils at Galle Face Green***

On 9 October 2022, police in Colombo harassed participants in a peaceful candlelight vigil and attempted to force them to move from the event's intended location at Galle Face Green. The police initially told protesters that public assemblies were not permitted at Galle Face Green because the public promenade comes under the purview of the Sri Lanka Ports Authority and police claimed that the protest was causing disturbance to the public.<sup>131</sup> The group was ordered to move to a remote area of Galle Face Green, away from the public view.<sup>132</sup> As protesters refused to comply with the order, police forcefully dispersed the group and arrested five of them, including a minor.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, on 9 November 2022, during another peaceful candlelight vigil at Galle Face Green, hundreds of police officers surrounded a group of approximately 200 protesters and forced them to hold the event in a remote area of the promenade.<sup>134</sup> Police also stood in front of the protesters, effectively blocking any view of their placards.<sup>135</sup>

### ***Liberty roundabout protesters harassed***

After months without interference, police eventually forced the participants in regular protests at the Liberty roundabout in Colombo to change the modality of their assembly. The protests, which started in March 2022 and took place twice a week up until the publication of this report, were held

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127. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 23.

128. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protester*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based lawyer*, 16 September 2022; NewsWire, *SL vs Aus Test : "Gota Go Home" protesters removed from Galle Fort*, 29 June 2022; <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/06/29/sl-vs-aus-test-gota-go-home-protesters-removed-from-galle-fort/>; *Amara Diwakara Liyanarachchi and other v. Lieutenant Colonel Asela Wijeratne and others*, SC FR 229/2022 pending before the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka.

129. The Morning, *Army says Galle Fort protest disrupted to make sure batsmen not distracted*, 1 July 2022; <https://www.themorning.lk/army-says-galle-fort-protest-disrupted-to-make-sure-batsmen-not-distracted/>

130. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protester*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based lawyer*, 16 September 2022.

131. The Morning, *IGP urged to arrest cops who obstructed protest*, 11 October 2022; <https://www.themorning.lk/igp-urged-to-arrest-cops-who-obstructed-protest/>

132. Daily Mirror, *Police now even attack peaceful commemorations – Lawyer testifies*, 20 October 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/Police-now-even-attack-peaceful-commemorations-Lawyer-testifies/108-247141](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Police-now-even-attack-peaceful-commemorations-Lawyer-testifies/108-247141)

133. News First, *Teenager arrested during protest, released*, 10 October 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/10/10/teenager-arrested-during-protest-released/>

134. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 10 November 2022.

135. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 10 November 2022.

in the middle of the Liberty roundabout so that passers-by could see their placards. However, on 17 November 2022, the police blocked the roundabout and prevented the protesters from holding their placards. This forced the protesters to move their protest to the pavement from then onwards.<sup>136</sup>

## 4.5 Modalities and expressive content of assemblies restricted

In some cases, authorities restricted the modalities and expressive content of *aragalaya* assemblies.

Such restrictions were contrary to international standards. The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37 stipulates that authorities "must leave it to the participants to determine freely the purpose or any expressive content of an assembly."<sup>137</sup> The General Comment further states that participants should be allowed to determine the use of equipment, such as posters, megaphones, or musical instruments, to convey their message.<sup>138</sup>

The police invoked the Police Ordinance to prevent protesters from using sound amplifying equipment and producing music as part of their demonstrations. Section 80 of the Police Ordinance prescribes that a permit is needed to use a loudspeaker, megaphone, or other instrument producing, reproducing, or amplifying sound.<sup>139</sup> For example, on 7 October 2022, police prevented protesters in Nugegoda, Colombo, from singing and playing music through portable speakers because no prior permit for the use of the equipment had been obtained.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, on 9 November 2022, during a peaceful candlelight vigil at Colombo's Galle Face Green, riot police prevented demonstrators from using a speaker, which resulted in them singing without any sound amplifying equipment.<sup>141</sup>

In addition, Section 77(3) of the Police Ordinance confers wide powers to the police to impose conditions on processions, including "prohibiting or restricting the display of flags, banners, or emblems."<sup>142</sup>

In several cases, the police also arbitrarily restricted the expressive content of assemblies without citing any valid legal basis. For example, on 12 November 2022, the police prohibited two women from holding placards during a peaceful protest walk from Kalutara to Colombo, Western Province.<sup>143</sup> Without any justification or grounds for restriction, police attempted to snatch their placards and told the two women that they could not walk on the road with placards.<sup>144</sup> On 15 November 2022, police blocked a group of women from performing a street play on police harassment of women protesters.<sup>145</sup> Police said the women had violated the Police Ordinance for not informing them of their intention to assemble, despite the fact that the Police Ordinance does not require street performers to notify or seek authorization from the police.<sup>146</sup>

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136. FIDH communication with protest organizer, November 2022.

137. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 22.

138. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 58.

139. Police Ordinance No.16 of 1865, Section 80.

140. News First, *Prime Time Sinhala News -10 PM*, 7 October 2022; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4nRFmQFV5A&list=PLwBEINft3JGBHaB6ZwkmmkI28n4gHBuP&index=112>

141. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 10 November 2022.

142. Police Ordinance No.16 of 1865, Section 77(3).

143. NewsWire, *WATCH: Police say two individuals can't walk on a road holding placards*, 12 November 2022; <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/11/12/watch-police-say-two-individuals-cant-walk-in-a-road-holding-placards/>

144. NewsWire, *WATCH: Police say two individuals can't walk on a road holding placards*, 12 November 2022; <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/11/12/watch-police-say-two-individuals-cant-walk-in-a-road-holding-placards/>

145. News First, *Hirunika granted bail*, 15 November 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/11/15/hirunika-granted-bail/>

146. News First, *Hirunika granted bail*, 15 November 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/11/15/hirunika-granted-bail/>

## 4.6 Abusive policing of assemblies

### 4.6.1 Military deployed to police protests

In several instances, the military was deployed to control the *aragalaya* protests. According to the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37, military personnel should not be used to police assemblies,<sup>147</sup> except in "exceptional circumstances and on a temporary basis," provided they have received "appropriate human rights training and comply with the same international rules and standards as law enforcement officials."<sup>148</sup>

During the *aragalaya* protest movement, there were no exceptional circumstances that justified the military's deployment. Military personnel were deployed to police assemblies that were predominantly peaceful and, in some cases, small-scale. In many instances, military personnel failed to adhere to international standards on the policing of assemblies by resorting to disproportionate and excessive use of force [See below, *Chapter 4.7*] - a fact that could suggest a lack of appropriate human rights training.

In addition, the use of the military for the maintenance of law and order was not carried out "on a temporary basis." Every month, from April to November 2022, Sri Lanka's President invoked Section 12 of the Public Security Ordinance (PSO) to deploy the armed forces for the maintenance of public order throughout the country.<sup>149</sup> In addition, the Emergency Regulations adopted by Parliament on 27 July 2022 enabled the military to search and arrest a person without a warrant,<sup>150</sup> and to use force to arrest and confine any person in a public place without providing any reason.<sup>151</sup> Following the 9 May attacks on *aragalaya* protesters [See above, *Chapter 3*] and the ensuing arson attacks against various properties of the ruling party members and affiliates around the country, members of the army's special forces units, such as the Combat Riders Squadron, were deployed for mobile patrols across many areas.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, in July, during a nationwide curfew, the military was deployed to patrol the streets.<sup>153</sup> On 13 July 2022, when protesters occupied the Prime Minister's office, then-Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe urged the military to do "whatever is necessary to restore order."<sup>154</sup> On 23 November 2022, President Ranil Wickremesinghe insisted that the military would be deployed to prevent the emergence of another *aragalaya*.<sup>155</sup>

In many cases, the military was used to block and/or forcefully disperse peaceful protesters. On 31 March 2022, during a protest in Mirihana, Colombo [See above, *Chapter 3*], military personnel armed with batons and assault rifles used unnecessary force to disperse protesters in front of

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147. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 80.

148. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 80.

149. Gazette No.2276/21 dated 21 April 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/4/2276-21\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/4/2276-21_E.pdf), Gazette No.2280/39 dated 20 May 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2280-39\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/5/2280-39_E.pdf), Gazette No. 2280/39 dated 20 June 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/6/2285-03\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/6/2285-03_E.pdf), Gazette No. 2289/40 dated 21 July 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/7/2289-40\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/7/2289-40_E.pdf), Gazette No. 2293/68 dated 19 August 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/8/2293-68\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/8/2293-68_E.pdf), Gazette No. 2298/28 dated 21 September 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/9/2298-28\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/9/2298-28_E.pdf), Gazette No. 2302/29 dated 20 October 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/10/2302-29\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/10/2302-29_E.pdf), Gazette No. 2307/03 dated 21 November 2022; [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/11/2307-03\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/11/2307-03_E.pdf)

150. Gazette No.2289/ 7, Emergency (miscellaneous Provisions and Powers) Regulations, No. 1 of 2022, Regulation 11(1).

151. Gazette No.2289/ 7, Emergency (miscellaneous Provisions and Powers) Regulations, No. 1 of 2022, Regulation 36(2).

152. News First, *Heavy military presence in Colombo and suburbs*, 11 May 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/11/heavy-military-presence-in-colombo-suburbs/>

153. Times of India, *Troops patrol streets as calm returns to Sri Lanka, president's resignation awaited*, 14 July 2022; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/troops-patrol-streets-as-calm-returns-to-sri-lanka-presidents-resignation-awaited/articleshow/92875148.cms>

154. BBC, *Sri Lanka PM tells military to do whatever necessary to restore order*, 13 July 2022; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62156711>

155. Daily News, *No room for another 'aragalaya'*, 24 November 2022; <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/11/24/local/291784/no-room-another-%E2%80%98aragalaya%E2%80%99>



the President's private residence.<sup>156</sup> On 29 June 2022, in Galle, Southern Province, armed army personnel dispersed protesters at the Galle Fort ramparts.<sup>157</sup> On 9 July 2022 [See above, *Chapter 3*], the army was deployed to control several large public assemblies in Colombo.<sup>158</sup> During the 22 July 2022 military raid on protesters in the vicinity of the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo [See above, *Chapter 3*], army, navy, and air force personnel were deployed along with police to disperse protesters. During this dispersal, the assembled military forces engaged in violent attacks on protesters, which possibly amounted to torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment.<sup>159</sup> On 2 November 2022, air force personnel blocked a peaceful walk by two protesters in Colombo.<sup>160</sup>

#### 4.6.2 Counter-terrorism unit, “men in black”, used for crowd control

In several instances, members of the Special Task Force (STF), a police unit specialized in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations,<sup>161</sup> were deployed to police assemblies. During the 31 March and 9 July protests in Colombo, the STF targeted and assaulted journalists [See below, *Chapter 4.7.4*].



Security forces patrol the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo on 22 July 2022. © ABHISHEK CHINNAPPA / GETTY IMAGES via AFP

In addition, several individuals who were present at the scene of the 22 July raid told FIDH that the attacks on protesters were carried out by men in military attire, without any name tags or form of identification, different from the uniforms that are normally worn by the regular armed

156. Watchdog, *Incident report: The Mirihana protest, a timeline*, 1 April 2022; <https://longform.watchdog.team/observations/incident-report-the-mirihana-protest-summarized>

157. Daily Mirror, *Deployment of army personnel to disperse Galle Fort protest: Eleven lawyer file FR petitions*, 1 August 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest\\_news/Deployment-of-army-personnel-to-disperse-Galle-Fort-protest-Eleven-lawyer-file-FR-petitions/342-242180](https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest_news/Deployment-of-army-personnel-to-disperse-Galle-Fort-protest-Eleven-lawyer-file-FR-petitions/342-242180)

158. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 15 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with journalist*, 17 September 2022.

159. Human Rights Watch, *Sri Lanka: Security forces assault peaceful protesters*, 22 July 2022; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/22/sri-lanka-security-forces-assault-peaceful-protesters>

160. News First, *Protest walk by Aragalaya duo blocked*, 2 November 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/11/02/protest-walk-by-aragalaya-duo-blocked/>

161. Ministry of Defense, *STF has a major role in countering extremism and combating organised crimes - Defence Secretary*, 29 May 2020; [https://www.defence.lk/Article/view\\_article/1638](https://www.defence.lk/Article/view_article/1638)



forces, wearing black balaclava.<sup>162</sup> Some protesters reported that these “men in black” yelled at protesters using abusive language, smelled of alcohol, and did not appear to conduct themselves in the manner of a properly trained military unit.<sup>163</sup>

#### 4.6.3 Crowd control police not properly trained in human rights

Police officers deployed for crowd control appeared to have not received adequate human rights training. They also appeared to lack training and sensitization to the specific needs of vulnerable groups at protests, including persons with disabilities and children.

General Comment No. 37 requires that only law enforcement officials trained in human rights standards on the policing of assemblies should be deployed for that purpose.<sup>164</sup> Training should also include “sensitizing officials to the specific needs of individuals [...] including children and persons with disabilities.”<sup>165</sup>

In at least one instance, lethal weapons were used by police officers without receiving prior adequate training, according to an investigation conducted by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL). The HRCSL’s probe into the crackdown on a protest in Rambukkana, Sabaragamuwa Province [See above, *Chapter 3*], which resulted in the death of one protester, found that out of the four police officers equipped with Type 56 assault rifles - the firearm that was used for the fatal shooting of the protester - two had very little knowledge on the operation of this weapon as a means of crowd control and had not received updated and adequate training on the use of lethal weapons prior to their deployment.<sup>166</sup>

In various instances during the *aragalaya* protests, police and military personnel severely neglected to protect, and, in some cases, targeted persons with disabilities and children. Such conduct was inconsistent with Sri Lanka’s obligations under the Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Sri Lanka is a state party to both treaties.<sup>167</sup> Article 29 of the CRPD guarantees to persons with disabilities the right to participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others. Article 15 of the CRC recognizes the rights of the child to freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly and states that “no restrictions on these right maybe imposed other than those imposed in conformity with the law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interest of national security or public safety and other grounds.”<sup>168</sup>

During the 22 July 2022 raid in and around the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo [See above, *Chapter 3*], military and other unidentified personnel attacked the tents used by members of the deaf community and war veterans with disabilities. Before they were assaulted, the deaf protesters had pointed to a sign board that indicated that they were deaf but the military proceeded to attack them.<sup>169</sup> Similarly, three war veterans with disabilities were hit on the head and one of them was hospitalized.<sup>170</sup>

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162. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022, FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 15 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 October 2022.

163. FIDH, *Interviews with protester*, 15 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 October 2022.

164. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 80.

165. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 80.

166. Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, *Interim Report of the Committee of Experts appointed by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to investigate the Police Shooting incident that took place in Rambukkana on 19th April 2022*, p.3.

167. Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations, *Sri Lanka ratifies the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 8 February 2016; <https://www.un.int/srilanka/news/sri-lanka-ratifies-convention-rights-persons-disabilities>, Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment of Sri Lanka; <http://www.childwomenmin.gov.lk/institutes/dep-probation-and-child-care-services/child-rights/crc>

168. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 15; <http://34.196.27.239/storage/app/media/United%20Nations%20Convention%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20the%20Child.pdf>

169. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 12 October 2022.

170. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 16 October 2022.

Authorities also failed to protect children who were present at the protests. In some cases, police arrested them, and, in other cases, used teargas indiscriminately in their presence [See below, *Chapter 4.7.2*].

While dispersing a candlelight vigil on 9 October 2022, an infant and a child were dragged away by the police as their parents were being arrested.<sup>171</sup> In relation to these incidents, instead of promoting sensitization of the police to the presence of children at protests, President Ranil Wickremesinghe stated he would consult with the Attorney General to introduce a law to prevent children from participating in protests.<sup>172</sup>

## 4.7 Use of force against peaceful assemblies

In numerous instances during the *aragalaya* protests, the authorities used force, including firearms, rubber bullets, teargas, water cannons, and batons, to disperse peaceful assemblies, in a manner that was inconsistent with international standards. In many cases, such actions amounted to serious violations of human rights, including the right to life.

According to the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37, an assembly may be dispersed only in "exceptional cases," when the assembly is "no longer peaceful, or if there is clear evidence of any imminent threat of serious violence [...]."<sup>173</sup> The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials require that in the dispersal of assemblies that are unlawful but non-violent, law enforcement officials should avoid the use of force.<sup>174</sup>

The use of force by law enforcement officials must meet the requirements of both necessity and proportionality, in accordance with Article 21 of the ICCPR. The requirement of necessity is met only when the use of force is absolutely necessary in order to achieve a legitimate law enforcement objective.<sup>175</sup> The use of force must cease as soon as it is no longer necessary.<sup>176</sup> The requirement of proportionality is met when law enforcement officials do not use greater force than is proportionate to the legitimate objective of either dispersing an assembly, preventing a crime, or effecting or assisting in the lawful arrest of offenders or suspected offenders.<sup>177</sup>

In most instances, law enforcement officials used unnecessary and/or disproportionate force against *aragalaya* protesters.

### 4.7.1 Firearms kill, injure protesters

In at least two key incidents, law enforcement personnel used firearms to disperse protesters, resulting in the death of one person and injuries to many others.

According to the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, law enforcement officials should not use firearms against persons except in self-defense or defense of others against the "imminent threat of death or serious injury" and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives.<sup>178</sup> Law enforcement officials are also

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171. NewsWire, "It is heartbreaking to see this young mother & child being treated like this", 9 October 2022; <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/10/09/it-is-heartbreaking-to-see-this-young-mother-child-being-treated-like-this-sajith-condemns-conduct-of-police/>

172. The Morning, *Ranil likens children at protests to LTTE's human shields tactic*, 13 October 2022; <https://www.themorning.lk/ranil-likens-children-at-protests-to-lttes-human-shields-tactic/>

173. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 85.

174. UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement officials, principle 13.

175. OHCHR, *Guidance on less-lethal weapons in law enforcement (2020)*, para.2.8.

176. OHCHR, *Guidance on less-lethal weapons in law enforcement (2020)*, para.2.9.

177. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para. 79.

178. UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement officials, principle 9.

required to give a clear warning prior to the use of firearms with sufficient time for the warning to be observed.<sup>179</sup> The Basic Principles also prescribe that in the dispersal of violent assemblies, law enforcement officials may use firearms “only when less dangerous means are not practicable and only to the minimum extent necessary.”<sup>180</sup>

On 19 April 2022, in the first reported incident of the use of firearms against protesters since the start of the *aragalaya*, one person was killed by live ammunition fired by police to disperse a protest that took place in Rambukkana, Sabaragamuwa Province. The police justified their decision to fire at protesters by claiming that there was imminent threat to life and property, as protesters allegedly attempted to set fire to a fuel tanker. However, according to the preliminary findings of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka’s (HRCSL’s) investigation into the incident, at the time of the shooting there was no threat to the police from the deceased and the other five individuals who sustained gunshot wounds.<sup>181</sup>

On 9 July 2022, in the second reported instance of use of firearms against *aragalaya* protesters in Colombo, the army used live ammunition in order to disperse demonstrators who were attempting to break through the barricades erected near the President’s official residence.<sup>182</sup> According to the National Hospital of Sri Lanka, three people received gunshot wounds.<sup>183</sup> A journalist who witnessed the shooting confirmed that live ammunition was used instead of rubber bullets.<sup>184</sup>

### Shoot-on-sight orders threaten the right to life

Following the arson attacks around the country on properties of ruling party’s members of Parliament and their affiliates on 9 and 10 May 2022, and pursuant to the President’s declaration of a State of Emergency, the Ministry of Defense issued orders that authorized members of the armed forces to shoot-on-sight any persons involved in theft of public property or causing damage to life. Similarly, the government issued orders to the police to shoot individuals on the same basis.<sup>185</sup> The shoot-on-sight orders contravened the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights’ (ICCPR’s) non-derogable provision on the right to life, which is protected by Article 6 of the Covenant.

In May 2022, in his report to the UN Human Rights Council on the protection of the right to peaceful assembly in conflict situations, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association stated that “shoot to kill orders must never be issued, as they constitute authorization for extrajudicial executions.”<sup>186</sup>

179. UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement officials, principle 10.

180. UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement officials, principle 14.

181. Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, *Interim Report of the Committee of Experts appointed by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to investigate the Police Shooting incident that took place in Rambukkana on 19th April 2022*, paragraphs 14 (iii) and 14 (iv).

182. Sri Lanka Army, *The Army sets the record straight about Saturday firing*, 10 July 2022; <https://www.army.lk/news/army-sets-record-straight-about-saturday-firing>

183. CNN, *At least 55 injured in protests, according to National Hospital of Sri Lanka doctor*, 9 July 2022; [https://edition.cnn.com/asia/live-news/sri-lanka-protests-07-09-22-intl/h\\_ef205bf134b460054c7acb483faa520e](https://edition.cnn.com/asia/live-news/sri-lanka-protests-07-09-22-intl/h_ef205bf134b460054c7acb483faa520e)

184. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 17 September 2022.

185. Reuters, *Sri Lanka police given orders to shoot to maintain order*, 11 May 2022; <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/sri-lanka-police-given-orders-shoot-maintain-order-2022-05-11/>; Island Online, *Govt. issues shoot-on-sight orders as situation gets out of control*, 11 May 2022; <https://island.lk/govt-issues-shoot-on-sight-orders-as-situation-gets-out-of-control/>

186. OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, Protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests during crisis situations*, 16 May 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/ 50/42; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5042-protection-human-rights-context-peaceful-protests-during-crisis>

## 4.7.2 Teargas, water cannons used indiscriminately

Police frequently used teargas and water cannons indiscriminately against peaceful *aragalaya* protesters, without adhering to prerequisites and modalities prescribed by relevant international standards. Between 31 March 2022 and 16 January 2023, police used teargas and/or water cannons in at least 25 protests, mostly in Colombo.<sup>187</sup>

According to the OHCHR Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement, the use of less-lethal weapons to disperse an assembly should be considered as a measure of last resort.<sup>188</sup> Law enforcement officials may use “weapons that target groups rather than individuals (such as water cannon or teargas)” only when interventions targeting individuals in an attempt to isolate them are ineffective.<sup>189</sup> The OHCHR Guidance also requires that, prior to the use of less-lethal weapons, appropriate warning be issued and assembly participants be given time to obey the warnings.<sup>190</sup> All those interviewed by FIDH who witnessed the use of less-lethal weapons by the authorities against protesters stated that no warnings or announcements for dispersal were issued prior to their use.

### ***Teargas harms health***

During many protests, including the protest in front of the Police Headquarters in Colombo on 9 June 2022 and the protests in several locations in Colombo on 9 July 2022, continuous rounds of teargas were used to disperse peaceful demonstrators. The OHCHR Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement states that repeated or prolonged exposure to any chemical irritant, such as teargas, should be avoided.<sup>191</sup>

A medic related to FIDH that when his medical team intervened to assist protesters who were affected by teargas attacks, in several instances he found it difficult to breathe even with a gas mask on.<sup>192</sup> He reported that there were instances in which protesters needed to be transported to hospitals for oxygen saturation due to difficulty in breathing. A protester told FIDH that she developed a skin condition after being repeatedly exposed to teargas.<sup>193</sup> Another protester said he was still suffering from respiratory issues weeks after being exposed to teargas.<sup>194</sup> “The problem with the teargas is that most of us are still suffering the consequences of it,” a third protester related.<sup>195</sup>

Due to the severe breathing difficulties and health conditions experienced by several protesters, on 17 June 2022 journalist Tharindu Jayawardena submitted three Right to Information requests to the police to obtain crucial information about the use of teargas during the *aragalaya* protests. This included requesting details on the dates and quantities of teargas procured, and whether expired teargas was used during the protests in 2022.<sup>196</sup> On 21 June 2022, the police responded to Mr. Jayawardena’s requests and stated that the information could not be disclosed on grounds of national security and territorial integrity of the country.<sup>197</sup> On 27 October 2022, the Right to Information Commission issued an order that directed the police to disclose the information requested by the journalist.<sup>198</sup>

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187. Based on FIDH’s review of images of protests and eyewitness testimonies.

188. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 6.3.3.

189. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 6.3.3.

190. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 6.3.3.

191. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 7.3.5.

192. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based academic*, 14 September 2022.

193. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 October 2022.

194. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022.

195. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female protester*, 13 September 2022.

196. *Tharindu Jayawardena v. Sri Lanka Police*, RTIC Appeal/927/2022,928/2022,929/2022; [http://www.rticommission.lk/web/images/pdf/Right-2022/927-928-929\\_2022-final-Order-1.pdf](http://www.rticommission.lk/web/images/pdf/Right-2022/927-928-929_2022-final-Order-1.pdf)

197. Daily Mirror, *RTI Commission reserves judgment as IGP refuses to give further information*, 7 October 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/RTI-Commission-reserves-judgment-as-IGP-refuses-to-give-further-information/108-246317](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/RTI-Commission-reserves-judgment-as-IGP-refuses-to-give-further-information/108-246317)

198. *Tharindu Jayawardena v. Sri Lanka Police*, RTIC Appeal/927/2022,928/2022,929/2022; <http://www.rticommission.lk/>



On 13 July 2022, a 26-year-old male protester died after developing breathing difficulties due to the repeated use of teargas by police to disperse demonstrators in front of the Prime Minister's office in Colombo.<sup>199</sup> Even though the post-mortem report revealed that the man had died from cardiac arrest, some observers believed that his continuous exposure to teargas may have contributed to his death.<sup>200</sup>

### ***Teargas aimed directly at protesters***

Police often fired teargas canisters aiming directly at protesters, disregarding international standards.

The OHCHR Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement requires that teargas should be fired at a "high angle" and not at individuals, their heads, or faces.<sup>201</sup>

During the 31 March protest at the President's private residence in Mirihana, Colombo [See above, *Chapter 3*], a neighbor observing the protest witnessed a high-ranking police officer instructing another police officer handling a teargas gun to aim point-blank at the protesters.<sup>202</sup> A medic told FIDH that during the series of 9 July protests in Colombo [See above, *Chapter 3*], some protesters had sustained injuries after being directly hit on their heads by teargas canisters.<sup>203</sup> "It was more like point-blank. That's why most of the skull injuries happened," he said.<sup>204</sup> "There was no end to the firing [of teargas]. They [police] fired teargas from all sides," an academic, who witnessed the 9 July protests near the President's official residence in Colombo, recounted.<sup>205</sup>



A policeman fires a teargas canister to disperse protesters during the 50th day of protests demanding the resignation of then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in Colombo on 28 May 2022. © ISHARA S. KODIKARA / AFP

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[web/images/pdf/Right-2022/927-928-929\\_2022-final-Order-1.pdf](#)

199. Daily Mirror, *26 year old protestor dies*, 13 July 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest\\_news/26-year-old-protestor-dies/342-241010](https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest_news/26-year-old-protestor-dies/342-241010)

200. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based Journalist*, 17 September 2022.

201. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; paras 7.3.2 and 7.3.6.

202. FIDH, *Interview with protest observer*, 29 September 2022.

203. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based volunteer medic*, 14 September 2022.

204. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based volunteer medic*, 14 September 2022.

205. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based academic*, 14 September 2022.

## ***Teargas used in confined spaces***

In at least one incident, police used teargas against protesters in a confined space, in a manner that was inconsistent with international standards.

The OHCHR Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement states that the consequences of teargas may be lethal if the weapon is used in a confined space with the possibility of a high level of exposure.<sup>206</sup> It also requires that prior to the use of teargas, law enforcement agencies should ensure safe space or routes for participants to move.<sup>207</sup>

A lawyer and a demonstrator who were present at a protest in front of the Police Headquarters in Colombo on 9 June 2022 told FIDH that police aimed teargas directly at protesters in a narrow passage where they were seeking shelter from teargas fire.<sup>208</sup>

## ***Teargas affects children***

In some cases, police used teargas indiscriminately against protesters, despite the presence of children near or at demonstrations.

The OHCHR Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement requires that when teargas is used, it should be targeted at violent individuals, giving due consideration to non-violent participants or bystanders.<sup>209</sup>

A protester told FIDH that during a peaceful demonstration that took place on 30 August 2022 in Maradana, Colombo, police used teargas indiscriminately near a school and the children inside the school were affected.<sup>210</sup> During a protest that took place on 6 May 2022 in front of Parliament in Colombo, police used teargas indiscriminately against the demonstrators, affecting many children who were among the protest participants.<sup>211</sup> Following this incident, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) called on law enforcement agencies to avoid the use of force targeting children.<sup>212</sup>

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206. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 7.3.3.

207. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 6.3.3.

208. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based lawyer*, 14 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 12 October 2022.

209. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 6.3.4.

210. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 13 October 2022.

211. The Morning, *NCPA to look into kids hurt by tear gas*, 9 May 2022; <https://www.themorning.lk/ncpa-to-look-into-kids-hurt-by-tear-gas/>

212. Colombo Gazette, *UNICEF concerned after tear gas hits children during protests*, 7 May 2022; <https://colombogazette.com/2022/05/07/unicef-concerned-after-tear-gas-hits-children-during-protests/>

## Water cannons

Law enforcement officials consistently used water cannons to disperse protest participants in a manner that was inconsistent with international human rights standards.

The OHCHR Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement states that water cannons “should only be used in situations of serious public disorder where there is a significant likelihood of loss of life, serious injury or the widespread destruction of property.”<sup>213</sup> The Guidance also states that water cannons “shall not target a jet of water at an individual or group of persons at short range.”<sup>214</sup>



Police use water cannons to disperse protesters demanding the resignation of President Ranil Wickremesinghe's administration in Colombo on 24 September 2022. © THARAKA BASNAYAKA / NURPHOTO via AFP

During the *aragalaya* protests, water cannons were used, often in conjunction with teargas, to disperse numerous peaceful demonstrations during which there was no serious public disorder or likelihood of loss of life or serious injury. Such demonstrations included: a 31 March 2022 protest in front of then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's private residence in Colombo;<sup>215</sup> a 19 May IUSF protest march in Colombo;<sup>216</sup> a 28 May 2022 protest in Colombo to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> consecutive day of *aragalaya* demonstrations;<sup>217</sup> a 30 August 2022 IUSF protest march in Maradana;<sup>218</sup> and a 24 September 2022 Socialist Youth Union protest in Colombo.<sup>219</sup>

213. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 7.7.2.

214. OHCHR, *Guidance on less-lethal Weapons in law enforcement*, 2020; para.7.7.4.

215. News First, *JUST IN: Tear gas and water cannons being fired at protestors*, 31 March 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/03/31/just-in-tear-gas-and-water-cannons-being-fired-at-protestors/>

216. Ceylon Today, *Tear Gas, water cannon used to disperse IUSF protesters*, 20 May 2022; <https://ceylontoday.lk/2022/05/20/tear-gas-water-cannon-used-to-disperse-iusf-protesters/>

217. Ada Derana, *Tear gas and water cannons fired to disperse protesters near WTC*, 28 May 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/82739/tear-gas-and-water-cannons-fired-to-disperse-protesters-near-wtc>

218. Colombo Page, *Police fire tear gas and water cannons to disperse IUSF march*, 30 August 2022; [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_22B/Aug30\\_1661870295CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_22B/Aug30_1661870295CH.php)

219. NewsWire, *Police use tear gas and water cannons to disperse SYU protest (Video)*, 24 September 2022; <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/09/24/police-use-tear-gas-water-cannons-to-disperse-syu-protest-video/>



### 4.7.3 Protesters attacked, beaten

Sri Lankan police and military frequently used baton charges to disperse protests and attacked participants who did not engage in any violent acts.

During the 31 March protest in Mirihana, Colombo, military and police personnel, including members of the STF, forcibly dispersed protesters. The police also violently attacked individuals over one kilometer away from where the initial protest had taken place.<sup>220</sup>

On 9 May 2022, in Galle, Southern Province, police violently attacked several demonstrators at an *aragalaya* protest site.<sup>221</sup>

On 9 July 2022, during a protest outside the President's official residence in Colombo, police used batons to beat demonstrators.<sup>222</sup> "There were so many injuries. [...] These were very bad beatings," an academic who witnessed the attacks told FIDH.<sup>223</sup>

During the 22 July 2022 pre-dawn raid in Colombo, the authorities used force to remove the protesters who were occupying a room of the Presidential Secretariat and the area in the building's vicinity [See above, *Chapter 3*]. Military and other unidentified personnel [See above, *Chapter 4.6.2*] used iron rods, cables, batons, and canes to beat protesters who were sleeping at the time. "Twenty-two July was definitely a surprise attack, otherwise none of us would have been there," a lawyer commented.<sup>224</sup> "It was the first time in a very long time Sinhalese people faced what the military can do if they want to do [it]," she added.<sup>225</sup> Some protesters were forced to kneel down or lie down on the road and when they failed to do so, they were beaten.<sup>226</sup> "That was when I actually experienced real fear. I have never been that scared. It was almost like there was no human inside [the attackers]," a female protester, who witnessed the beating of a fellow demonstrator, recounted.<sup>227</sup> The military also assaulted lawyers and journalists who were attempting to record the conduct of law enforcement and assist the protesters.<sup>228</sup> [See below, *Chapter 4.7.4*] "We feel like they were very angry with us – we don't know why," one of the journalists told FIDH.<sup>229</sup>

In many cases, the police also used force to disperse protesters during peaceful processions. For example, during a protest march that took place on 30 August 2022 in Colombo, the police indiscriminately assaulted participants, including an elderly woman.<sup>230</sup> On 24 September 2022, security forces attacked protesters and journalists during a protest march organized by the Socialist Youth Union when the protest march started to move from Colombo's Lipton Circus.<sup>231</sup>

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220. Groundviews, *March 31 Protests and Aftermath: Updates*, 2 April 2022.

221. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022.

222. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based academic*, 14 September 2022.

223. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based academic*, 14 September 2022.

224. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.

225. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.

226. FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

227. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female protester*, 13 September 2022.

228. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalists*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based lawyer*, 14 September 2022.

229. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 13 September 2022.

230. FIDH, *Interviews with student protesters*, 18 September 2022.

231. CIVICUS, *Protesters continue to face arrest, excessive force in Sri Lanka as new UN resolution maintains international scrutiny*, 9 October 2022; <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2022/10/09/protesters-continue-face-arrest-excessive-force-sri-lanka-new-un-resolution-maintains-international-scrutiny/>



#### 4.7.4 Bystanders, journalists, and lawyers targeted; medics obstructed

Authorities often targeted protest observers, including bystanders, journalists, and lawyers, in direct contravention of international standards.

The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No.37 requires that law enforcement officials tasked with the policing of assemblies should protect the rights of journalists, observers, and medical personnel from harm.<sup>232</sup> It also states that these individuals should be allowed to monitor the actions of law enforcement officials and their equipment should not be confiscated or damaged.<sup>233</sup> The OHCHR Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement states that law enforcement officials should consider and minimize the possible impact of their use of force on bystanders, passers-by, medical personnel, and journalists.<sup>234</sup>

Journalists were attacked on numerous occasions by law enforcement officials while covering the *aragalaya* protests, despite the fact that they wore identification or accreditation tags, were on official duty, or had informed the authorities that they were journalists.

On 31 March 2022, during a protest in Mirihana, Colombo [See above, *Chapter 3*], nine journalists were attacked by STF personnel while they were covering the protest.<sup>235</sup> A journalist told FIDH that while he was covering the protest, the STF officers ran directly towards a group of journalists, cornered him using their shields, and beat his head with batons.<sup>236</sup> The attack caused head injuries that needed to be treated with stitches at the hospital. Nearly six months after the attacks took place, the journalist stated that he was still suffering from loss of vision in his left eye.<sup>237</sup> Another journalist covering the same protest was attacked and arrested by the police and was taken into custody at the Mirihana police station.<sup>238</sup>

A number of residents in the area who were observing the 31 March protest in Mirihana were assaulted as well. According to CCTV camera footage, riot and STF police entered the homes of several residents and assaulted them.<sup>239</sup>

On 9 July 2022, during a protest in front of then-Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's private residence, eight reporters from the privately-owned national TV channel *News First* were attacked by police, including members of the STF.<sup>240</sup> A 23-year-old female reporter and three of her colleagues were beaten by batons and firearms in the attacks.<sup>241</sup> The female reporter suffered injuries to her head and back.<sup>242</sup> All four reporters wore recognizable *News First* t-shirts and were carrying journalist accreditation cards on them when the attack took place.<sup>243</sup> Four other *News First* journalists who attempted to aid their injured colleagues were also assaulted by the police.<sup>244</sup>

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232. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020; UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 74.

233. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020; UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 30.

234. OHCHR, *Guidance on less-lethal Weapons in law enforcement*, 2020; para.2.10.

235. Reporters without Borders, *At least nine journalists injured during Sri Lanka protests*, 7 April 2022; <https://rsf.org/en/least-nine-journalists-injured-during-sri-lanka-protests>

236. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 17 September 2022.

237. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, , 17 September 2022.

238. Ada Derana, *Several journalists including AD reporters injured during Mirihana protest*, 1 April 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/81547/several-journalists-including-ad-reporters-injured-during-mirihana-protest>

239. Groundviews, *March 31 Protests and Aftermath: Updates*, 2 April 2022.

240. International Federation of Journalists, *Sri Lanka: Journalists attacked during protest coverage*, 11 July 2022; <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/sri-lanka-journalists-attacked-during-protest-coverage.html>

241. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based senior journalist*, 14 September 2022.

242. Committee to Protect Journalists, *Police attack News First journalists covering Sri Lanka protests*, 11 July 2022; <https://cpj.org/2022/07/police-attack-news-first-journalists-covering-sri-lanka-protests/>

243. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based senior journalist*, 14 September 2022.

244. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based senior journalist*, 14 September 2022.

A senior journalist described the attacks on the *News First* reporters as “inhuman” and “brutal.”<sup>245</sup> “This is not a random attack. They [the police] knew that these are journalists who are covering this and they were brutally attacked,” he said.<sup>246</sup>

The authorities’ violent attacks on journalists had a lasting and negative psychological impact on some of them.<sup>247</sup> “For sure you get fear psychosis. [...] For young journalists it’s a trauma that they have to go through,” the senior journalist told FIDH.<sup>248</sup>

On 22 July 2022 during the pre-dawn military raid on protesters in the vicinity of the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo [See above, *Chapters 3 and 4.7.3*], lawyers and journalists who tried to access the area or document the attacks on the protesters said they were violently assaulted by the military and unidentified men in full military attire wearing black balaclava [See above, *Chapter 4.6.2*].<sup>249</sup> According to a lawyer who spoke to FIDH, air force personnel blocked lawyers from accessing the cordoned off area, ordered them to leave the area, and not record their conduct. The lawyer related to FIDH that he was verbally abused and kicked by air force personnel and also witnessed air force officers attacking another lawyer and severely beating his head.<sup>250</sup> Law enforcement officials assaulted and arrested lawyer Nuwan Bopage as well.<sup>251</sup> On that night, at least five journalists were attacked by law enforcement officials.<sup>252</sup> Two journalists who were assaulted told FIDH that they were hit on the head and back by military personnel when they tried to access the cordoned off area and live stream the attacks on the protesters.<sup>253</sup>

In at least one instance, medics were obstructed from assisting injured protesters. The OHCHR Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement requires that medical personnel, acting officially or as volunteers, should be provided with “safe access to attend to any injured individuals.”<sup>254</sup>

Medical personnel stationed near the area of the 22 July 2022 military raid in Colombo told FIDH that for six hours they were not granted access to the protesters who may have needed medical attention, as the areas was cordoned off with barricades following the raid.<sup>255</sup> A volunteer medic also said several of his colleagues declined to be interviewed for this report for fear of possible reprisals.<sup>256</sup>

#### **4.7.5 Barricades pose danger to protesters, journalists**

In some cases, police used barricades that had the potential to cause physical harm to protesters and journalists.

The OHCHR Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement requires that physical barriers used in policing an assembly should “never impose a risk to safety or undue risk of injury to participants.”<sup>257</sup>

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245. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based senior journalist*, 14 September 2022.

246. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based senior journalist*, 14 September 2022.

247. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalists*, 13 September 2022.

248. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based senior journalist*, 14 September 2022.

249. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 15 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based protester*, 13 October 2022.

250. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based lawyer*, 14 September 2022.

251. Ceylon Today, *Lightning attack on GotaGoGama protesters*, 23 July 2022; <https://ceylontoday.lk/2022/07/23/lightning-attack-on-gotagogama-protesters/>

252. International Federation of Journalists, *Sri Lanka: Security forces attack journalists and unarmed protestors*, 22 July 2022; <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/sri-lanka-security-forces-attack-journalists-and-unarmed-protestors.html>

253. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalists*, 13 September 2022.

254. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 6.3.6.

255. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based academic*, 14 September 2022.

256. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based volunteer medic*, 14 September 2022.

257. OHCHR, *Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*, 2020; para 6.3.5.

In April 2022, police used semi-permanent barricades with spikes covered in tarp to prevent IUSF students from proceeding towards the Presidential Secretariat during a protest march in Colombo.<sup>258</sup> A journalist told FIDH that in many protest venues journalists were pushed towards barricades as protest crowds increased and that the spiked barriers used by the police in April had the potential of causing physical harm to journalists.<sup>259</sup>

## 4.8 Arrest and detention of protest organizers and participants

Police routinely arrested *aragalaya* protest organizers and participants. In most instances, the protesters neither engaged in violent behavior nor incited others to violence. In addition, authorities used anti-terrorism legislation to detain three student protesters for prolonged periods of time.

The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37 states that the practice of indiscriminate mass arrests prior to, during, or following an assembly is arbitrary and unlawful.<sup>260</sup> It also states that the "mere act of organizing or participating in a peaceful assembly cannot be criminalized under counter-terrorism laws."<sup>261</sup>



Policemen detain a protester during a demonstration by university students to demand the release of their leaders in Colombo on 18 October 2022.  
© ISHARA S. KODIKARA / AFP

258. News First, *Spikes on barricades? Sri Lankan authorities position lethal barricades around President's office*, 24 April 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/04/24/spikeson-barricades-sri-lankan-authorities-position-lethal-barricades-around-presidents-office/>

259. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 17 September 2022.

260. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 82.

261. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 68.



Organizers of student and youth protests were specifically targeted for arrest, while mass arbitrary arrests took place during many peaceful *aragalaya* protests. “Political rallies are OK, but not so much if it’s students [protesting],” a protester noted.<sup>262</sup> On 18 August 2022, during an IUSF protest in Colombo, police arrested 16 demonstrators, including IUSF Convenor Wasantha Mudalige and Inter University Bhikkhus’ Federation Convenor Venerable Galwewa Siridhamma Thero [See below, *Anti-terrorism legislation used to arrest, detain student protest organizers*].<sup>263</sup> On 30 August 2022, police arrested 27 participants of another IUSF protest in Colombo.<sup>264</sup> On 24 September 2022, during a protest organized by the Socialist Youth Union (SYU) in Colombo, police arrested 84 participants, including SYU National Organizer Eranga Gunasekara.<sup>265</sup> On 18 October 2022, during an IUSF protest march from Kelaniya to Colombo, police arrested eight students, including Kelaniya University Student Union President Kalum Mudannayake.<sup>266</sup>

“The government is extremely worried about the IUSF, it is also a way of crushing the younger leadership [and] any future political engagement of the younger group of people,” a lawyer noted.<sup>267</sup>



Demonstrators and university students hold a silent protest to demand the release of IUSF Convenor Wasantha Mudalige in front of the District Court Complex in Colombo on 5 January 2023. © PRADEEP DAMBARAGE / NURPHOTO via AFP

262. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female protester*, 13 September 2022.

263. Ada Derana, *90-day detention orders issued on IUSF convenor and two others*, 22 August 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/84461/90-day-detention-orders-issued-on-iusf-convenor-and-two-others>

264. The Morning, *27 IUSF activists at PTA protest arrested*, 31 August 2022; <https://www.themorning.lk/27-iusf-activists-at-pta-protest-arrested/>

265. Ada Derana, *SYU's Eranga Gunasekara and 2 others granted bail*, 25 September 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/85146/syu-eranga-gunasekara-and-2-others-granted-bail>

266. News First, *IUSF demands the release of detained activists*, 19 October 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/10/19/iusf-demands-the-release-of-detained-activists/>

267. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.



## Anti-terrorism legislation used to arrest, detain student protest organizers

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), a draconian piece of anti-terrorism legislation under which suspects can be detained for up to a year without judicial oversight, was used to arrest three IUSF students for their involvement in *aragalaya* protests. The IUSF is a student-led body that mobilized thousands of students for months to take part in the demonstrations.<sup>268</sup>

On 18 August 2022, IUSF Convenor Wasantha Mudalige, Inter University Bhikkhus' Federation Convenor Venerable Galwewa Siridhamma Thero, and IUSF member Hashan Jeewantha were arrested and detained under the PTA. On 23 August 2022, the three student activists were subject to 90-day detention orders that were signed by President Ranil Wickremesinghe in his capacity as Minister of Defense.<sup>269</sup> The police justified the detentions on grounds that it was necessary to conduct investigations into allegations that the students incited and provoked the general public to set fire to the private residence of Mr. Wickremesinghe, caused the assassination of a parliamentarian, incited the general public to overthrow a lawfully elected government, disobeyed a court order, and other acts.<sup>270</sup> On 24 November 2022, during a parliamentary session, Minister of Public Security Tiran Alles accused Venerable Galwewa Siridhamma Thero and Wasantha Mudalige of being "*aragalaya* activists inciting terror."<sup>271</sup>

The three students were arbitrarily detained and kept in solitary confinement in dark cells. While in detention, Venerable Galwewa Siridhamma Thero contracted dengue fever and had to be hospitalized.<sup>272</sup> Due to insufficient ventilation and sunlight, Wasantha Mudalige suffered from a serious skin condition.<sup>273</sup>

After 50 days of detention, on 7 October 2022, Hashan Jeewantha appeared before the Tangalle Magistrate's Court and was released without charge after the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) informed the court that there was not sufficient evidence to continue detaining him.<sup>274</sup> On 23 November 2022, after over 90 days of detention, the Colombo Magistrate's Court granted bail to Venerable Galwewa Siridhamma Thero.<sup>275</sup> However, on the same day, he was remanded again by the Kaduwela Magistrate's Court until 6 December over his alleged involvement in another protest that took place in July 2022 near the Ministry of Education in Colombo.<sup>276</sup> On 6 December 2022 the Kaduwela Magistrate's Court released him on bail.<sup>277</sup> As of 20 January 2023, Wasantha Mudalige remained detained under the PTA.

268. The protests led by IUSF were linked to Sri Lanka's economic crisis, accountability for economic mismanagement, and good governance. The IUSF has a 40-year history of mobilizing students of public universities around the country.

269. Ceylon Today, *President signs 90-day Detention Orders*, 23 August 2022; <https://ceylontoday.lk/2022/08/23/president-signs-90-day-detention-orders/>

270. Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, *Sri Lanka: Release student activists arbitrarily detained under anti-terror law*, 18 October 2022; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-release-student-activists-arbitrarily-detained-under-anti>

271. The Leader, *Two remanded student activists incite terror – Tiran*, 25 November 2022; <https://english.theleader.lk/news/3013-two-remanded-student-activists-incite-terror-tiran>

272. Ceylon Today, *Siridhamma Thera down with dengue*, 27 October 2022; <https://ceylontoday.lk/2022/10/27/siridhamma-thera-down-with-dengue/>

273. The Morning, *IUSF and IUBF Convenors get skin disease, dengue*, 1 November 2022; <https://www.themorning.lk/iusf-and-iubf-convenors-get-skin-disease-dengue/>

274. News First, *Lack of evidence: IUSF activist released after 50-days in detention*, 7 October 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/10/07/lack-of-evidence-iusf-activist-released-after-50-days-in-detention/>

275. NewsWire, *Ven. Galwewa Siridhamma Thero released from detention*, 23 November 2022; <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/11/23/ven-galwewa-siridhamma-thero-released-from-detention/>

276. Colombo Times, *Ven. Galwewa Siridhamma Thero remanded again in another case*, 23 November 2022; <https://www.colombotimes.net/ven-galwewa-siridhamma-thero-remanded-again-in-another-case/>

277. News First, *Student leaders Wasantha Mudalige, Ven. Siridhamma Thero granted bail*, 6 December 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/12/06/student-leaders-wasantha-mudalige-ven-siridhamma-thero-granted-bail/>

The PTA has been severely criticized by UN human rights experts for its lack of a definition of terrorism that complies with international norms.<sup>278</sup> General Comment No.37 states that the definition of terrorism should not be overbroad in a manner that may be applied to “curtailed or discourage the exercise of the right of peaceful assembly.”<sup>279</sup> In May 2020, in the report on his visit to Sri Lanka, UN Special Rapporteur on the right of freedom of peaceful assembly and of association Clément Voule recommended the Sri Lankan authorities refrain from using national security legislation, including the PTA, “to criminalize protesters legitimately exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly.”<sup>280</sup>

The frivolous nature of the arrests for engaging in any form of dissent became more evident after Ranil Wickremesinghe became President in July 2022. For example, on 13 November 2022, police arrested two women, the sole participants in a mothers’ march from Colombo to Kalutara, Western Province, for merely walking on the road with placards.<sup>281</sup>

## 4.9 No accountability for human rights violations

Sri Lankan authorities failed to hold members of law enforcement agencies accountable for human rights violations they committed in the policing of *aragalaya* protests.

According to the UN Human Rights Committee’s General Comment No. 37, authorities have an obligation to investigate effectively, impartially, and in a timely manner any allegation or reasonable suspicion of unlawful use of force or other violations by law enforcement officials.<sup>282</sup>

On 23 May 2022, two weeks after the 9 May attacks on *aragalaya* protesters by pro-government elements in Colombo [See above, *Chapter 3*], the Attorney General instructed the IGP to immediately transfer Western Province Senior Deputy Inspector General Deshabandu Tennakoon for failing to prevent the attacks from taking place.<sup>283</sup> As of 20 January 2023, the transfer had not come into effect. As of 20 January 2023, a case filed by the CID on the 9 May attacks was pending before the Fort Magistrate’s Court in Colombo.<sup>284</sup> Several suspects arrested by the police in connection with this case, including Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) member of Parliament Sanath Nishantha, were subsequently released on bail.<sup>285</sup>

Similarly, no action has been taken against any of the police, military, and other personnel who engaged in assaulting protesters and subjecting some of them to cruel, inhuman, or degrading

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278. OHCHR, *Sri Lanka: UN experts call for swift suspension of Prevention of Terrorism Act and reform of counter-terrorism law*, 2 March 2022; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/sri-lanka-un-experts-call-swift-suspension-prevention-terrorism-act-and>

279. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 68.

280. OHCHR, *Visit to Sri Lanka - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association*, 5 May 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/44/50/Add.1; p.17; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc4450add1-visit-sri-lanka-report-special-rapporteur-rights-freedom>

281. News First, *Mother’s march reaches Galle Face; activists raise concerns against Police*, 13 November 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/11/13/mother-s-march-reaches-galle-face-activists-raise-concerns-against-police/>

282. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 90.

283. News First, *Deshabandu Thennakoon : Public Services Commission calls for transfer recommendation*, 10 June 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/06/10/deshabandu-thennakoon-public-services-commission-calls-for-transfer-recommendation/>

284. Ada Derana, *May 9 violence: Johnston and Kahandagama named as suspects*, 1 June 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/82808/may-9-violence-johnston-and-kahandagama-named-as-suspects>

285. News First, *Court orders the arrest of Johnston Fernando*, 8 June 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/06/08/court-orders-the-arrest-of-johnston-fernando/>

treatment during the 31 March Mirihana protest and the 22 July raid on protesters in the vicinity of the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo [See above, *Chapter 3*].

Regarding the 19 April 2022 deadly shooting in Rambukkana, Sabaragamuwa Province, four officers, including Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) K.B. Keerthiratne, were arrested and taken into custody by the CID on 28 April 2022.<sup>286</sup> All four police officers were released on bail on 5 August 2022 by the Kegalle High Court.<sup>287</sup> The case is still pending in court.

For most of the attacks carried out by members of law enforcement agencies on journalists while they were covering protests, no thorough investigations were launched and no reparations were provided to the victims. In relation to the attacks on a group of *News First* reporters by STF officers on 9 July 2022 in Colombo, Director of the Prime Minister's STF Security Division SSP Romesh Liyanage was suspended from official duty on 11 July 2022 by the IGP for his failure to prevent the violent assault.<sup>288</sup> However, the IGP reinstated SSP Liyanage on 21 July 2022, as the preliminary investigation by the Police Special Investigation Unit was completed.<sup>289</sup> As of 19 January 2023, *News First* was not aware of any progress in the full investigation.<sup>290</sup>

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka conducted investigations into various incidents involving human rights violations committed against *aragalaya* protesters and observers.<sup>291</sup> However, despite publishing findings and making recommendations in relation to some of these incidents, FIDH is not aware of any meaningful and effective actions taken by the government to hold perpetrators of violations accountable, prevent future abuses, and provide reparations to victims.

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286. The Morning, *Ex-Kegalle SSP's bail application rejected*, 2 May 2022; <https://www.themorning.lk/ex-kegalle-ssps-bail-application-rejected/>

287. News First, *Rambukkana shooting: SSP Keerthirathne granted bail*, 5 August 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/08/05/rambukkana-shooting-ssp-keerthirathne-granted-bail/>

288. Ada Derana, *SSP interdicted over assault on journalists near PM's house*, 11 July 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/83577/ssp-interdicted-over-assault-on-journalists-near-pms-house>

289. Daily News, *SSP Liyanage re-instated after inquiry*, 22 July 2022; <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/07/22/law-order/283564/ssp-liyanage-re-instated-after-inquiry>

290. Communication between FIDH and *News First*, 19 January 2023.

291. Incidents investigated by the HRCSL include: the 19 April deadly shooting in Rambukkana, Sabaragamuwa Province; the 9 July assault of *News First* journalists in Colombo; and the 22 July military raid in Colombo; Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, *Interim Report of the Committee of Experts appointed by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to investigate the Police Shooting incident that took place in Rambukkana on 19th April 2022*, 28 June 2022; <https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Interim-Report-of-the-Committee-of-Experts-appointed-by-the-Human-Rights-Commission-of-Sri-Lanka-HRCSL-to-investigate-the-Police-Shooting-incident-that-took-place-in-Rambukkana-on-19th-April-2022.pdf>; Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, *Press release*, 11 July 2022; <https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/HRCSL-Press-Release-11.07.2022.pdf>; Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, *Press Release*, 22 July 2022; <https://www.hrcsl.lk/human-rights-commission-of-sri-lanka-hrcsl-press-release-on-22-07-2022/>

## 5. Harassment of protest organizers and participants

Authorities subjected *aragalaya* protest organizers and participants to a systematic campaign of arrests, prosecutions, and other acts of harassment, including intimidation and surveillance.

### 5.1 Protest participants and organizers arrested, prosecuted

Protest organizers, social media mobilizers, a prominent union leader, a lawyer, and public figures were all targeted through arrests and prosecutions for their involvement in the *aragalaya* movement.

From May to September 2022, police arrested approximately 4,000 people, of whom nearly 1,500 were detained pending trial.<sup>292</sup> Most arrests - around 3,800 - were carried out following the arson attacks that took place in multiple locations across the country on 9 May 2022, while approximately 200 were arrested, of whom 80 were remanded, after 22 July 2022.<sup>293</sup>

The arrests and prosecutions of protest organizers, especially those belonging to youth movements, appeared to be tactics used by the authorities to prevent further protests from taking place. “[President] Ranil Wickremesinghe knows that there will be more demonstrations, so he wants to suppress this by terrorizing people,” a senior lawyer said.<sup>294</sup> Another lawyer described the series of arrests made by police after 22 July as “a very pathetic attempt to stop future uprisings.”<sup>295</sup>

On 17 June 2022, the Fort Magistrate’s Court ordered the arrest of nine student protest organizers, including: IUSF Convenor Wasantha Mudalige; Inter University Bhikkhus’ Federation Convenor Venerable Galwewa Siridhamma Thero; Youth for Change National Organizer Lahiru Weerasekara; SYU National Organizer Eranga Gunasekara; and five others for their involvement in two separate protests in front of the Police Headquarters and the Education Ministry in Colombo, on 9 and 10 June.<sup>296</sup> On 22 June 2022, Lahiru Weerasekara, along with six others, were remanded on various charges, including unlawful assembly, damaging public property, and obstructing the duties of a police officer.<sup>297</sup> On 9 September 2022, Lahiru Weerasekara was re-arrested by the Maradana police in Colombo on charges of unruly behavior and obstructing the duties of a police officer during a peaceful protest on 30 August 2022 in Maradana.<sup>298</sup> Three police officers forced Weerasekara into a police jeep as he was returning on his bike from another peaceful protest at Colombo’s Galle Face Green.<sup>299</sup> He was allegedly assaulted inside the police jeep.<sup>300</sup>

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292. Sunday Times, *May 9 violence and protests: 4000 arrested*, 11 September 2022; <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/220911/news/may-9-violence-and-protests-4000-arrested-494822.html>

293. Sunday Times, *May 9 violence and protests: 4000 arrested*, 11 September 2022; <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/220911/news/may-9-violence-and-protests-4000-arrested-494822.html>

294. FIDH, *Interview with Kandy-based senior lawyer*, 11 September 2022.

295. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.

296. News First, *Nine key suspects involved in violent acts ordered to be arrested*, 17 June 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/06/17/nine-key-suspects-involved-in-violent-acts-ordered-to-be-arrested/>

297. Ada Derana, *‘Ratta’, Lahiru Weerasekara and 5 others remanded*, 22 June 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/83201/ratta-lahiru-weerasekara-and-5-others-remanded>

298. News First, *Activist Lahiru Weerasekara granted bail*, 10 September 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/09/10/activist-lahiru-weerasekara-granted-bail/>

299. Front Line Defenders, *Sri Lanka: Arrest of youth rights defender Lahiru Weerasekara*, 9 September 2022; [https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua\\_sri\\_lanka\\_-\\_lahiru.odt\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua_sri_lanka_-_lahiru.odt_-_final.pdf)

300. Front Line Defenders, *Sri Lanka: Arrest of youth rights defender Lahiru Weerasekara*, 9 September 2022; [https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua\\_sri\\_lanka\\_-\\_lahiru.odt\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua_sri_lanka_-_lahiru.odt_-_final.pdf)



On 28 July 2022, Venerable Koswatte Mahanama Thero, a Buddhist monk and protest organizer, was arrested by Colombo's Fort police on charges of violating court orders during a protest held on 28 May 2022 at Fort. He was released on bail by the Fort Magistrate's Court on 5 August 2022.<sup>301</sup>

In an apparent effort to deter the public from taking part in the protests, police also arrested prominent supporters of the *aragalaya*. For example, on 3 August 2022, Ceylon Teachers' Union General Secretary Joseph Stalin<sup>302</sup> was arrested on charges of violating a court order for participating in a peaceful protest march in Colombo on 28 May to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> day of the *aragalaya* protests.<sup>303</sup> He was kept in remand custody at the Fort Police Station in Colombo and released on bail on 8 August 2022 by the Fort Magistrate's Court. On 7 September 2022, actress and activist Damitha Abeyratne was arrested on charges of forcibly entering the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo and obstructing the duties of a police officer in July 2022.<sup>304</sup> She was arrested by Colombo's Fort police after giving a speech on government repression at a peaceful protest at Diyatha Uyana, a public park in Battaramulla, Colombo.<sup>305</sup> On 13 September 2022, the Fort Magistrate's Court granted her bail but imposed a travel ban on her.<sup>306</sup>

In many cases, police arrested and prosecuted protest participants for their mere presence at demonstrations, without any evidence of criminal conduct. This includes participants in assemblies who did not engage in any violent conduct. Such arrests are inconsistent with international standards.

The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37 stipulates that the "conduct of specific participants in an assembly may be deemed violent if authorities can present credible evidence that, before or during the event, those participants are inciting others to use violence, and such actions are likely to cause violence; that the participants have violent intentions and plan to act on them; or that violence on their part is imminent."<sup>307</sup>

A lawyer who represented several detained protesters told FIDH that during court proceedings photographic evidence produced by police simply showed the defendants participating in the assemblies.<sup>308</sup> Mere bystanders also accounted for many of the arrests carried out in relation to arson attacks that took place around the country on 9 May 2022.<sup>309</sup> "They [police] are not concerned about the merits [of the cases], they just want to please the government," a Galle-based senior lawyer said, describing the circumstances surrounding the arrest of a local doctor based on CCTV footage showing him near the site of an arson attack.<sup>310</sup>

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301. News First, *Court orders release of Mahanama Thero on bail*, 5 August 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/08/05/court-orders-release-of-mahanama-thero-on-bail/>

302. Joseph Stalin is a senior trade union leader and an active mobilizer of protests calling for accountability and reform of the political system.

303. Al Jazeera, *Concerns as Sri Lanka arrests top protest leader Joseph Stalin*, 4 August 2022; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/4/concerns-as-sri-lanka-arrests-top-protest-leader-joseph-stalin>

304. Ada Derana, *Actress Damitha Abeyratne arrested*, 7 September 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/84815/actress-damitha-abeyratne-arrested>

305. NewsCutter, *Op. leader visits actress Damitha – lawyers claim unlawful arrest*, 8 September 2022; <https://www.newscutter.lk/sri-lanka-news/damitha-unlawful-arrest-08092022-47867/>

306. Daily News, *Actress Damitha granted bail*, 13 September 2022; <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/09/13/law-order/287122/actress-damitha-granted-bail>

307. UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21)*, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; para 19.

308. FIDH, *Interview with L8*, 6 October 2022.

309. FIDH, *Interview with L8*, 6 October 2022.

310. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based senior lawyer*, 16 September 2022.

## 5.2 Lack of due process following arrests

In many cases, after arresting protesters, the police failed to inform the family of those arrested of the location in which they were being detained. Such practice affected the ability of the arrested protesters to receive timely legal assistance. For example, a protester, who was arrested at around 11.30pm from his home in a village in the Central Province, was taken to Colombo, Western Province, over 100 km away, for questioning.<sup>311</sup> His house was searched by around 10 police officers who confiscated his electronic equipment without a court order. At the time of being taken to Colombo, police did not inform him that he was under arrest and failed to notify his family of his whereabouts for over 10 hours.<sup>312</sup>

In some cases, police also attempted to take fingerprints of protesters without their consent following their arrest at the time of taking their statement.<sup>313</sup> Such practice is in breach of Sri Lanka's Criminal Procedure Code, according to which fingerprints can only be taken for the purpose of an investigation and with the consent of the person in question.<sup>314</sup> In the event that a person does not consent to give finger impressions, the police must seek an order from the Magistrate's Court to obtain the fingerprints.<sup>315</sup> A lawyer told FIDH that he suspected that the police may be seeking to obtain fingerprints from the protesters with the intention of creating a database of those involved in the *aragalaya* movement.<sup>316</sup>

## 5.3 Protesters abducted

In some cases, protesters were arrested without due process by individuals wearing civilian clothing who presented no form of identification. These incidents were akin to enforced disappearances, as protesters were abducted and held *incommunicado* for several hours in undisclosed locations by individuals who seemingly acted with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the authorities. In some cases, the abductors were later determined to be law enforcement personnel despite their failure to identify themselves as such.

In two cases, those who were unlawfully abducted were later found in police custody. Their whereabouts had remained unknown to lawyers and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) for many hours. In the first case, on 27 July 2022, IUSF member Veranga Pushpika was abducted in broad daylight from a bus in Fort, Colombo, while he was returning from a protest. He was forcefully taken away by plainclothes law enforcement officers travelling in a blue jeep.<sup>317</sup> Despite attempts by five lawyers and HRCSL officers to locate him, Pushpika's whereabouts remained unknown for approximately six hours until lawyers eventually found him in police custody.<sup>318</sup> It was later reported that the protester had been arrested by the Colombo South Divisional Crime Detective Bureau.<sup>319</sup> In the second case, on 8 August 2022, Viplawawadi Shishya Sangamaya [Revolutionary Student Union] National Organizer Mangala Maddumage was abducted near the Colombo Public Library by unidentified men in an auto rickshaw wearing civilian clothes and claiming to be police.<sup>320</sup> Lawyers, his family, and friends could not locate him for many hours

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311. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 22 September 2022.

312. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 22 September 2022.

313. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 22 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based lawyer*, 6 October 2022.

314. Code of Criminal Procedure Act No.15 of 1979, Section 123(1).

315. Code of Criminal Procedure Act No.15 of 1979, Section 123(2).

316. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based lawyer*, 6 October 2022.

317. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.

318. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based female lawyer*, 17 September 2022.

319. Daily Mirror, *Police arrest IUSF activist Veranga Pushpika*, 27 July 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/top\\_story/Police-arrest-IUSF-activist-Veranga-Pushpika/155-241908](https://www.dailymirror.lk/top_story/Police-arrest-IUSF-activist-Veranga-Pushpika/155-241908)

320. Daily Mirror, *Four more GGG youth activists nabbed yesterday Another abduction style arrest made on aragalaya activist at Colombo Public Library*, 9 August 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/front\\_page/Four-more-GGG-youth-activists-nabbed-yesterday-Another-abduction-style-arrest-made-on-aragalaya-activist-at-Colombo-Public-Library/238-242668](https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/front_page/Four-more-GGG-youth-activists-nabbed-yesterday-Another-abduction-style-arrest-made-on-aragalaya-activist-at-Colombo-Public-Library/238-242668)

until it was learned that he had been taken into police custody. On 9 August 2022, it was reported he had been arrested by the Colombo South Divisional Crime Detective Bureau.<sup>321</sup>

In another case, on 31 July 2022, a student protester from Kelaniya University, Western Province, was abducted at night by a group of unidentified men and released after being interrogated for about three hours regarding the whereabouts of IUSF Convenor Wasantha Mudalige, who had gone into hiding to avoid being arrested.<sup>322</sup>

On 9 August 2022, the Bar Association of Sri Lanka recommended the IGP ensure that arrests followed the due process of law and emphasized that police must respect its obligations under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance Act No. 5 of 2018.<sup>323</sup> Following the Bar Association's recommendations, on 12 August 2022, the IGP issued a circular to the police, instructing them to follow due process when making arrests.<sup>324</sup>

## 5.4 Judicial harassment

Numerous criminal cases were filed against those who supported the *aragalaya*. Protest organizers were issued court warrants for not appearing in cases instituted against them for their participation in protests.

On 22 July 2022, Nuwan Bopage, a lawyer who represented many of the arrested *aragalaya* demonstrators, was arrested by police during the raid on protesters in the vicinity of the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo and briefly detained before being released on bail.<sup>325</sup> On 11 November 2022, he was named as a suspect in a case involving those who had allegedly entered the President's official residence in Colombo.<sup>326</sup>

Hirunika Premachandra, former member of Parliament and vocal critic of President Rajapaksa's administration, was arrested twice, on 6 July 2022<sup>327</sup> and 14 November 2022,<sup>328</sup> for participating in peaceful protests in front of the President's official residence and the UN compound in Colombo.

On 12 August 2022, prominent protest organizer and Catholic priest Father Jeewantha Peiris surrendered himself to the Fort Magistrate's Court in Colombo in connection with two cases filed against him by the Fort police and Slave Island police in Colombo.<sup>329</sup> He was accused of engaging in an unlawful protest in contravention of a court order and forcefully entering the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo on 9 July 2022. During the court hearing, the CID requested to remand him. However, the Fort Magistrate's Court rejected the police request and released him on bail.<sup>330</sup>

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321. Ceylon Today, *Student activist arrested*, 9 August 2022; <https://uploads.ceylontoday.lk/epapers/files/CT-09-08-2022-CT.pdf>

322. Colombo Post, *A student activist of Kelaniya University is kidnapped*, 1 August 2022; <https://www.thecolombopost.org/en/politics-en/95345/>

323. Bar Association of Sri Lanka, *Letter addressed to the IGP*, 9 August 2022; <https://basl.lk/arrests-being-carried-out-without-following-due-process/>

324. Bar Association of Sri Lanka, *IGP circular regarding [in Sinhala] "Notice to officers to follow due procedure when making arrests"*, 29 August 2022; <https://bit.ly/3wg5Ym5>

325. Ada Derana, *Nine arrested during Galle Face military raid granted bail*, 22 July 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/83814/nine-arrested-during-galle-face-military-raid-granted-bail>

326. News First, *Attorney Nuwan Bopage named suspect for illegally entering President's house*, 11 November 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/11/11/attorney-nuwan-bopage-named-suspect-for-illegally-entering-president-s-house/>

327. Economy Next, *Sri Lanka opposition politicians Hirunika Premachandra, Rehan Jayawickreme arrested at protest*, 6 July 2022; <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-opposition-politicians-hirunika-premachandra-rehan-jayawickreme-arrested-at-protest-97023/>

328. Ada Derana, *Hirunika arrested during protest in Colombo*, 14 November 2022; <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/86129/hirunika-arrested-during-protest-in-colombo>

329. Daily Mirror, *Fr. Jeewantha Peiris surrenders to Court*, 12 August 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/Fr-Jeewantha-Peiris-surrenders-to-Court/108-242921](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Fr-Jeewantha-Peiris-surrenders-to-Court/108-242921)

330. News First, *Rev. Fr. Jeewantha granted bail; Barred from overseas travel*, 12 August 2022; <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/08/12/rev-fr-jeewantha-granted-bail-barred-from-overseas-travel/>

## 5.5 Police intimidation

Police frequently summoned protest organizers, protest participants, and journalists for questioning to intimidate them. Protesters were summoned by various police branches, such as the CID, the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID), and the Colombo Crime Division. A lawyer told FIDH that the summoning of persons by police branches that are normally tasked with investigating serious crimes created a sense of fear among protesters and anyone associated with them.<sup>331</sup>

Several journalists who covered the *aragalaya* protests were harassed and called in for questioning by law enforcement officials. A journalist who had been assaulted by STF officers during the 31 March Mirihana protest in Colombo was visited at his home by the CID in early April and asked to appear before the CID for an inquiry.<sup>332</sup> On the day he appeared at the CID, he was subjected to a six-hour interrogation.<sup>333</sup> In November 2022, journalists Tharindu Udawaragedara and Tharindu Jayawardena were summoned to the CID following complaints lodged by the IGP.<sup>334</sup> The two journalists were questioned over a Facebook post they had published to seek public assistance to identify police officers who used disproportionate force in the dispersal of a peaceful protest on 9 October 2022 at Colombo's Galle Face Green.<sup>335</sup> On 24 November 2022, Minister of Public Security Tiran Alles told Parliament that journalists who published pictures to identify uniformed police officers would be called in for questioning by the CID.<sup>336</sup> He did not elaborate on the legal basis for such measure.

Several protest organizers were summoned by the police for their role in the protests. For example, on 7 June 2022, the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of police in Kurunegala, North Western Province, summoned two organizers of the Gota Go Gama protest site in Kurunegala.<sup>337</sup> On 14 November 2022, the Officer-in-Charge of the Colpetty police in Colombo summoned two protest organizers of the protests that had taken place twice a week since March 2022 at the Liberty roundabout.<sup>338</sup>

In several instances, protesters called in for questioning by the police were arrested when they arrived at the police station to give statements. For example, on 8 August 2022, police in Bambalapitiya, Colombo, arrested protesters Sasindu Sahan Tharaka and Bhanu Induwara when they went to give statements to the police.<sup>339</sup> On the same day, Slave Island police in Colombo arrested protester Piyath Nikeshala when he arrived at the police station in response to the summons.<sup>340</sup>

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331. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based lawyer*, 6 October 2022.

332. FIDH, *interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 17 September 2022.

333. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, , 17 September 2022.

334. Front Line Defenders, *Human Rights Defender and Journalist Tharindu Jayawardhana interrogated by the Cyber Crimes Investigation Division*, 15 November 2022; <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-and-journalist-tharindu-jayawardhana-interrogated-cyber-crimes>, Front Line Defenders, *Human Rights Defender Tharindu Uduwaragedara questioned by the Cyber Crimes Investigation Division in Sri Lanka*, 9 November 2022; <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-tharindu-uduwaragedara-questioned-by-cyber-crimes-investigation-division>

335. Front Line Defenders, *Human Rights Defender and Journalist Tharindu Jayawardhana interrogated by the Cyber Crimes Investigation Division*, 15 November 2022; <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-and-journalist-tharindu-jayawardhana-interrogated-cyber-crimes>, Front Line Defenders, *Human Rights Defender Tharindu Uduwaragedara questioned by the Cyber Crimes Investigation Division in Sri Lanka*, 9 November 2022; <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-tharindu-uduwaragedara-questioned-by-cyber-crimes-investigation-division>

336. The Leader, *Two remanded student activists incite terror – Tiran*, 25 November 2022; <https://english.theleader.lk/news/3013-two-remanded-student-activists-incite-terror-tiran>

337. Inform, *Repression of dissent in June 2022*, p.4; [https://www.inform.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/RoD\\_June2022.pdf](https://www.inform.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/RoD_June2022.pdf)

338. FIDH correspondence with protest organizer, November 2022.

339. Daily Mirror, *Four more GGG youth activists nabbed yesterday Another abduction style arrest made on aragalaya activist at Colombo Public Library*, 9 August 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/front\\_page/Four-more-GGG-youth-activists-nabbed-yesterday-Another-abduction-style-arrest-made-on-aragalaya-activist-at-Colombo-Public-Library/238-242668](https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/front_page/Four-more-GGG-youth-activists-nabbed-yesterday-Another-abduction-style-arrest-made-on-aragalaya-activist-at-Colombo-Public-Library/238-242668)

340. The Morning, *Another activist arrested, ex-IUSF leader 'abducted'*, 9 August 2022; <https://www.themorning.lk/another-activist-arrested-ex-iusf-leader-abducted/>



Some protest organizers and participants stated that authorities made attempts to implicate them in the arson attacks that took place in multiple locations across the country on 9 May 2022 in order to arrest and/or intimidate them. While some protesters who appeared at police stations were told their names had been included in the list of individuals associated with those involved in the arson attacks, other protesters who directly surrendered themselves to courts instead of responding to summons were told by the courts that the police were not pursuing any cases against them.<sup>341</sup>

## 5.6 Travel bans imposed

Authorities imposed travel bans on nearly 30 protest organizers and participants in connection with their involvement in the *aragalaya*.

On 25 July 2022, the Colombo Fort Magistrate imposed overseas travel bans on six protest organizers: IUSF Convenor Wasantha Mudalige; Ceylon Teachers' Union General Secretary Joseph Stalin; SYU National Organizer Eranga Gunasekara; Father Jeewantha Peiris; and Youth For Change National Organizer Lahiru Weerasekara.<sup>342</sup>

On 28 July 2022, the Colombo Fort Magistrate imposed travel bans on 21 protesters for allegedly causing a public nuisance by blocking the main entrances to the Presidential Secretariat during ongoing protests at Colombo's Galle Face Green.<sup>343</sup>

## 5.7 Surveillance of journalists

Two journalists who covered *aragalaya* protests and documented the authorities' abuses against protesters were subject to surveillance by the authorities. The journalists reported that after the 22 July raid near the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo, two police officers were stationed in front of the building of the news agency for which they worked.<sup>344</sup> On another occasion, one of the two journalists reported seeing an auto rickshaw parked in front of the same building from 5.30am until approximately 3-4:00pm, while two men kept looking at the building.<sup>345</sup> The acts of intimidation of journalists, coupled with the frequent incidents of violent attacks against them by the authorities, had a negative effect on their professional work as they became hesitant to cover protests after July 2022.<sup>346</sup> "We don't feel safe and we are not comfortable going outside. [...] It's very stressful to have somebody looking at us all the time," a journalist related to FIDH.<sup>347</sup>

## 5.8 Harassment of family members and associates

In an apparent attempt to discourage protest organizers and participants from being involved in further demonstrations, police extended harassment and intimidation to their family members and associates.

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341. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protester*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based lawyer*, 16 September 2022.

342. NewsWire, *Travel ban for six Galle Face activists*, 25 June 2022; <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/07/25/travel-ban-for-six-galle-face-activists/>

343. Daily News, *Travel ban for Danish Ali, 20 protesters imposed*, 29 July 2022; <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/07/29/law-order/284040/travel-ban-danish-ali-20-protesters-imposed>

344. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalists*, 13 September 2022.

345. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalists*, 13 September 2022.

346. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalists*, 13 September 2022.

347. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 13 September 2022.

Police officers often visited the homes of family members of protest organizers and participants and questioned them regarding their relatives' whereabouts. "Without telling any reasons, police suddenly visit the homes of the protesters and ask the mother or family members to tell their relatives to go to the police station," a lawyer said.<sup>348</sup> "Police officials who come in search of us, say: 'Sorry, we don't want to do this, we know what you did was national service, this is an order coming from above,'" a protest organizer told FIDH.<sup>349</sup>

Protesters told FIDH that police treated protesters as criminals during the visits to their family members, creating shame and stigma for their involvement in the protests.<sup>350</sup> On 16 January 2023, the police visited the home of an organizer of the Liberty roundabout protests in Colombo [See above, *Chapter 4.4*], and informed the protest organizer's wife that they had come looking for him.<sup>351</sup> A protester who later relocated abroad stated that the police visited his house and questioned his family on when he would return to Sri Lanka.<sup>352</sup> A Buddhist monk who participated in the *aragalaya* protests said that the police visited the temple where he used to stay and asked questions about his involvement in the protests.<sup>353</sup> Another protester stated that the police visited his elderly parents' home twice and there was constant surveillance near their house for nearly a month.<sup>354</sup> Protesters in Galle, Southern Province, told FIDH that the police visited the villages of Immaduwa, Hapugala, and Kithulampitiya to question parents and neighbors of protesters.<sup>355</sup> When the police visited family homes of protesters, their relatives were told to tell the protesters to report to the police station without giving any specific reason as to why they were being summoned.<sup>356</sup>

## 5.9 Crackdown forces protest participants, organizers, and a journalist into hiding

Due to the crackdown by the police through arrests, prosecutions, surveillance, intimidation, and other acts of harassment, many protest organizers and participants, and at least one journalist, were forced to go into hiding to avoid persecution.

Some of the protesters interviewed by FIDH said they had been in hiding for several months and had sought shelter in safe houses to avoid being harassed by the authorities. A protester who was in hiding for nearly five months stated that she was compelled to take her daughter out of school and relocate to a different place as the police had visited her home regularly.<sup>357</sup> Another protester who was in hiding for approximately three months stated that she relocated to a different province because the police had visited the boarding place where she was staying in Colombo.<sup>358</sup> Both protesters stated that they had experienced severe psychological pressure, acute stress, and depression because of their life in hiding and the lack of any source of income for a prolonged period of time.<sup>359</sup>

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348. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based lawyer*, 16 September 2022.

349. FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

350. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protester*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based lawyer*, 16 September 2022.

351. FIDH correspondence with a protest organizer, 16 January 2023.

352. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 31 August 2022.

353. FIDH, *Interview with student protester*, 18 September 2022..

354. FIDH, *Interview with prominent protest organizer*, 13 September 2022.

355. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protester*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based lawyer*, 16 September 2022.

356. FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protest organizer*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based protester*, 16 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with Galle-based lawyer*, 16 September 2022.

357. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 18 October 2022.

358. FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 15 September 2022.

359. FIDH, *Interviews with protester*, 15 September 2022; FIDH, *Interview with protester*, 18 October 2022.

In September 2022, a journalist who had extensively covered the *aragalaya* protests told FIDH that he went into hiding and sought shelter in a safe house.<sup>360</sup>

Police raided several locations in an attempt to find protest organizers who were in hiding. On 29 July 2022, two police teams raided the Headquarters of the Frontline Socialist Party as they were trying to locate IUSF Convenor Wasantha Mudalige.<sup>361</sup> On 27 July 2022, police raided a church in Ratnapura, Sabaragamuwa Province, where protest organizer Father Jeewantha Peiris had previously resided.<sup>362</sup>

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360. FIDH, *Interview with Colombo-based journalist*, 13 September 2022.

361. Daily Mirror, *Two police teams raid FSP headquarters in Nugegoda; search for Wasantha Mudalige*, 30 July 2022; [https://www.dailymirror.lk/front\\_page/Two-police-teams-raid-FSP-headquarters-in-Nugegoda-search-for-Wasantha-Mudalige/238-242048](https://www.dailymirror.lk/front_page/Two-police-teams-raid-FSP-headquarters-in-Nugegoda-search-for-Wasantha-Mudalige/238-242048)

362. The Morning, *Catholic Priests concerned about attempts to arrest Fr. Jeevantha Peiris*, 1 August 2022; <https://www.themorning.lk/catholic-priests-concerned-about-attempts-to-arrest-fr-jeevantha-peiris/>

## 6. Recommendations

With a view to uphold the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Sri Lanka in a manner consistent with its international human rights obligations, FIDH calls on the government of Sri Lanka to implement without delay the recommendations listed below.

### GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognize that the freedom of peaceful assembly plays a decisive and indispensable role in the existence of an effective democracy.
- Recognize that assemblies are presumed to be lawful and peaceful, in accordance with international human rights standards.
- Guarantee a conducive and safe environment for all those who exercise, or seek to exercise, their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, those belonging to minorities, and other marginalized groups.
- Ensure the protection of all individuals who exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly from attacks, harassment, and intimidation, including by non-state actors.
- Put an end to all acts of harassment, including at the judicial level, against all peaceful assembly organizers and participants, and ensure that they are able to exercise their legitimate rights to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of peaceful assembly without any hindrance or fear of reprisal.
- Ensure that government laws, policies, and practices on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly are consistent with Sri Lanka's obligations under international law.
- Refrain from using national security legislation, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act, to criminalize assembly organizers and participants for the legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

- Carry out prompt, thorough, effective, and impartial investigations into all allegations of attacks, threats, harassment, and other human rights violations against those who exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and hold the perpetrators accountable.
- Ensure that participants in assemblies who have suffered violations of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly have access to effective remedies, as guaranteed by Article 2(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### RESTRICTIONS

- Ensure that all restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly are: prescribed by law; necessary in a democratic society; and proportionate to the aim pursued. Any restrictions should be subject to an independent, impartial, and prompt judicial review.
- Refrain from enacting new laws, rules, and regulations that unduly restrict the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Refrain from declaring a State of Emergency in the absence of the prerequisites outlined in Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Ensure that the prior notification process under the Police Ordinance is not used as a *de facto* authorization system to regulate the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Consider amending the notification requirement for processions under the Police Ordinance in order to facilitate spontaneous or urgent processions.
- Refrain from imposing blanket bans on assemblies in public places and/or surrounding government buildings.



## **POLICING OF ASSEMBLIES**

- Refrain from any form of unwarranted interference with peaceful assemblies, such as prohibiting, dispersing, blocking, or disrupting peaceful assemblies without compelling justification.
- Refrain from deploying members of the armed forces, counter-terrorism police units, or unidentified personnel for the policing of assemblies.

## **USE OF FORCE**

- Ensure that any use of force to disperse assemblies is in accordance with international human rights law and international standards, including the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.
- Adopt clear guidelines for the police to ensure that assemblies are only dispersed as a last resort, if they are no longer peaceful, or where there is clear evidence of imminent threat of serious violence that cannot be reasonably addressed by more proportionate measures, such as targeted arrests.
- Adopt clear command structures and protocols that underpin accountability for the use of force at assemblies, particularly to ensure reporting and identification of officers who resort to the use of force.
- Refrain from arresting and detaining participants in peaceful assemblies.

## **TRAINING**

- Provide training to law enforcement officials to respect and protect the rights of peaceful assembly participants, including women, children, and persons with disabilities.
- Conduct periodic human rights training to law enforcement officials, with the assistance of relevant domestic and international human rights bodies, on the policing of assemblies.
- Conduct periodic training of law enforcement officials on the appropriate manner in which lethal and less-lethal weapons may be used as a means of crowd control.

## **OBSERVERS**

- Guarantee that law enforcement officials policing assemblies respect and ensure the rights of journalists, lawyers, medical personnel, and assembly observers.
- Recognize the right of journalists and observers of assemblies to record the actions of law enforcement officials, without any hindrance or fear of reprisal.
- Ensure that journalists, lawyers, medical personnel, and observers do not face reprisals or harassment for their work related to assemblies.

# APPENDIX: Chronology of key developments in 2022

## JANUARY

- 24 Nationwide one to two-hour daily power outages begin due to foreign exchange shortages that delay fuel imports during seasonal droughts.

## FEBRUARY

- 28 Nationwide daily power outages increase to five hours.

## MARCH

- 1 Daily candlelight vigils begin in Colombo's Kohuwala. The vigils will continue for around 40 days.
- 2 Nationwide daily power outages increase to seven and a half hours.
- 12 Twice-weekly protests in front of Liberty roundabout in Colombo begin.
- 30 Nationwide daily power outages increase to 10 hours.
- 31 Protesters demonstrate in front of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's private residence in Mirihana, Colombo.

## APRIL

- 1 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declares a State of Emergency and a 36-hour nationwide curfew.
- 3 Government imposes a 15-hour nationwide block on social media platforms.  
All 26 members of the cabinet resign, including Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa.
- 4 Central Bank Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal resigns.
- 5 OHCHR says measures taken by the Sri Lankan government in response to mass demonstrations are aimed at preventing or discouraging people from legitimately expressing their grievances through peaceful protest.  
President Gotabaya Rajapaksa revokes State of Emergency.  
Government Medical Officers' Association declares a medical emergency due to the shortage of essential medicines and equipment.  
Forty-three members of Parliament leave the government coalition to become independent lawmakers.
- 8 UN human rights experts condemn the Sri Lankan authorities' crackdown on protests and urge the government to guarantee the fundamental rights of peaceful assembly and of expression.
- 9 Protesters gather in front of the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo and establish the Gota Go Gama protest site in front of it, marking Day 1 of the protests.
- 12 Government suspends repayment of the country's foreign debt.
- 14 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa calls on the armed forces to maintain law and order

- throughout the country.
- 18 Securities and Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka suspends the Colombo Stock Exchange for five days.
  - 19 Police use live ammunition against protesters in Rambukkana, Sabaragamuwa Province, killing one.
  - International credit rating agency Fitch Ratings downgrades Sri Lanka's Long-Term Foreign Currency Issuer Default Rating to "C" from "CC."
  - 28 Over 1,000 state and private sector unions go on a nationwide strike in solidarity with *aragalaya* protesters in Colombo.

## MAY

- 6 Over 2,000 trade unions around the country launch a nationwide strike to call for the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.  
President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declares a second State of Emergency.  
Parliament is adjourned until 17 May.
- 7 European Union (EU) Delegation in Sri Lanka says the State of Emergency will "certainly not" help solving the country's difficulties and could have a counter-productive effect.
- 9 Supporters of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa attack *aragalaya* protesters in Colombo.  
Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigns.  
Series of arson attacks are carried out around the country on vehicles, houses, and properties of nearly 80 members of Parliament and 70 individuals with ties to the government.  
Parliamentarian Amarakeerthi Athukorala is found dead following a confrontation with *aragalaya* protesters in Nittambuwa, Western Province.  
President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declares 36-hour nationwide curfew.  
President Gotabaya Rajapaksa issues Emergency Regulations back-dated to 6 May.
- 10 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet calls on the Sri Lankan authorities to prevent further violence, and urges restraint and meaningful dialogue to address the grievances of the population.  
EU condemns the "vicious attack" against peaceful protesters in Colombo, calls on the authorities to initiate an investigation into the events and to hold accountable those instigating or perpetrating violence.
- 11 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa extends curfew for another 24 hours.  
UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemns all violence and calls on all parties in Sri Lanka to exercise restraint.  
The Ministry of Defense issues "shoot-on-site" orders to the armed forces against those involved in damage to property in connection with the ongoing protests.
- 12 Ranil Wickremesinghe is sworn in as Prime Minister.  
President Gotabaya Rajapaksa extends curfew for another 16 hours.
- 13 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa extends curfew for another 16 hours.
- 14 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa extends curfew for another 11 hours.
- 16 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa extends curfew for another six hours.

- 18 Protesters hold Remembrance Day event at Gota Go Gama protest site in Colombo to remember those who died during the civil war.
- 19 International credit rating agency Fitch Ratings downgrades Sri Lanka's Long-Term Foreign Currency Issuer Default Rating to "RD" [restricted default] from "C."
- 20 State of Emergency lapses.  
President Gotabaya Rajapaksa calls on the armed forces to maintain law and order throughout the country.
- 28 Police block protest march in Colombo to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> day of continuous *aragalaya* protests.

## JUNE

- 9 Police use teargas in front of their Headquarters in Colombo to disperse protesters calling for justice for the victims of the 9 May attacks by pro-government elements.  
Former Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa resigns from Parliament.  
Minister of Power and Energy Kanchana Wijesekara announces weekly fuel quotas for all motorists.
- 18 Ministry of Education declares closures for a week for public and state-approved private schools in Colombo and other major cities across the country.
- 20 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa reiterates his call on the armed forces to maintain law and order throughout the country.
- 22 Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe informs Parliament that the economy has "completely collapsed."
- 27 The government suspends fuel supply to non-essential services.

## JULY

- 4 Ministry of Education declares a week-long holiday for both public and state-approved private schools across the country.
- 8 Inspector General of Police C.D. Wickremaratne declares curfews in several police divisions in the Western Province from 9:00pm until further notice.  
On the eve of a planned large demonstration in Colombo, OHCHR urges the authorities to show restraint in the policing of assemblies and ensure every necessary effort to prevent violence.
- 9 Police lift curfew in the Western Province at 8:00am.  
Close to a million protesters gather in Colombo to call for the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.  
Protesters in Colombo occupy the President's official residence, the Prime Minister's official residence, and the Presidential Secretariat.  
Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's private residence in Colombo is set on fire.
- 11 UN Secretary-General António Guterres calls on all stakeholders in Sri Lanka to engage in dialogue to ensure a smooth transition of government.
- 12 Immigration officials at Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport stop former Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa from leaving Sri Lanka.
- 13 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa flees to the Maldives.  
Protesters occupy Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's office in Colombo,



calling for his resignation.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is appointed as Acting President.

Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe declares a nationwide curfew for 17 hours.

In a televised statement, Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe refers to protesters as a “fascist threat.”

- 14 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa travels to Singapore.  
Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe declares another nationwide curfew for 17 hours.
- 15 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa e-mails a letter of resignation to the Speaker of the Parliament, Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena.  
Protesters in Colombo withdraw from the Prime Minister's office, the President's official residence, and the Prime Minister's official residence.
- 17 Protesters mark 100 days of continuous *aragalaya* protests at the Gota Go Gama protest site in Colombo.
- 18 Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe declares a nationwide State of Emergency and promulgates Emergency Regulations.
- 20 Parliament elects Prime Minister and Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe as the new President of Sri Lanka by a majority vote.  
Colombo Fort Magistrate issues an order prohibiting anyone from gathering within a 50-meter radius of the S.W.R.D Bandaranaike statue at Galle Face Green in Colombo.
- 21 President Ranil Wickremesinghe is sworn in as Sri Lanka's President.  
President Ranil Wickremesinghe calls on the armed forces to maintain law and order throughout the country.
- 22 Military forces carry out a pre-dawn raid on protesters in the area near the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo to disperse them and remove the protest camp.  
OHCHR says it is alarmed by the unnecessary use of force used by security forces to remove a protest camp near the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo.  
EU condemns the unwarranted use of force against peaceful demonstrators in Colombo.
- 25 Colombo Fort Magistrate imposes travel bans on six protest organizers.
- 27 Parliament adopts a resolution that ratifies the President's declaration of the State of Emergency and the Emergency Regulations issued on 18 July.

## AUGUST

- 3 Police order protesters to vacate tents at the Gota Go Gama protest site in Colombo.
- 8 UN human rights experts condemn the authorities' repeated use of emergency measures to crack down on protests.
- 10 Protesters vacate the Gota Go Gama protest site in Colombo.
- 11 Former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa travels to Bangkok, Thailand.
- 18 State of Emergency declared on 18 July lapses.  
Police attack Inter University Students' Federation (IUSF) student activists during a peaceful protest march in Colombo. Sixteen student activists are arrested, including three under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).
- 19 President Ranil Wickremesinghe reiterates his call on the armed forces to maintain law and order throughout the country.

- 31 Year-on-year food inflation climbs to 84.6%.  
Year-on-year consumer inflation increases to 70.2%.

## SEPTEMBER

- 1 International Monetary Fund reaches Staff-Level Agreement on an Extended Fund Facility Arrangement with Sri Lankan authorities.
- 3 Former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa returns to Sri Lanka.
- 6 OHCHR report says Sri Lanka's new government should immediately reverse the drift towards militarization and end the reliance on draconian security laws and crackdowns on peaceful protests.
- 12 UN Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif says she encourages Sri Lanka's new government to embark on a national dialogue to advance human rights and reconciliation.
- 21 President Ranil Wickremesinghe reiterates his calls on the armed forces to maintain law and order throughout the country.
- 23 President Ranil Wickremesinghe issues order designating High Security Zones in Colombo.
- 24 Socialist Youth Union, the youth wing of the political party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, holds a protest march against the use of PTA to detain protesters. Eighty-four protesters are arrested.
- 30 Year-on-year food inflation climbs to 85.8%.  
Year-on-year consumer inflation hits record high of 73.7%.

## OCTOBER

- 1 President Ranil Wickremesinghe revokes order issued on 23 September on the designation of High Security Zones.
- 6 UN Human Rights Council adopts resolution on Sri Lanka renewing the mandate of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to collect and preserve evidence of alleged war crimes that occurred during Sri Lanka's civil war.
- 7 IUSF member Hashan Jeewantha, detained under the PTA, is released without charge.  
Police prevent protest participants from using a sound system to amplify music played at a protest in Nugegoda, Colombo.
- 9 Police disperse peaceful candlelight vigil held at Galle Face Green in Colombo to commemorate those who died during the *aragalaya*. Six protesters are arrested.
- 10 Police block protest march organized by lawyers and professionals at Galle Face Green in Colombo.
- 12 President Ranil Wickremesinghe states that participation of children at public protest should be prohibited.
- 18 Police block IUSF protest march on the Colombo-Kandy road. Eight protesters are arrested.  
Parliament adopts legislation to liberalize oil imports.
- 20 President Ranil Wickremesinghe reiterates his calls on the armed forces to maintain law and order throughout the country.

- 21 Parliament adopts the 22<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, aimed at curbing executive powers and increasing anti-corruption safeguards.

## NOVEMBER

- 2 Police block large peaceful protest march in Colombo organized by political parties, trade unions, and student bodies.  
Sri Lanka Air Force officers block protest walk by two *aragalaya* activists from Ambepussa, Sabaragamuwa Province, to Colombo, Western Province.
- 8 UN states 6.3 million people (28% of the population) in Sri Lanka face “moderate-to-severe acute food insecurity.”
- 9 Police disrupts candlelight vigil at Galle Face Green in Colombo to remember those who died during the *aragalaya*.  
National day of solidarity marked, with protest taking place in various locations in four provinces.  
Two-hour nationwide power outage occurs.
- 10 World Bank ranks Sri Lanka sixth in a list of 10 countries with the world’s highest food inflation.
- 12 Police block two women protesters holding placards during a peaceful walk from Kalutara, Western Province, to Colombo’s Galle Face Green. The two protesters are physically harassed, obstructed from walking, and subsequently arrested.
- 14 Police block peaceful drama performance protest in front of the UN office in Colombo and arrest 15 protesters, including member of Parliament Hirunika Premachandra.
- 17 Police block peaceful protest at the Liberty roundabout in Colombo.
- 18 Police block peaceful protest marches organized by the IUSF in Colombo and use teargas and water cannons to disperse participants.
- 21 President Ranil Wickremesinghe reiterates his calls on the armed forces to maintain law and order throughout the country.
- 23 President Ranil Wickremesinghe tells Parliament that he will use the armed forces and emergency powers to prevent another *aragalaya* protest movement.  
The Colombo Magistrate’s Court grants bail to Inter University Bhikkhus’ Federation Convenor Venerable Galwewa Siridhamma Thero.  
Inter University Bhikkhus’ Federation Convenor Venerable Galwewa Siridhamma Thero remanded again by the Kaduwela Magistrate’s Court until 6 December over his involvement in another protest.

## DECEMBER

- 6 Kaduwela Magistrate’s Court releases on bail Inter University Bhikkhus’ Federation Convenor Venerable Galwewa Siridhamma Thero and Wasantha Mudalige. Wasantha Mudalige remains detained pending a separate case.
- 18 President Ranil Wickremesinghe inaugurates Christmas carnival at the former location of the Gota Go Gama protest site near the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo.

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**Director of publication:**  
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**Editor:**  
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FIDH  
**Design:**  
FIDH/CB



**The Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRD)** is a non-governmental organization working towards the advancement of democracy and human rights through peaceful means. Established in 1997 in Sri Lanka by lawyers and activists, CHRD is currently the country's leading organization providing free legal services to the political prisoners detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). CHRD's primary identity has been its legal assistance program, around which its other activities of social mobilization and advocacy have been built. CHRD's strength is its grassroots human rights defenders' network and its holistic approach to working with victims. All activities of the organization are designed to be victim/civic centered. CHRD has been engaging in a campaign for abolishing the PTA and the release of political prisoners for almost 20 years.

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