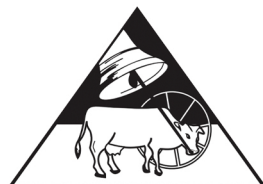




ANNUAL REPORT 2023



LAW & SOCIETY TRUST
கிறியிஸ் ஐசாக்க் ஐசாக்க்
சட்டம் மற்றும் சமூக நம்பிக்கை

CALL TO ACTION

A HUMAN RIGHTS – CENTERED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AS A RESPONSE TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Economic growth without investment in human development is unsustainable – and unethical.

Amartya Sen

Human development, as an approach, is concerned with what I take to be the basic development idea: namely, advancing the richness of human life, rather than the richness of the economy in which human beings live, which is only a part of it.

..... The success of a society is to be evaluated primarily by the freedom. that members of the society enjoy.”

Amartya Sen

Human rights are key in shaping the economic and governance crisis that Sri Lanka faces. The crisis response has a broad and pervasive impact on people's lives and livelihoods. Today and in the years to come. It impacts the life chances of future generations. A human rights approach to the crisis will shape the human development choices that the state makes and will put people centre-stage. Responses that are shaped by and respect human rights result in better outcomes in beating the economic crisis by ensuring safety nets and future opportunities for everyone and preserving human dignity. This approach will focus our attention on who is suffering most, why, and what can be done about it. They prepare the ground now for emerging from this crisis with more equitable and sustainable societies, development and peace.

COVER PHOTOS

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2. www.wows.org, World Socialist Website (2023). Over 1,000 workers protest in Colombo against Sri Lankan government's social attacks.
3. India Times, The Times of India Website (2023). Sri Lankan Parliament votes to debate controversial online safety bill
4. www.theleader.lk, The Leader Website (2023). Draft ATA's presentation in House delayed by several weeks.
5. Ruwanpathirana, T. Sri Lanka Brief Website (2023). Sri Lanka's LGBTQ+ community holds Pride march, demands end to discrimination.
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WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The Law & Society Trust (LST) is a not-for-profit organisation engaged in legal research, advocacy and human rights documentation.

The late Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam founded the Law & Society Trust in 1982 in Colombo, Sri Lanka under the Trust Ordinance. LST was subsequently incorporated in 1992 under the Companies Act No. 17 of 1982 and given Registration No. N(A) 211. LST has since re-registered as required by law under the new Companies Act No.07 of 2007.

LST's goals are the promotion of legal reforms for access to justice, judicial enforcement of rights, and public accountability.

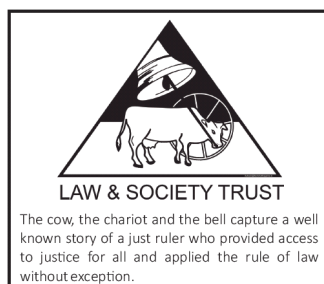
LST aims to use rights-based strategies to promote and protect human rights, enhance public accountability and strengthen respect for the rule of law.

LST has built strong networks across communities by implementing effective programmes and engaging in human rights advocacy. LST's advocacy is based on

sound research and LST operates to expand democratic spaces wherever they exist. It does so by strengthening institutions, promoting equal access and upholding good governance through the practice of honesty, transparency and persistent inquiry.

The programme interventions have included human rights education, advocacy, training and engagements with community-based organisations and duty-bearers at the district and national levels. It also engages with judges, lawyers and opinion leaders.

The organization also focuses on building networks and coalitions of human rights activists and defenders at the national and international levels. The knowledge gained through these efforts has shaped the strategies and approaches adopted in all of LST's programmes.



VISION MISSION AND GOALS

Vision

A society free from war, discrimination and social injustice and based upon human dignity for all.

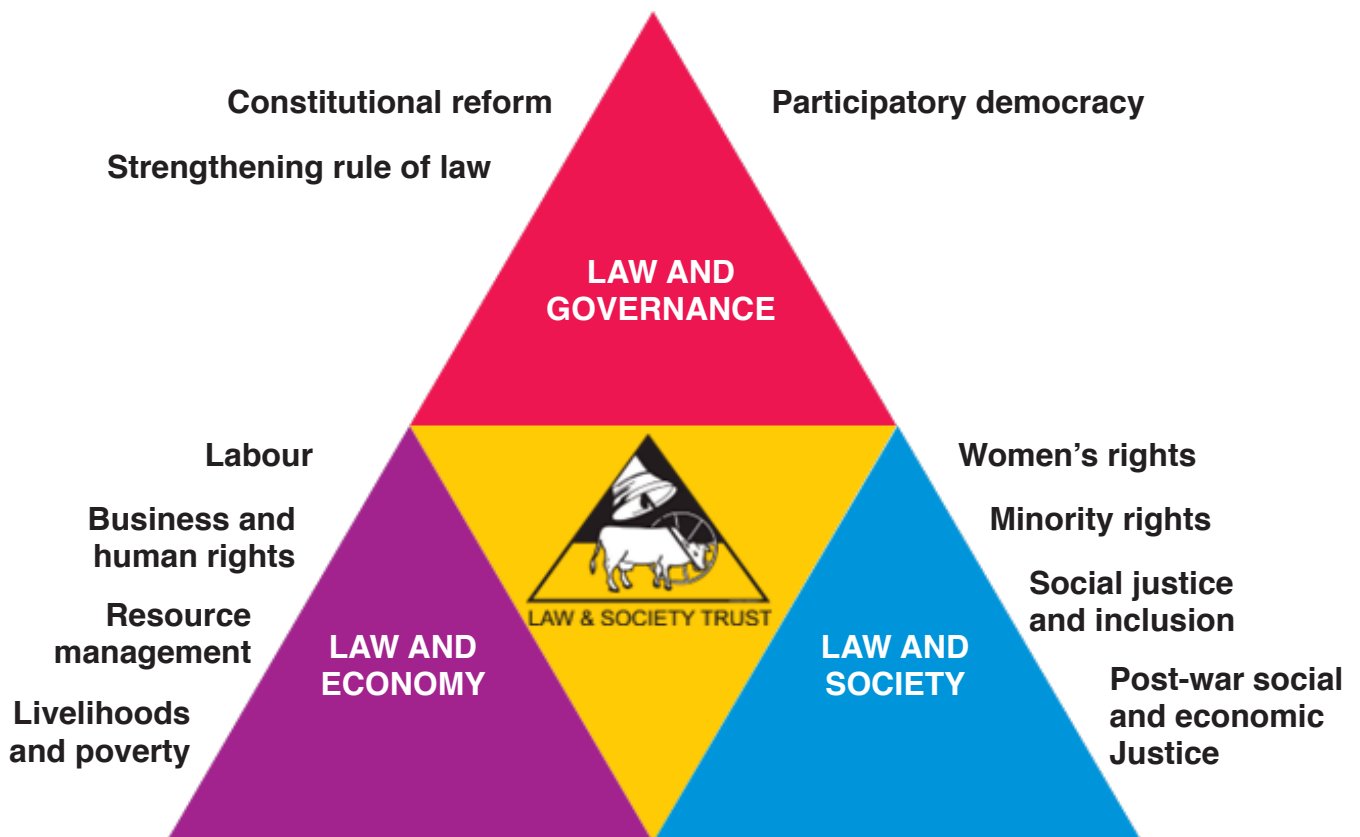
Mission

To utilize rights-based strategies in research, documentation and advocacy, and to promote the full realization of the rule of law, justiciability of rights and public accountability.

Goals

1. To be a leader in national-level policy and legislative changes
2. To be a change maker in perceptions, attitudes and traditions which affect rights
3. To be a space maker for human rights discourse
4. To advocate for effective accountability ensuring good governance, transparency, equality and social justice
5. To empower and build the capacity of rights holders

HOW WE WORK : INTERCONNECTED WORK CLUSTERS



BOARD OF DIRECTORS, STAFF AND CONSULTANTS

Board of Directors

Dr. J A S Felix PC - Chairman
Mr. Geoffrey J.T. Alagaratnam PC
Ms. Anushya Coomaraswamy
Prof. Fathima Farzana Haniffa
Mr. Tissa Jayatilaka
Prof. Remini Sharya Scharenguivel

Company Secretary

Secretarius (Private) Ltd

Auditors

Ernst & Young - External Auditors
Jayasinghe and Company - Internal Auditors

Senior Management Team

Dr. Sakuntala Kadirgamar - Executive Director
Mr. Sandun Thudugala - Director of Programmes
Ms. Hasara Fernando - Head of Finance and Administration up to 30.06.2023
Ms. Rachithra Sandanayaka – Head of Finance from 18.10.2023

Program and Research Staff

Mr. Vidura Munasinghe - Senior Researcher
Mr. W.R. Anura Nisanka – Communications Manager
Ms. H.M. Chathurika Sewwandi – Program Manager
Mr. Madasamy Vijeyakanth – Project Coordinator & Researcher
Mr. Sakuna Gamage – Project Coordinator from 01.09.2023
Mr. Malinga Prasad Jayaratne – Project Coordinator
Mr. Nikshan Vasantharasa – Project Officer from 01.09.2023

Human Resources and Administration

Ms. Janaki Kamani Dharmasena - Human Resources and Administration Manager

Finance Unit

Ms. Sagarika Nilmini – Project Accountant
Ms. Dharshika Anthonyraj – Project Accountant
Mr. Prasanna Kaminde Gajaweera – Assistant Accountant & Logistic Manager
Ms. Hashini Bandara – Project Accountant from 01.09.2023

Publications

Ms. Dilhara Pathirana - Editor

Library

Ms. W.M.T. Arosha P. Wasala – Librarian

Support Staff

Mr. M. Chandran

Consultants

Ms. Marisa De Silva – PARL Coordinator

Mr. Prabath Hemantha Kumara – Project Coordinator

Ms. Anuradhi Jayasinghe – Researcher up to June 2023

Mr. Sakuna M. Gamage – Researcher up to August 2023

Mr. Michael Mendis – Researcher

Mr. T. Suvirthan – Research Assistant up to February 2023

Ms. Anusha Gayathri Selvendran – Research Assistant up to February 2023

Ms. Vraie Cally Balthazaar – Researcher

Mr. Amila Udagedara – Media Coordinator

Ms. Megara Tegal – Researcher up to August 2023

Ms. Rasmi Fathima Rasma – Research Assistant up to May 2023

Mr. Chathuranga Pradeep Kumara – Researcher & Digital Content Producer

Ms. Sobiya Vincendepaul – Research Assistant up to June 2023

Ms. Fathima Hasna Hasbullah – Research Assistant up to October 2023

Project Coordinator from November 2023

Ms. Methara Serany Serasundera – up to March 2023

Ms. Vyshnavi Manogaran – up to July 2023

Mr. Nikshan Vasantharasa – Coordinator from March 2023 to August 2023

Ms. S.H.Tekla Maduwanthi – Library Assistant

Ms. G.L. Sakuni Dinusha – Research Assistant from May 2023

Mr.. B. Skanthakumar – Researcher from June 2023

Ms. G. Melani Rasanga Premasiri – Project Coordinator from June 2023

Ms.. Amitha Priyanthi – Research Assistant from 15 June 2023

Ms. Ermiza Tegal – Legal Researcher from November 2023

Ms. Namashya Rathnayake – Research Assistant from November 2023

Mr. Selvaratnam Subasgaran – Researcher from July 2023

Ms. Sinthuja Sritharan – Researcher from July 2023

Mr. Ramasamy Vijayakumar – Research Assistant from July 2023
Ms. Madulika Rupasinghe Gunawardena – Research Assistant from July 2023
Ms. Hasara Fernando – Finance Consultant from July 2023
Ms. Yathursha Ulakendran – Researcher from July 2023
Ms. Mohamed Rafaithu Shafiya Roshan – Researcher from July 2023
Ms. Rajeshwaran Babyshalini – Researcher from July 2023
Mr. Vasuthevan Vasantharajah – Researcher from July 2023
Mr. Ashan Hasitha Kumara – Research Assistant from July 2023
Mr. R.M. Tharindu Milan Davinda Ratnayake – Research Assistant from August 2023
Mr. K.M. Damith Chathuranga Premaratne – Research Assistant from August 2023
Mr. Upul Kumara Wickramasinghe – Researcher from September 2023
Mr. H.P. Dhanusha Gihan Pathirana – Researcher from September 2023
Ms.. A.A. Hasini M. Abeysinghe – Research Assistant from September 2023
Mr. W. Sudantha Madhawa Fernando – Research Assistant from September 2023
Ms. Saranthaman Mangaladharshini – Research Assistant from October 2023
Ms. Madhushika Ananthaseelan – Research Assistant from October 2023
Ms. Kamaleshwaran Vithursha – Research Assistant from November 2023
Ms. Isuri Udayangana Rodrigo – Legal Researcher from December 2023
Ms. V.P. Tharushi Dilshara Fernando – Legal Researcher from December 2023

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE : HOW SHOULD SRI LANKA REMEMBER THE YEAR 2023?

The year 2023 commemorates a variety of anniversaries and it is for us, Sri Lankans to review their significance. It marks seventy-eight years since we first enjoyed universal franchise (1931), and seventy-five years of independence (1948). We should reflect on what we have achieved in these years in terms of our democratic development. Did we use the franchise and freedom to build a nation founded on social cohesion, a strong economy and political institutions to consolidate our fledgling democracy?

Counting down, 2023 marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Citizenship Act when Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) disenfranchised the Tamils living and working on the plantations and serving as the engines of our growth. It was the newly independent Ceylon's first act of social and political exclusion. This was followed by the Sinhala Only Act passed in 1956 which was accompanied by the first of many bouts of communal violence. Thus, fifty-seven years ago we chose to adopt a language policy that was both divisive and limiting – shutting Sri Lankan youth from the international arena through their access to an international language. The year 2023 marks thirty-nine years since the District Development Council elections and the burning of the Jaffna Library (1982), forty years since the riots of July 1983 which heralded a full-fledged civil war and thirty-six years since the Indian government sent in troops to keep the peace in Sri Lanka's messy civil war. It also marks fourteen years since the civil war ended (2009), but despite convening commissions of inquiry and exercises in lessons learned from the conflict, little was done to foster national reconciliation. The year 2023 also marks nine years since the anti-Muslim riots in Aluthgama, three years since the anti-Muslim riots in Digana and four years since the Easter Sunday bombings of Catholic

Churches and tourist establishments (2019) for which there has been no accountability and it is a year since the Aragalaya protests ousted an incompetent and unpopular President (2022) while demanding a "system change".

In between these past seventy-five years, Sri Lanka has witnessed two insurrections led by discontented Sinhala youth (1971 and 1989) and a thirty-year civil war for secession stemming from the unmet political demands of Tamil youth. All this transpired within the framework of one of Asia's oldest democracies. What went wrong and can we turn the corner despite this?

Looking at our neighbours

We cannot fail to see the economic strides that other countries in South and Southeast Asia have made since they gained their freedom and were responsible for their governments. India (1947), Malaya (1952) Singapore (1962) Bangladesh (1972) and South Korea after the Korean War dividing the country (1953). They too had their struggles. India's independence was accompanied by the partition of the sub-continent into East and West Pakistan, the displacement of populations, murder, riots, anarchy and mayhem. Malaya's independence was overshadowed by a communist insurgency and Singapore, at the time of separation from Malaya was extremely vulnerable, with no resources at hand. South Korea was emerging after the Korean War and the division of the Korean Peninsula between North and South Korea. Sri Lanka's political establishment learned the wrong lessons in political economy from the success of Southeast Asia – that they were successful because they were authoritarian rather than their commitment to professionalism, their investments in education and a strategically

planned economy. In this bleak litany of anniversaries, Sri Lanka had some high points when the cricket team won the World Cup in 1996. A great achievement for a country that played its first test match in 1982. Commitment, dedication, good leadership, a team chosen on merit and team-building secured that victory.

From System Change to Halt the Change

The Aragalaya was akin to the Arab Spring for the political and social upheavals that it caused, only to revert to square one. Remarkably, in Sri Lanka too, the incompetent President forced to depart due to the Aragalaya was replaced in 2022 by a Parliamentarian who did not even win his seat. The existing system made that switch legal and constitutional, although, in the eyes of the people demanding a “system change”, it lacks legitimacy. The president ousted by the people’s protests was subsequently found by the Supreme Court, to be one of the actors responsible for the economic crisis. Nevertheless, he walks free in the country and enjoys a state pension and the perks arranged for a former president.

While enmeshed with all these anniversaries, Sri Lankans will remember 2023 as the year of our bankruptcy and the year in which we were constrained to accept the 17th structural adjustment programme determined by the International Monetary Fund. It is an anniversary that calls for a sombre reflection on what we have done to this country when we were in charge of its reserves, its resources and its destiny.

Untangling the debates and dilemmas around Sovereignty and independence

Nevertheless, Sri Lanka celebrated seventy-five years of independence with jet planes streaking across the skies and President Ranil Wickremasinghe taking the salute at the military parades. The pageantry

was subdued – there were bills to be paid, but still, there was pageantry when there should have been a collective and sombre national soul-searching.

The IMF and Structural Adjustment Programme

The International Monetary Fund and the structural adjustment plan it proposed became a lightning conductor for comment, criticism and protests. The IMF and the inequalities embedded in the global economic order became a magnet for resentment. The criticism was also followed by some soul-searching. Did Sri Lanka have other alternatives? Could the government have negotiated better, engaged parliament more fully and explained it to the public better? Our responsibility for the crisis is rather muted. The corruption, the tax cuts, and the profligate spending on projects that do not yield a return garnered less attention. The IMF plan is almost an orphan – only the president stands by it. His Parliamentary backers have distanced themselves from it, even as they voted for it! The parties that purport to be the “governments-in-waiting” claim they will renegotiate it. Nevertheless, the people must endure the impact of reduced social spending, and the high cost of living as many subsidies are removed as they remain fearful of the future for themselves and their families.

Strengthening Rule by Law and Not the Rule of Law

Under the guise of enacting economy-related measures, promoted as “unpopular but necessary” austerity measures to recover from the country’s economic crisis, the government has undertaken a broad legislative agenda. These include The Inland Revenue (Amendment) Act No. 14 of 2023, the Aswesuma welfare benefit payment scheme, the Microfinance Credit and Regulatory Authority Bill, a slew of labour reforms that strip workers of protection and Anti- Terrorism legislation that augurs to be more repressive than the Prevention of Terrorism Law that it seeks to replace.

During this year, to the civil and political rights of people continue threatened by the arbitrary use of the International Convention on Civil, and Political Rights Act, signified by the arrest of a stand-up comedian accused of causing ethnic and religious disharmony, this is compounded by the “Operation Yuthika” which is a campaign to eradicate drug abuse, targeting buyers and sellers alike while giving the police unrestricted and unfettered powers.

An outcome of the IMF oversight is the Sri Lanka Technical Assistance Report – Government Diagnostic Assessment which may still be the silver lining among the dark clouds and gathering storm. Even as civil society deplores the burdens put on the population through this structural adjustment programme this may be a tool to ensure accountability for the future, given that we failed to ensure rational and corruption-free government in the past.

Our representatives under the spotlight

In 2023, the Supreme Court’s unanimous decision to approve the power of a political party to expel one of its members, thus ensuring their dismissal from Parliament was considered to be a landmark. Such a decision was made after former Minister of Environment Ahamed Nazeer Zainulabdeen was expelled from his party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, for going against his party’s decision by accepting a ministerial position. Expulsion from his party stripped him of his seat and thereby his ministerial position. Sri Lankans have watched with frustration and dismay as politicians elected based on their membership in a particular party and commitment to that party’s mandate, blithely cross over when they are offered positions as cabinet ministers or as state ministers, degrading peoples’ expectations of their representatives.

However, following the dismissal of Ahamed Nazeer Zainulabdeen, the controversial Minister of Health Keheliya Rambukwella was given a lateral transfer and was sworn in as the new Minister of Environment despite

many accusations levelled against him for corrupt practices. In December – Janaka Chandragupta, former Secretary of the Ministry of Health, was arrested by the CID over the controversial human Immunoglobulin import issue. Parliamentarian Ali Sabri Raheem is arrested at the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) in Katunayake for smuggling a 3.5 kg stock of undeclared gold. We are surely entitled to ask our government – “Quo Vadis Sri Lanka’s democracy?”

Even in the aftermath of the pandemic, economic crisis and intense public protest, the government and parliamentarians and senior government officials demonstrated that they have little appetite for clean politics. We must interrogate these events to determine whether these lapses are due to individual flaws or whether these transgressions are possible because the system is flawed and permits, even enables corruption and abuse of power.

Rising environmental challenges

Although Sri Lanka claims to be committed to wildlife conservation and the protection of wildlife, government policies and actions do not represent this commitment. It is citizens’ activism that has protected the environment. The Department of Wildlife Conservation cancelled plans to export 100,000 endangered toque macaque Old World monkeys to China after several environmentalists initiated legal action in the Court of Appeal against the export. The ill-treatment of Tusker ‘Muthu Raja’ was highlighted by active citizens and the elephant was airlifted to Thailand by a special flight.

The incidents of human-elephant conflict have increased and there is no evidence of policies to address this issue. Inconsistent and incoherent policies on the management of forests, reserves, village expansion and agricultural development have led to the shrinking of the elephant habitat, forcing them to maraud into villages and farmlands. Villagers protest that people mourn the loss of elephants (a draw for tourists) more than they do the deaths of villagers and the destruction of their homes and crops.

Poorly planned development has led to a decline in the quality of air in parts of Sri Lanka, with the air quality index (AQI) in Colombo reaching an “unhealthy” level of concern and this will have an impact on the health sector and people’s access to their fundamental right to health.

So, 2023 calls for reflection, critical analysis and a call for action to align our development with human rights-centred development strategies, both as a response to the economic crisis and in planning for a sustainable future. In the past 75 years we have deconstructed our understanding of the state, society and democracy and the challenge is to reconstruct it. Sri Lanka’s democracy and economy can only be redeemed by an active citizenry.

Dr. Sakuntala Kadirgamar
Executive Director

LAW AND SOCIETY TRUST IN 2023: RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS AND SUPPORTING ACTIVE CITIZENRY

Governance challenges

The ‘system change’, envisaged by people, especially the youth, during the ‘Aragalaya’ - the people’s struggle, is yet to become a reality. Elite political classes continue to hold the key decision-making powers in the country and remain dominant. The immense powers that are vested with the Executive Presidency have been used to suppress any form of people’s uprising from recurring. Attempts by the people to protest or organize themselves after the Aragalaya have been suppressed violently by the state using police and military powers. Democratic institutions, procedures and civic spaces are being shut down. Independent institutions of accountability such as the National Human Rights Commission, the Election Commission and other independent bodies were sidelined. The President and the Government have overwhelmed the democratic process by postponing local and provincial government elections, conducting a spate of arrests of activists and passing a plethora of laws – derisively called the “Shut-up laws”. These laws are designed to suppress freedom of speech and movement and the right to organize and protest as well as express themselves in cyberspace. The Government having passed the discredited Online Safety Bill, is currently trying to enact a range of new laws including the Anti-Terror Bill to replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the new NGO Act to suppress the people’s rights and freedoms further.

Economic challenges

Economic reforms were implemented as per the IMF agreement and they were done with limited or no consultation, increasing the burden on the poor. The Value Added Tax has increased the cost of almost all consumer products. The removal of subsidies provided for electricity and fuel has increased the prices of these utilities almost threefold. The

impact of food insecurity, indebtedness and dispossession are disproportionately higher on women. The government is determined to make sweeping changes to the economic and legal structure of the country to facilitate the IMF agreement, although they do not have a legitimate mandate to do so.

Re-emergence of active citizenry

The Aragalaya, the “People’s Struggle” confounded cynics and sceptics and swept aside a seemingly all-powerful President and Prime Minister. Ethnic and religious harmony, reconciliation and a determination to fight racism were some of the prominent slogans of the protest movement, and a visibly mixed community, cutting across religious, ethnic and class lines and the urban/ rural divide participated in the Aragalaya. It created a window of hope and optimism. Ideally, these sentiments should be harnessed and reinforced. Anger and frustration are strong emotions that catalyze protests but for reforms and change to be introduced and sustained there must be concerted actions based on strategic interventions, and not on tactics alone. The emotions and impulses must be transformed into a political movement that adopts strategies and tactics.

Key to building a pluralistic and inclusive society

The year 2023 for LST was a year of trying to protect whatever democratic and civic spaces existed while the people were envisaging an agenda for a new Sri Lanka. LST has stood with activists and their movements to protect the rights of human rights defenders and activists who have been targeted by the State after the protest movement. We believe that protecting the rights of people expressing their ideas to advance democracy is key to building a pluralistic and inclusive society.

We worked with other civil society organizations, trade unions, academics, and activists to challenge the introduction of oppressive legal reforms. LST facilitated broad-based discourses and platforms to analyze and critique the impacts of the economic reforms on the democratic and human rights of the people, given that the government is pushing ahead with the reforms without any public consultation or transparency.

LST has created platforms for various sections of society to envisage and articulate the 'system change' to which they aspire. Initiatives such as the People's Parliament have enabled not only the youth engaged in Aragalaya, but also other communities in the North, the East, the Upcountry and other places to collectively discuss building an agenda for the future.

Building the power of people so they can, not only hold the rulers accountable but also win the right to set their agenda is a key takeaway from Aragalaya. Supporting public participation and active citizenship have been the foundation for LSTs' work for several years. In 2023 we have seen new rays of hope that may make this materialize.

Sandun Thudugala
Director of Programmes

THE LAW AND SOCIETY TRUST'S WORK IN 2023

The Law and Society Trust's overall goal is to support the establishment of a society free from violent conflict, discrimination, and social injustice and based upon human dignity for all. In 2023, LST continued its commitment to support economic, social and cultural rights and political and governance reforms in Sri Lanka. Many of these activities are interconnected cutting across the spectrum of the economy, the society and politics reaffirming the understanding that there are no clear demarcations between indivisible human rights.

In the course of 2023, LSTs programmes focussed on law and governance reforms, land rights, and labour rights and discriminatory cultural norms LST engaged directly and through social media, with 693272 rights holders. Of these numbers, 3462 were men, 4714 were women and 36 were intersex. However, these programmes are interlocking and neat boundaries between programmes cannot be defined. Engagements focusing on law and economy have implications on society and governance and vice versa.

Law and Economy

Women, youth, workers, and rural communities can influence policy, legal and system reforms to ensure economic justice and environmental sustainability.
(Law and Economy)

Investing in women's leadership and consolidating women's labour rights Women in the formal sector – trade union leadership

The trade union sector in Sri Lanka has historically been a male-dominated space. Even in export processing zones, where the majority are women workers, women leaders rarely get an opportunity to represent decision-making platforms with duty bearers or employers. LSTs work with women's organizations in Export Processing Zones and have supported them in getting their agendas recognised by the authorities. Leaders of the five women organizations LST is working with are regularly invited for discussions with the Ministry, Labour Department, Board of Investment (BOI) and employers' associations. Building the capacities of women to engage in leadership positions in political, economic and social spaces is a key programme priority for LST. In 2023 we saw around 25 women who were a part of the leadership training programmes conducted by LST gaining nominations to contest in local government elections. These women who represented rural women farmers, local civil society

organizations and activist groups were recognized by political parties as leaders due to their role in the socio-economic enhancements of their communities. They could not contest as the elections were postponed, but LST will continue to work with these women, profiling them as leaders and as creating a social discourse on the importance of women's leadership in social, economic and political spaces.

LST has continuously engaged with women workers and their organizations in the export processing Zones (EPZs) in Sri Lanka, and these women gained skills, enabling them to organize as a women-led organization and movement and to engage in key advocacy initiatives as a collective. This has helped them to gain recognition from the State as well as the private sector as a key stakeholder in workers' rights-related issues. This is evident from the regular requests they receive from the state and employers' associations to attend meetings, give interviews and be engaged. Most of these women's organizations are now also registered as Trade Unions and can represent women workers, and speak to their needs and aspirations in formal spaces with the Government and employers.

Supporting women farmers

LST's work with women farmers and their organizations has resulted in the formation of a national-level women's forum 'Women's Collective for Economic Justice' to provide critique and alternatives with a feminist perspective on economic rights issues. The Collective has provided their inputs for the national budget 2024, proposed a national food security bill and a micro-credit regulatory act in 2023. They have also conducted many press briefings to express their ideas on contemporary economic issues.

Supporting women to respond to the debt crisis

LST, in partnership with the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) conducted a workshop in Sri Lanka to build a feminist response to the debt crisis in Sri Lanka. This workshop included a partnership with other women's organizations such as the Women and Media Collective, Feminist Collective for Economic Justice, Colombo Urban Lab and the National Fisheries Solidarity Movement.

Law and Society

People of all identities are working together for a society that recognizes and respects plurality, equality, and justice for all (Law and Society)

Combatting discrimination and increasing social cohesion : Fronting Women's Rights

Building on the research conducted on gender discriminatory social norms in the Northern Province, and the research publication (2022), LST initiated a consultative process with school teachers, academics, students and officials on the need to reshape school curricula to address gender discriminatory social norms that are deeply embedded in

the culture and which implicitly shape societal attitudes and responses to women and girls. LST conducted 4 discussions with school teachers in the Northern province covering all five districts. 116 teachers participated in all the discussions. These discussions focused on the impacts of gender-discriminatory social norms on school children. In each discussion, their reflections and recommendations were collected and will be incorporated into the policy document. Desk research was also conducted to identify the gender-discriminatory social norms prevailing in the school textbooks. School textbooks from grade 1 to grade 13 were referenced and gender-discriminatory texts, pictures and contents were identified.

They have already started an initiative to get their identity cards revised after the gender transformation. An active media campaign was conducted by LST to disseminate the research findings about gender discriminatory social norms and 364,169 people were reached through the media campaign.

Commemorating International Women's Day

In honour of International Women's Day, we presented a series of insightful panel discussions that amplify diverse voices and perspectives. Across four thought-provoking sessions, we address crucial issues such as domestic and gender-based violence, advocating for a world where safety is a fundamental right. Our exploration extends to creating better workplaces for the queer community, championing inclusivity and equality.


- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efaWeaaao54&t=1217s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiNP3Ax5MX0&t=136s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgHN85lnZik&t=744s>

Fronting the Rights of LGBTIQ+

A discussion was conducted with the LGBTIQ+ communities on their rights and the impacts of discriminatory social norms on the ground. 25 members from the transgender community joined with discussion and other related activities. LST is continuing to work with the LGBTIQ community in the Northern Province to develop their capacities to advocate for their rights.

Fronting Women's Right :

The summary of the reach is below



Social media and other mainstream media 363,399 reached	• Facebook , websites , blogs and E news papers, YouTube , interviews and videos
20 Forum theaters 1480 reached Drama teams stage these drama even after the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drama Festival in Jaffna 300• Drama Festival in Kilinochchi 80• Drama Festival in Mullaitivu 350• Drama Festival in Mannar 250• Drama Festival in Vavuniya 500
21 physical dialogs with cartoons and research findings . 764 people reached 20 cartoons were developed.	• Discussions with school teachers, midwives, youth , university students, fishery women, Garments workers, women activists

Building a network of young lawyers, law students and political leaders

LST worked with approximately 15 young lawyers and approximately 20 law students to enhance their capacities to address human rights violations and gender-based violence cases in the North. 3 training programs were conducted with them and they were also part of the referral network established by LST to support affected communities. In 2023 this network facilitated legal support for 131 cases. "Women in politics " is one of LST's thematic areas of work and LST provides spaces for women candidates who are planning to contest the upcoming election to share their perceptions of their journey as women leaders in this society and their experiences in politics. The objectives were to promote them as women politicians and support their political leadership through innovative social media. One participant shared her interest in entering into politics. 26 women leaders who were part of LST training programs are being nominated to contest in local elections.

Supporting community resilience Access to justice

Ensuring the rights of people is key to respectful coexistence. LST has been working with human rights activists, civil society organizations, lawyers etc., to ensure the rights of the most marginalized and vulnerable were protected during times of crisis. International human rights organizations including UNHRC in their statement in March 2023 have raised their concerns about the oppression against activists and this has provided a level of protection to activists. LST has worked continuously with lawyers to provide legal support for key fundamental rights cases filled by CSOs and activists, some of these cases supported activists to challenge the violations of their fundamental rights through arbitrary arrests and detention. There is strong public resistance against the new Anti-terror Act (ATA) and other repressive laws that are proposed. This pressure resulted in the Government being compelled to withdraw the ATA draft bill twice in 2023. Lawyers, professionals, activists trade unions and CSOs carried out collective campaigns

against repressive laws (#NoShutupLaws). This collective action was evident in the 50 fundamental rights petitions filed against the Online Safety Bill and over 30 petitions against ATA.

Evidence-based research on land rights

Working with the People's Alliance for Right to Land (PARL), LST developed 3 research papers aiming to contribute to drafting a framework for an alternative land policy. One paper was presented at the Symposium of the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) of the University of Colombo. All three papers will be presented at the PARL land rights colloquium to be held on 23-24 January 2024. After incorporating the comments of the colloquium, the 3 research papers will be finalized and published and 3 policy briefs will also be published based on the recommendations emerging from the research papers.

Providing platforms and spaces for social dialogue

The People's Parliament was an articulation of the aspirations and proposals made by the people who joined the 'Aragalaya' protest movement and other longer-term struggles in Sri Lanka. These long-term struggles included the struggles of groups in the North and the East, the plantation communities and rural farmers. It captures the elements of the 'system change' they envisaged for Sri Lanka. The final report of the People's Parliament was launched in March 2023 in Colombo. The launch was attended by representatives of various community struggles, activists, political parties and media. During the event discussions were conducted on the three main themes of the People's Parliament report which are: a people-centred economy; democracy and peace and reconciliation. The People's Parliament will be used as a collective platform to bring people from various ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds together to build a common agenda for governance reforms in Sri Lanka.

Broadening the understanding of Sri Lanka's debt crisis

To address the government's lack of consultation on the proposed economic reforms, LST worked closely with a joint trade union and civil society alliance called 'UNITE' to campaign for workers' and citizens' rights during the economic crisis. The key focus of the collective is the IMF agreement with Sri Lanka and the conditions proposed through the agreement which are impacting negatively on the working-class people in Sri Lanka. LST provided research support on key issues such as debt restructuring, the IMF proposals and the impact of those proposals on people's economic rights.

LST has also provided logistical support for the joint trade union alliance to conduct awareness-raising workshops, meetings with duty bearers and public campaigns on the negative impact of the IMF reforms on the people.

Law and Society Trust in partnership with the Young Researchers' Network and International Development Economists' Association (IDEAs) organized a national consultation on debt restructuring of Sri Lanka. The consultation was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on the 23rd and 24th of March. Three international economists, Dr C. P. Chandrasekhar and Dr Charles Abugre from IDEAs network Ms Yeufen Li, Former United Nations Independent Expert on Debt and Human Rights; Senior Advisor, South Centre attended the workshop and some other prominent international economists and academics presented online. Around 20 academics and activists from Sri Lanka and local and international civil society organizations also attended the consultation workshop. A public seminar on Sri Lanka's economic and debt crisis and the way forward was held on the 25th at the National Library of Colombo. Approximately 40 trade union, political, and civil society activists from Sri Lanka participated in the event.

Right to health

LST initiated the People's Commission for Pandemic Justice to build a broad-based public consultation process on key reforms required to ensure that people's rights to health are secured despite the economic crisis. The commission focuses on developing evidence-based recommendations for policy, legal and administrative reforms. The Terms of Reference for the People's Commission for Pandemic Justice were finalized after a series of discussions with experts and activists. 7 experts from the fields of health, education, sociology etc. have been identified as commissioners. The survey and the public consultations will start in March 2024.

Supporting the establishment of networks - women, youth, and other vulnerable groups to become Rights holders: Strengthening livelihood options with sustained incomes

Women's Collective for Economic Justice - Engaging with Women Farmers

LST's work with women farmers and other women groups has enabled them to build a solid network of women's organizations to work on the economic rights of women in Sri Lanka. This collective successfully advocated for reforms to the Land Development Ordinance, and the removal of embedded gender-discriminatory provisions. The collective continues to engage with national and provincial authorities to address the practical challenges of implementing the Land Development Ordinance.

Women's Collective for Economic Justice has grown as a national-level platform for women to raise the economic rights-related issues of women. Submission of national budget proposals, providing inputs for national food security bills, campaigning for plantation communities' land rights and campaigning against the government's efforts to introduce oppressive legal reforms such as the Anti-Terrorism Act are some of the actions that

the collective has spearheaded.

In 2023 LST worked with 7 women farmer groups supporting them to build climate resilient agriculture models. Feasibility studies were conducted with them to identify the further areas of support needed by them. This specific support which includes technical support, training and some infrastructure support will be provided during 2024.

Supporting women farmer groups to transform food systems through sustainable and ecological agriculture practices

LST has worked with women farmers in Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee, Vavuniya, Monaragala and Bogawandalawa, facilitating technical and practical knowledge sharing, leadership and advocacy training to advance their rights. The women farmers shared their experiences including the techniques they developed to establish a cooperative approach to organic agroecology and self-sufficiency by using traditional practices to increase the nutritional value of crops. This approach has been key to creating collective resilience. Some of the women farmer groups LST have supported directly are described below.

Mother Teresa Women's Organization (MWTO) Nedunkeni, Vavuniya

In 2022 the LDO reforms enabled the MWTO to utilise the reform as a tool to get land ownership for 3 women who faced land ownership issues. The women's society also wrote a letter to the Divisional Secretariat and District Secretary to get land for 70 families for paddy cultivation. They have agreed to give the land and from the list of families who would receive ownership over 50% would be women. 20 people from this women farmer's group had training on agroecological practices through Chandanapokuna women farmers at a member's house and they applied this training in a collective agroecological garden that created self-sufficiency for the members.

Bogawandalawa Women's Organization, Bogawandalawa, Lower Division

Last year, this women's group received a piece of land from the estate management for collective farming. LST linked the Wellawaya-based women's organization named 'Vikalpani Federation' which has established and recognised expertise in agroecology, with the Bogawandalawa Women's Organization and the Vikalpani Federation provided voluntary training and knowledge on agroecological practices for the Bogawandalawa women farmers. Later they provided traditional seeds for farming. The Bogawandalawa farmers harvested their first production in the collective farm and shared the 9 types of vegetables among the 20 farmer society members. Recognising LST's commitment to advancing socio-economic rights, Jothi, the leader of the society invited LST to help some people facing issues with their land rights documentation and related issues in the new housing scheme.

Ilanthalir Women's Society - Verugal, Trincomalee

The women farmers are well known for their successful collective work on dairy production. Additionally, the women farmers initiated the production of coconut oil and oil cake to feed cows in the village. Recently they got approval from the Divisional Secretariat to construct a building for the society.

Engaging with women in the plantation community

LST convened meetings with the plantation community, enabling them to take the basic, even scant documents they received from the land commission and register them formally to consolidate their ownership of the housing they received. This documentation entitles them to use the land as collateral for bank loans, transfers to their children etc. Many women, as they continued to work on the estates as tea-pluckers received the ownership deeds in their names. LST initiated

dialogues between the new female owners and government land officers on land matters, including protecting their assets. The new female owners are supported to gain financial literacy much needed to protect their land rights as land is their sole asset. LST expects 156 deeds to be registered by the end of 2023.

Law and Governance

Citizens and civil society organizations have the information, knowledge and skills to advocate for democratic governance reforms at the national and local levels
(Law and Governance)

Strengthening opportunities for establishing value-based education that promotes plural, inclusive, and democratic values

"Freedom means breaking frames."
This served as our theme throughout a video documentary series developed to commemorate 75 years of independence. The programme was presented in both the Sinhala and Tamil mediums, and it had a wide outreach on social media.

To commemorate 75 years of independence, we presented a video documentary series and delved deep into the narratives of eight extraordinary individuals, each a unique character in their own right. Spanning both Sinhala and Tamil mediums, these interviews have a wide outreach on social media.

Critiquing repressive and anti-democratic laws

LST provided analysis and advocacy materials for CSOs, Trade Unions and other activists to challenge the government's effort to introduce a new Anti-Terror Act (ATA) in May 2023. The ATA, which was supposed to replace the existing draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act has contained even more repressive and draconian provisions, which violates a wide

array of fundamental rights and freedoms of people. LST convened a roundtable program and created several social media posts and analyses on the ATA to share with other actors. LST also provided logistics support for Trade Unions and CSOs to conduct a public seminar on the ATA. As a result of public protest, the government has temporarily withdrawn the act.

The videos can be accessed at:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AITq-kugTM&t=2666s>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qx41ZyHY-_E&t=1s
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtnNqxURMtw&t=169s>

Further advancing value-based education, LST published research on Challenges Faced by Civil Society Organisations when responding to unforeseen or sudden violence which was based on a survey and more detailed discussions with key stakeholders around the survey on the role and contributions of CSOs in addressing different forms of violence. LST also published the State of Human Rights, covering the period 2018-2020. The speakers at the book launch were Prof. Deepika Udugama, (Former Chair of the Human Rights Commission, Sri Lanka) Ms. Ermiza Tegal (Attorney at law and Human Rights Defender, Mr. Balasingham Skanthakumar (Researcher, on the political economy of development) and Ms. Tharushi Dishara Fernando (Human Rights Lawyer). They shared their perspectives on the publication and more generally on the key developments and challenges to protecting human rights in Sri Lanka.

Given the political situation of the country, LST had limited engagement with government institutions throughout 2023. But during this time, LST initiated the People's Parliament project – which was both a process and

a collective platform for communities to articulate views and to build a common agenda, find solutions for the economic and political crises including the national question and influence reforms LST established a platform called the Community Governance Platform (CGP) to engage the community directly on governance. The members of the CGP have enhanced their capacities in the process. LST identified that some women who represent the CGP have decided to contest the upcoming local government election in the North. Simultaneously, LST linked with women candidates in the South and decided to develop an online platform for women candidates to express their perspectives and their experiences, with the view to strengthening women in politics. 18 women candidates in the North and 8 women candidates in the South participated in the session. The theme was “women in politics” and participants were asked to share their perceptions in their preferred language. The videos were shared on the Law and Society Trust YouTube channel, Facebook page and related WhatsApp groups.

LST prioritised developing its online capacities in the year 2023. In an era defined by digital connectivity, LST recognized the paramount importance of leveraging social media to engage, communicate, and build meaningful connections with our audience.

The following section captures the themes and issues that LST engages with on social media.

- **LST Roundtable** is a dynamic discussion series analysing critical legal reforms and addressing pressing social issues. The platform is a nexus for lawyers, policymakers, and the public to engage in insightful conversations on issues that shape the future of our society.
- **Taboo Talk** Video Series was initiated to celebrate International Women's Day where LST hosted four panel discussions on gender issues.

- **Discussing legal reforms** panels discussed the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), amendments to Sections 365 and 365A of the Penal Code, and debt restructuring.

The LST Roundtable can be accessed at:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V86Y6My3_f4&t=1648s
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mozYw0tuPxQ&t=263s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOJ4JWo9Ch0&t=437s>
- **Executive Media Brief** hosted by LST to address the critical role of media in reshaping narratives surrounding the LGBTIQ+ community in Sri Lanka. The event aimed to engage influential figures within the media landscape and present issues relating to Sections 365 and 365A of the Penal Code, which currently criminalizes homosexuality and the impact it has on the LGBTIQ+ community. The event was attended by prominent personalities in higher management from mainstream media outlets, including directors, deputy directors, editors, and news heads. The discussion addressed the importance of responsible journalism in breaking stereotypes, dismantling biases and creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for the LGBTIQ+ community by protecting their dignity and their human rights.
- **JustDoc Fellowship** established by LST is an innovative project that brought together 19 law students for residential training in the art of documentary filmmaking around the themes of justice and human rights. The participants demonstrated dedication and imagination and embarked on a creative journey to harness the power of visual storytelling. During the fellowship, participants received customised training, equipping them with the skills to navigate the intricacies of documentary filmmaking. Their efforts

culminated in each fellow successfully producing an original documentary film, showcasing their newfound skills in identifying key issues and justice-related themes and telling the story visually through video documentaries. Through this initiative, we underscored the intersection of law and society and the initiative empowered the next generation of legal minds to advocate for justice beyond the courtrooms and through the compelling medium of documentary filmmaking.

Increasing impact through digital outreach

Taking a strategic leap, the Law and Society Trust significantly expanded its social media footprint in 2023, embracing new platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Threads, to complement its established presence on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This expansion did not only focus on broadening networks but also made a deliberate effort to reach diverse audiences across various digital landscapes.

We are now actively moderating and curating content across all major social media platforms. Each platform is strategically leveraged to reach a different demographic segment of our society. This ensures that our message resonates with a wide range of people and constituencies. We are committed to raising awareness on issues that matter in a timely and effective way—organising thought-provoking legal discussions as well as through engaging visual content,

LIBRARY

The library has been rearranged according to the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system and is in excellent condition. The total collection of books in the LST library has increased to 9675.

This year the LST Library successfully rebounded and repaired 65 damaged books, preserving the library's valuable collection. A proper rearrangement of the Archives Section, Appellate Law Recorder section, and LST Review Magazine collection occurred in 2023. LST invested in the Integrated Library Management System (KOHA) and 8114 bibliographic records are available in the integrated library management system (KOHA).

Erroneous entries that were made in the past have been corrected in the Koha system.

Online Public Access Catalogue Link is:
<http://library.lstlanka.org/>

The library has invested in several online subscriptions that include JSTOR Arts and Sciences Collection I, moving away from Arts and Sciences Collection VI. The content on JSTOR includes economics, history, political science, and sociology, with a total of 117 titles.

The Law and Society Trust Library has subscribed to "Law Lanka," which serves as an A-Z guide to the laws of Sri Lanka and

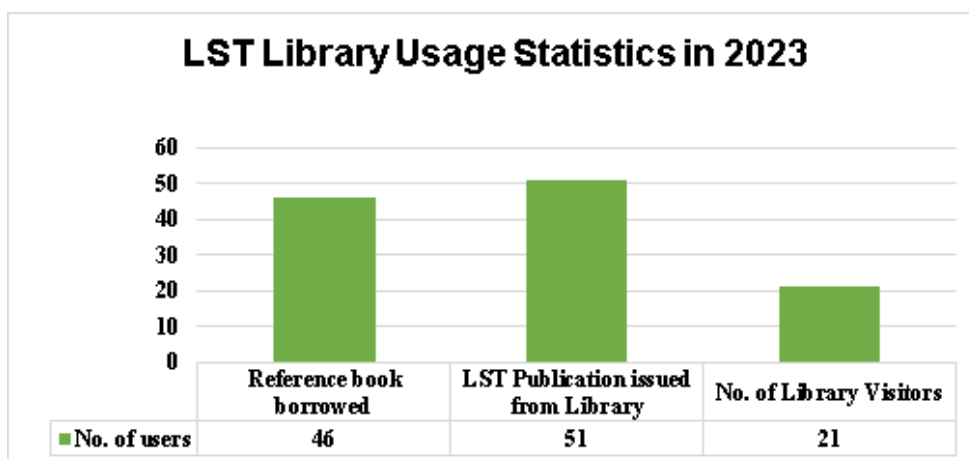
includes reported cases. This subscription provides comprehensive coverage and access to legal information, facilitating research and understanding of the legal landscape in Sri Lanka for the specified period.

The library was responsible for the distribution of the LST Annual Report 2022, LST Review (Vol.31, Issue No.349 - Aragalaya), and The State of Human Rights 2018-2020 to members, institutions including the parliament library, universities, donors and foreign embassies.

The library distributed publications as per requests made and during LST workshops. Specifically, in 2023 LST delivered 547 copies of the State of Human Rights, (printed only in English) 338 copies of the LST Review (Sinhala 125, Tamil 98, English 115), 81 copies of the Annual Report and 2726 miscellaneous publications (Sinhala 946, Tamil 815, English 878 , 87 books which include all 3 languages). LST distributed Leaflets on the rights and procedures for Victims of torture and their families (3750 in Tamil and 4250 in Sinhala).

The LST library created a Facebook page to communicate information to members of the public.

Link - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61550054526786>



PUBLICATIONS

LST publications are available online on the Law & Society Trust website.

Printed copies of these publications are distributed to the Board of Directors, LST members, donors, embassies, academic and research institutes, universities, the Parliament library, the secretaries of all political parties in Parliament, and contributors.

Books

- Can We Manage Without Bosses? An Analysis of Public Opinion in the post-Aragalaya Political Context DATE (Sinhala – Tamil)
- Challenges faced by civil society organizations when responding to unforeseen or sudden violence April 2023 (English - Sinhala – Tamil)
- People’s Manifesto for Sri Lanka July 2023 (English We must prepare to reflect selected writings of Vijay Nagaraj in Sri Lanka Sinhala – Tamil)
- Sri Lanka: State of Human Rights 2018 – 2020, August 2023 (English)
- Understanding Clandestine Gravesite Investigations: Guide for Families of the Missing and Disappeared December 2023 (English - Sinhala – Tamil)
- We must prepare to reflect selected writings of Vijay Nagaraj in Sri Lanka 2024 (English)

Periodicals

- LST Review – Aragalaya-The Politics of Protest (Vol.31, Issue No. 349, June 2023) (English - Sinhala – Tamil)

Reports

- Civic Watch Review of the World Bank and Sri Lanka’s COVID-19 Emergency Response May 2023 (English)
- Dreams and dignity: Stories of Malaiyaha Tamil Youth, November 2023 (English – Sinhala – Tamil)

Collaborative publications

- The South Asia State of Minorities Report 2023: Majoritarianism and Its Impact on Minorities

SOCIAL MEDIA OVERVIEW & SPECIFIC ANALYSIS



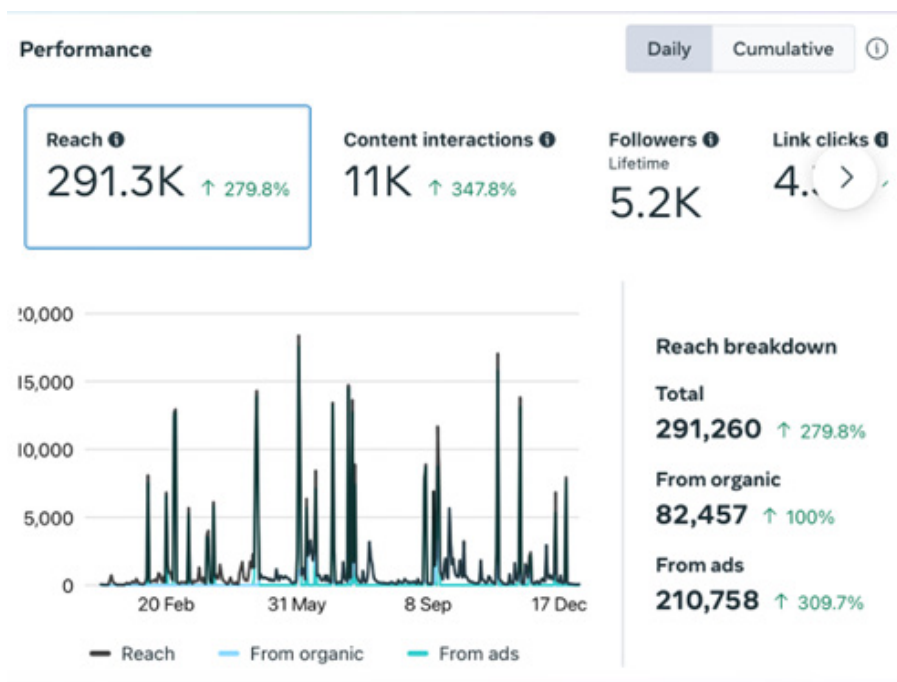
Analytics on LST social media

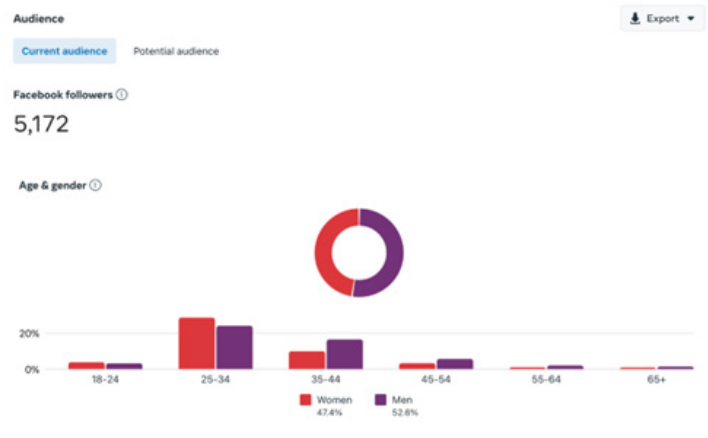
Year - 2023

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Youtube
Total views (reach)	291300	25400	25200	15200 325400 (Impressions)
Gender				
male	52.50%		39.90%	40.80%
Female	47.50%		60.10%	59.20%
Location				
Sri Lanka	81%		77.40%	67.40%
Australia	1.90%		4.10%	0.80%
Malaysia	0.50%		2.10%	
Canada	1.30%			0.30%
India	1.80%			0.20%
United State	1.10%			0.40%
United Arab Emirates	1%		2.10%	0.10%
Thailand				0.10%

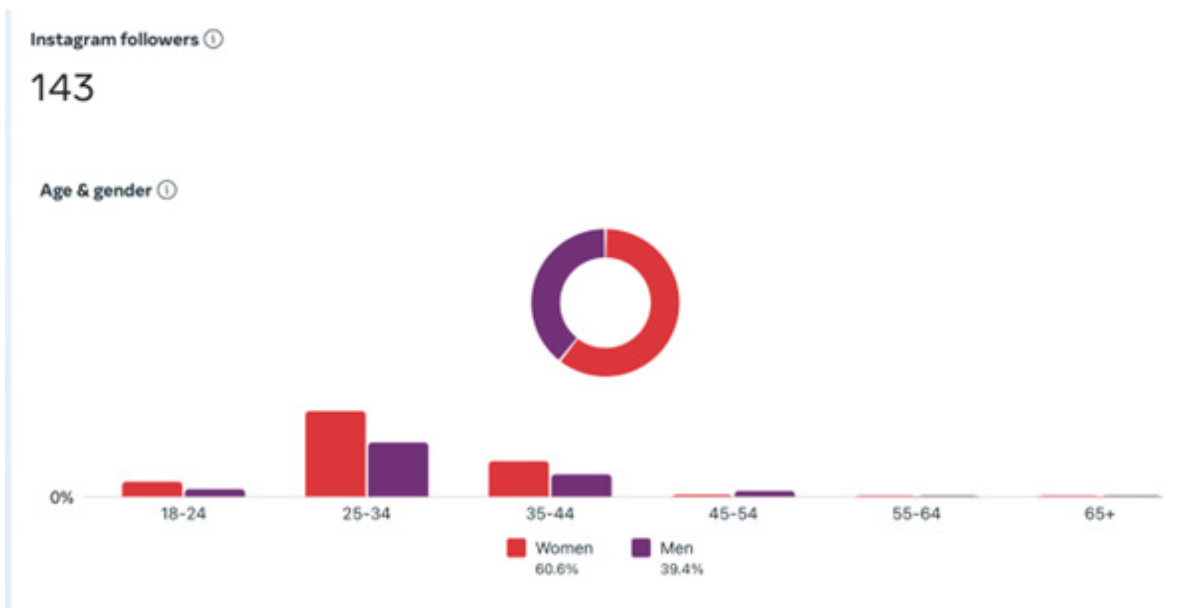
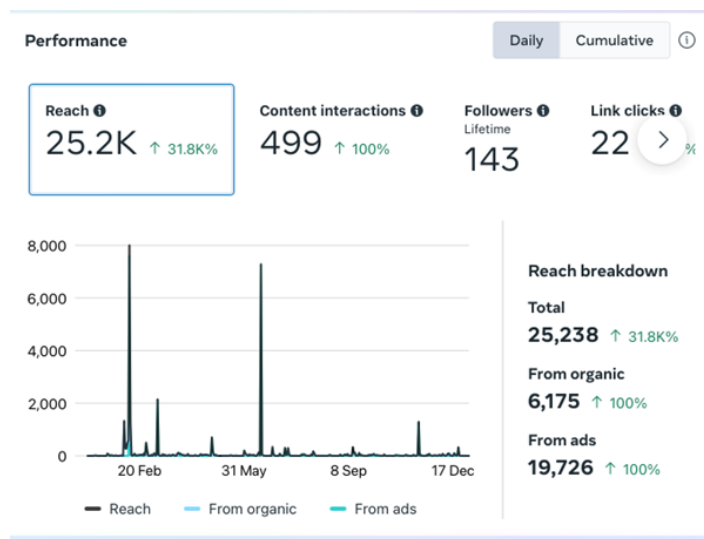
Facebook

In 2023, we reached 291,260 people through Facebook and we have received 11,000+ interactions on the page.



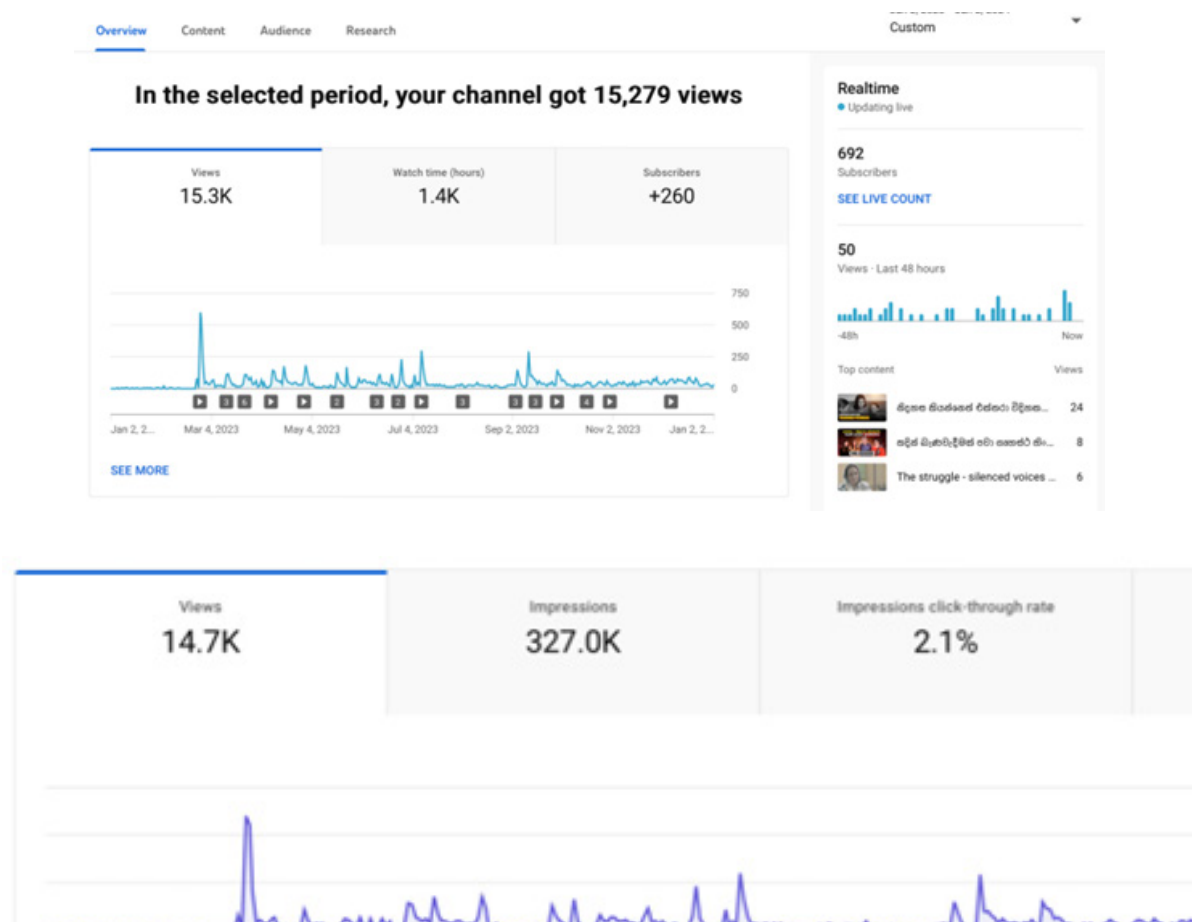


Instagram



YouTube

On YouTube, LST has improved the subscriptions and has generated a positive response.



Twitter



Tweet activity

Jan 1 – Apr 1, 2023

Export data

Your posts earned **3.6K impressions** over this 91 day period



Tweet activity

Apr 2 – Jul 1, 2023

Export data

Your posts earned **4.1K impressions** over this 91 day period



Tweet activity

Jul 2 – Sep 30, 2023

Export data

Your posts earned **12.9K impressions** over this 91 day period



Tweet activity

Oct 1 – Dec 30, 2023

Export data

Your posts earned **4.8K impressions** over this 91 day period



DONORS

International donors

Asia Foundation
Bank Information Center
British Academy Navigation
CAFOD
Diakonia
Fundacion de Antropologia Forensede Guatemala (FAFG)
FORD Foundation
FORUM Asia
Internews
Minority Rights Group (MRG)
National Endowment Fund (NED)
Open Society Foundation
UNDP
UN Education
University of Zurich
University of Edinburgh
US AID - Msi (IDEA)
WeEffect

National Donors

Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust
Chrysalis

RETROSPECTIVE OVERVIEW OF THE LAW & SOCIETY TRUST AT WORK

During 2023 LST managed 13 projects (11 projects through donor organizations and 2 projects through universities), along with the core support LST receives from Diakonia. In total LST receives funds from 20 international donors and has one national donor. In 2023 LST was also selected for funding from the USAID through its Bolstering Civil Society project and this will provide core support. LST developed its strategy and annual work plan to achieve its vision and mission and it utilizes the support from various donors to align to this vision and mission.

LST underwent capacity assessments conducted by We Effect (in 2023) and The Asia Foundation (in 2022) and scored satisfactorily for most of the administrative, governance and technical aspects. LST was also selected for a capacity-building program for research-oriented think tanks conducted by the University of South Carolina.

LST is regarded as a key player in many collective civil society networks locally and internationally. LST has been convening networks such as People's Alliance for Right to Land (PARL), Women's Collective for Economic Justice and YUKTI collective with the participation of many academics, civil society organizations and activists. LST has also played a key role in other networks such as UNITE - a collective of Trade Unions and CSOS, Stand for Democracy Collective - an NGO, and CSO collective which was called upon to make representations on the Voluntary Social Services Organization Act (VSSO Act). LST has also been a key partner in international networks such as Forum Asia, Minority Rights Group, The South Asia Collective and Asia Pacific Women for Law and Development.

Assessing LST's work in advancing the rights of minorities, marginalised and vulnerable communities

The rights of women and girls are central to LST's strategy and actions. But moving beyond the binary perspective on gender as men and women, LST has expanded its work with people of other sexual diversities and has included groups working on the rights of LGBTIQ persons to its community governance platforms, worked with LGBTIQ workers in Free Trade Zones providing them legal support in their rights violations, raised their issues in the socially conservative Northern Province and worked together in addressing the social, political and economic rights of the LGBTQI+ as part of the mainstream human rights discourse.

On the rights of women LST continued its work with women farmers' groups, women workers in FTZs and the informal sector, women workers in tea plantations etc in supporting their collective actions to ensure their rights. LST used its research on gender discriminatory social norms, rights of women farmers, rights of free trade zone workers and rights of persons with disabilities to highlight specific issues faced by women and propose recommendations.

In its broader advocacy for protecting the rights of human rights defenders, the impact of economic reforms and the need for governance reforms, LST always adopted a feminist perspective when addressing issues and proposing solutions. Thus, specific issues faced by women were raised in most of these initiatives. LST programs invested in developing the capacities of women leaders to frame their advocacy messages based on a strong conceptual foundation of human rights and feminism. Through training and exposure programs, participatory research and local initiatives to address their issues, LST has been able to support a strong group of women leaders all over the country.

LST publications and online materials are regularly being used by other CSOs, Trade Unions, activists, academics and politicians in their training, advocacy and campaigning work.

Conflict sensitivity

LST believes that ensuring rights and justice for local communities who were victims of conflicts, exploitation, marginalization and discrimination is key for longer-term sustainable peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

LST works with communities to understand the underline causes of conflicts and the discrimination that local communities face irrespective of their ethnicity or religion. Building common platforms for local communities to work together to claim their rights is key to enhancing mutual trust and reconciliation among them.

In 2023, LST initiated many programs to link youth groups from the south to engage with the struggles of people from the North, the plantation areas and the east, and to enhance their understanding of similarities of their struggles and the need for common and joint struggles to secure for their rights.

Building on the recommendations that came out through the People's Parliament process, LST will continue to engage in advocacy for constitutional, political and economic reforms that ensure the rights of everyone despite their differences.

“Lessons Learnt” during 2023

As manifested during the Aragalaya protest movement and civic actions after that over 2022-23 period, people's democratic participation can have many forms moving beyond elections. We must develop this broader idea of democratic participation of citizens at all levels and promote enabling governance reforms. Recognising the various forms of expressing dissent, including protests, as democratic participation is key in future human rights engagements.

It is extremely important to build on people's campaigns and other civic actions to influence longer-term policy and legal reforms. Year 2024 is expected to be an election year, LST should build on the citizens' actions and aspirations over the last two years to influence policymakers and political parties to commit and implement governance reforms which ensure democracy and civil and political rights. For that, it is important to build broader networks and collectives which link communities and their organizations with national-level CSOs, academics and policy influencers.

Given the failures of the UN and other Western countries in preventing human rights violations in places such as Gaza, will provide the opportunity for governments of countries such as Sri Lanka to question their legitimacy in involving human rights issues in our countries. Hence, while we stay engaged with the international community, we must also strengthen local initiatives and movements to fight for human rights within the country. Pushing the social movements in the South to take up the issues impacting Tamils and Muslims in the North and East is a priority for next year.

With the government rapidly introducing new legal and economic reform measures, it is extremely important that we can analyse them properly and inform the public about them in a simple manner. We need to work with a group of lawyers, academics and communicators for this purpose.

Given the increasing operations costs for programming, we must build synergies among the programs within the organization and with other organizations to increase the value for money and impact. Joint programming among various projects and with other organizations should be encouraged.

Appreciating our Staff

We are deeply appreciative of our staff who have worked through many political and economic challenges. We face the challenges of staff turnover, with people leaving to go overseas – to study or to escape the economic turmoil. We face the challenge of ensuring that the staff can manage their lives on the compensation they receive.

We have upgraded staff policies, and included a Code of Conduct that addresses sexual harassment and child protection etc.) that consultants must also sign as we work within a framework of ethical values.

We have established procurement guidelines; we conduct internal and external audits. All these measures are operational.

These reviews are ongoing and are updated to address both existing and new challenges.

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Income	2021	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year	2022	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year	2023	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year
Grant Income	81,056	49%	108,060	33%	157,413	46% *
Publication Income	14	(-11%)	47	236%	33	-30%
Interest Income	2,626	-37%	4,748	81%	9,671	104% **
	2021	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year	2022	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year	2023	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	(2,508)	-3%	10,977	538%	29,459	168% ***
Total Assets	114,324	4%	123,174	8%	207,283	68%

Amounts are in “000

* The increase in grant income is attributed to LST securing several new donors and new projects under existing donors, including Internews, Bread for the World under Forum Asia, the Bridge project under Chrysalis, and the Pandemic Justice project under CAFOD. Additionally, there was a 41% increase in exchange gain income compared to 2022.

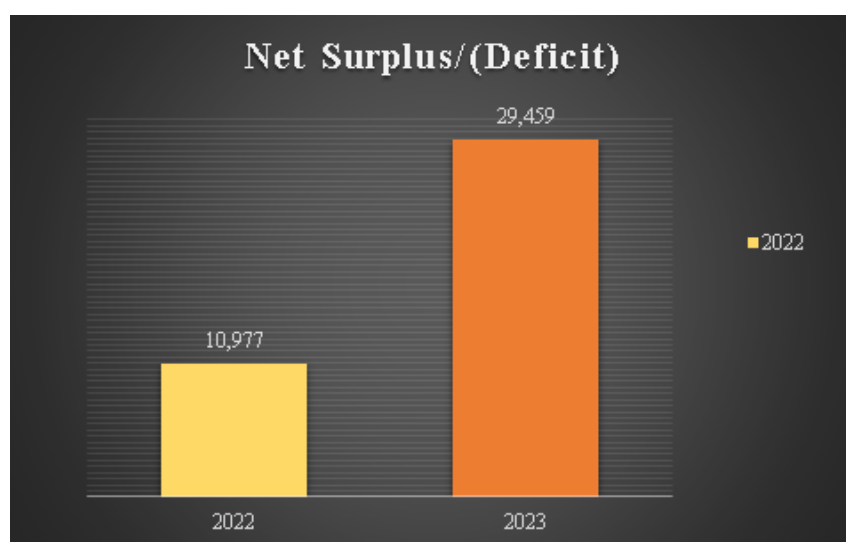
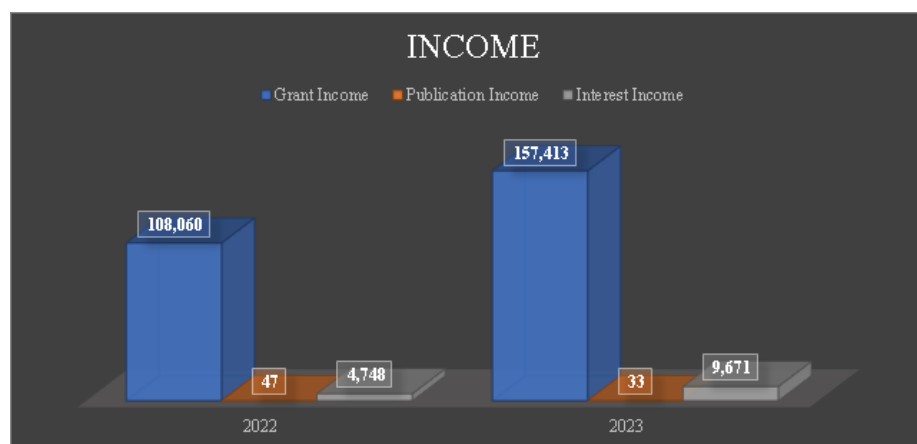
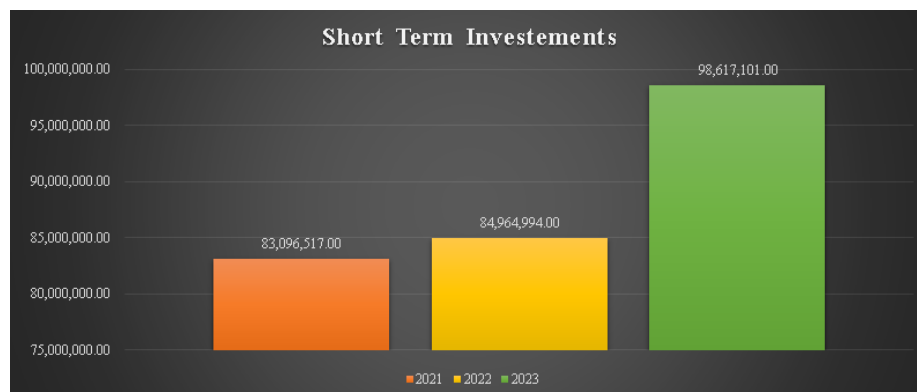
** Interest income has increased by 104% due to a substantial rise in bank interest rates in 2022. The maturity period of the fixed deposits falls between 2022 and 2023, carrying forward the effect to 2023.

*** The increase in net surplus is due to two factors: an increase in grant income and an increase in other income, which includes exchange gains and interest income from fixed deposits. However, exchange gains are not actual gains from grant income but are due to foreign currency translation. Grant income increased by 46%, and other income increased by 123% compared to 2022.

STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL RESERVES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Reserves	2022	2023	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year
Restricted Funds	5,661	44,916	693%

Amounts are in “000



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTORS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2023

The Directors present herewith the Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Law & Society Trust for the year ended 31st December 2023.

Nature of Business of the Trust

- To promote and conduct research into the indigenous legal culture of Asia and its relationship to the religious traditions of the Continent of Asia.
- To initiate studies in order to provide legal solutions appropriate to the problems and needs of contemporary Asian society from the indigenous legal culture and concepts of Asia.
- To establish centers for research and training on all aspects of law and social change, legal theory, social theory, comparative law, anthropology and related fields.
- To sponsor or co-sponsor with other institutions, lectures, meetings, seminars and symposia in pursuance of its applied and academic work and for the diffusion of legal knowledge.
- To promote an understanding and belief in the protection of human rights and in furtherance thereof to promote international understanding and co-operation in an universal respect for the observance of human rights and fundamental freedom for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion, colour and creed.
- To promote and encourage, in furtherance of protection of human rights, acquisition and diffusion of knowledge among the masses.

Financial Statements

The financial statements of the Law & Society Trust for the year ended 31st December 2023 include the Income Statement, Statement of Financial Position and the notes to the financial statements as set out on pages 4 to 20 of the audited financial statements.

Auditor's Report

The Auditor's Report is set out on page 1 to 2 of the audited financial statements.

Accounting Policies

Accounting policies used are summarized in Note 2 to the financial statements and are consistent with those used in the previous year.

Directors Remuneration

The Directors receive no remuneration from the Law & Society Trust.

Donations

No donations were given by the Trust for the period under review.

Directors

The Directors of the Law & Society Trust as at 31st December 2023 were as follows:

Dr. J A S Felix
Mr. G J T Alagaratnam
Prof. F F Haniffa
Miss. Anushya Coomaraswamy
Mr. Tissa Jayatilaka
Prof. R S Scharenguivel

Prof. R S Scharenguivel and Prof. F F Haniffa retire by rotation in terms of the Articles of Association of the Trust and being eligible offer themselves for re-election.

Resolutions for the appointment of Mr. Tissa Jayatilaka and Mr. G J T Alagaratnam who are over 70 years will be proposed at the AGM of the Trust.

Amounts payable to the firm holding office as External Auditor

The remuneration payable by the Trust to the external auditor is given in Note 6 to the financial statements.

Auditor's relationship or any interest with the Company

The Directors are satisfied that the auditors did not have any relationship or any interest with the Trust that would impair their independence.

Directors' interests in contracts

The Directors have confirmed that none of them have conflict of interest in relation to operations and transactions or contracts and have no related party interests in any transactions or contracts of the Trust.

Going Concern

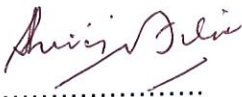
The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis. After making adequate inquiries from the management, the Directors are satisfied that the Trust has adequate resources to continue its operations in the foreseeable future as a going concern.

Appointment of Auditors


The Board has recommended a change of auditors to the members at the Annual General Meeting of the Company in keeping with corporate governance best practices. Accordingly, the Board recommends the appointment of Messrs. Ernst & Young, Chartered Accountants as Auditors of the Trust.

A resolution to appoint Messrs. Ernst & Young, Chartered Accountants, will be proposed at the Annual General Meeting of the Trust.

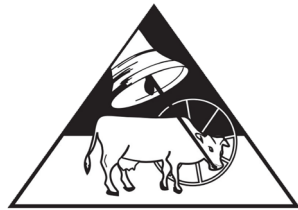
This Annual Report of the Directors has been signed on behalf of the Board by:


.....
Director


.....
Director


.....
Secretaries
Director
SECRETARIUS (PRIVATE) LIMITED.
PV 5958

Colombo
01st July 2024



LAW & SOCIETY TRUST
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சட்டம் மற்றும் சமூக நம்பிக்கை

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Sri Lanka

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