

Joint Press Release

5th Meeting of the European Union – Sri Lanka Working Group on Good Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights

1. The fifth Working Group on Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights met in Colombo on 29th September 2021.
2. The Working Group meeting took place in the context of regular bilateral exchanges between the European Union (EU) and Sri Lanka. During the one-day meeting, held in a cordial and open atmosphere, the two partners reaffirmed their commitment to good governance, adherence to the rule of law, and protection of human rights. They discussed common interests pertaining to the protection and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms, and agreed to continue cooperation on issues of relevance.
3. The EU and Sri Lanka exchanged experiences in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Sri Lanka appreciated the EU's contribution to COVAX which supports vaccine equity and benefits developing countries.
4. The EU reiterated the importance of fostering social, economic and political inclusion through justice, reconciliation and accountability. The two sides discussed the 20th Amendment, independence of the judiciary, separation of powers and the ongoing work of independent institutions. The two sides reiterated the importance of the effective functioning of independent institutions.
5. Sri Lanka updated the EU on the extensive legal reform programme undertaken by the Ministry of Justice, through consultative processes that brought together officials, sector experts and members of the official and unofficial Bars. The EU encouraged Sri Lanka to consider a broad consultation process in this undertaking.
6. The EU and Sri Lanka agreed on the importance of engaging civil society and giving it the necessary space to function in all its diversity. The EU expressed its readiness to continue supporting Sri Lanka in these efforts.
7. The Working Group discussed matters related to minorities and measures to address hate speech. Sri Lanka highlighted the pluralistic composition of the country where the rights of all communities are equally guaranteed by the Constitution.
8. Sri Lanka provided an update on the action in process to review the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and reiterated its commitment to bring it in line with international norms and standards within a time bound process. The EU and Sri Lanka agreed to take stock of progress in this regard by the next meeting of the EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission in early 2022. The need to uphold international norms and standards of human rights while countering terrorism and violent extremism was also underlined.

9. The EU reiterated its opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances. Welcoming the continued moratorium, the EU encouraged Sri Lanka to take steps towards the formal abolition of capital punishment.
10. Both sides discussed cooperation with the Human Rights Council, including treaty bodies, special procedures and universal periodic review. They agreed to work towards enhancing cooperation in multilateral fora, including in the achievement of the SDGs by 2030 in the United Nations framework.
11. The Working Group was co-chaired by Ms. Manisha Gunasekera, Director General Europe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka and Mr. Ioannis Giogkarakis-Argyropoulos, Head of South Asia Division, European External Action Service.