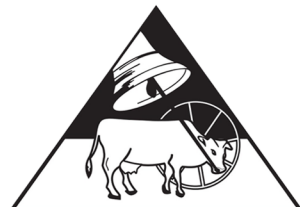


ANNUAL REPORT 2024



LAW & SOCIETY TRUST
தீதீய னா கலாச னாரட
சட்டம் மற்றும் சமூக நம்பிக்கை

CALL TO ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AS A RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND CHANGE

**“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of
innocence is drowned
The best lack all conviction, while the worst are filled with
passionate intensity.”**

W.B. Yeats “The Second Coming”

“Every great change is preceded by chaos”

Deepak Chopra

Globally and nationally, we are facing unprecedented challenges and change. The international human rights standards that Sri Lanka and many other countries signed on to, albeit with degrees of enthusiasm are being challenged both covertly and overtly. Nevertheless, a human rights-centred response to political and economic crises and changes prioritises the protection and fulfillment of human rights throughout the crisis and its recovery. This approach acknowledges that crises disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, requiring tailored interventions and safeguards. It also emphasises the importance of inclusive dialogue, accountability, and long-term systemic changes to prevent future crises.

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’s livelihoods at the centre-stage. Responses that are shaped by and respect for human rights result in better outcomes in overcoming the economic crisis by ensuring safety nets and future opportunities for everyone. It will preserve 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 societies, sustainable development and peace.

COVER PHOTOS

Dr. Harini Amarasuriya Receiving Appointment as the 17th Prime Minister

Credit: Prime Minister's Media Division (PMMD) / Government of Sri Lanka (2024)

Human Elephant Conflict - STR / AFP via Getty Images (2023)

(If officially sourced from a Sri Lankan wildlife authority or media team, use:

“Department of Wildlife Conservation Media Unit”)

Urumaya Land Deeds Programme – Government Officials Displaying Deed Book

Credit: news.lk – The Official Government News Portal of Sri Lanka

Poster of the documentary film produced by Law & Society Trust, The FourFold Path

Credit : Photographer Amila Udagedara & Lahiru Milan

Design : Dasun Prabhashwara

Heterodox economist Martine Guzman addressed the conference “Is there another way? Debt Restructuring, The IMF & The Future of Sri Lanka”, organized by Yukthi together with Law & Society Trust.

Credit : Sakuna Gamage

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Who we are and what we do	1
Vision Mission and Goals	2
LST's interconnected work clusters	3
How we work	3
Board of Directors, Staff and Consultants	4
2024 in Retrospect	
The Old Order gives way: A New Order struggling to be born	7
Law & Society Trust in 2024	14
Law & Society	16
Law and Governance	20
Law and Economy	23
Library	32
Publications	33
Communications	
Digital Media : Overview & Specific Analysis	34
2024: LST in Retrospect	36
Donors in 2024	37
Financial Highlights	38
Strengthening Financial Reserves and Sustainability	39
Annual Report of the Directors for the year ended 31 December 2024	41

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 Trusts 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.

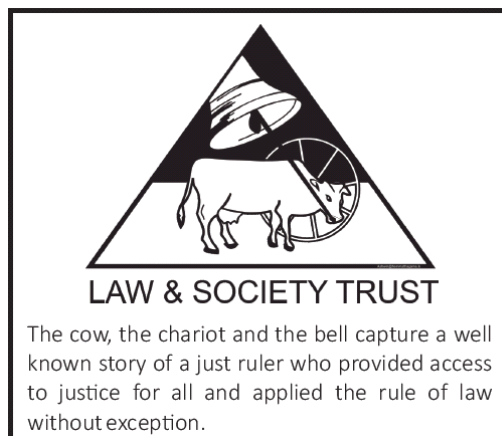
LST aims to use rights-based strategies to promote and protect human rights, enhance public accountability and strengthen respect for the rule of law.

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 organisation 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.

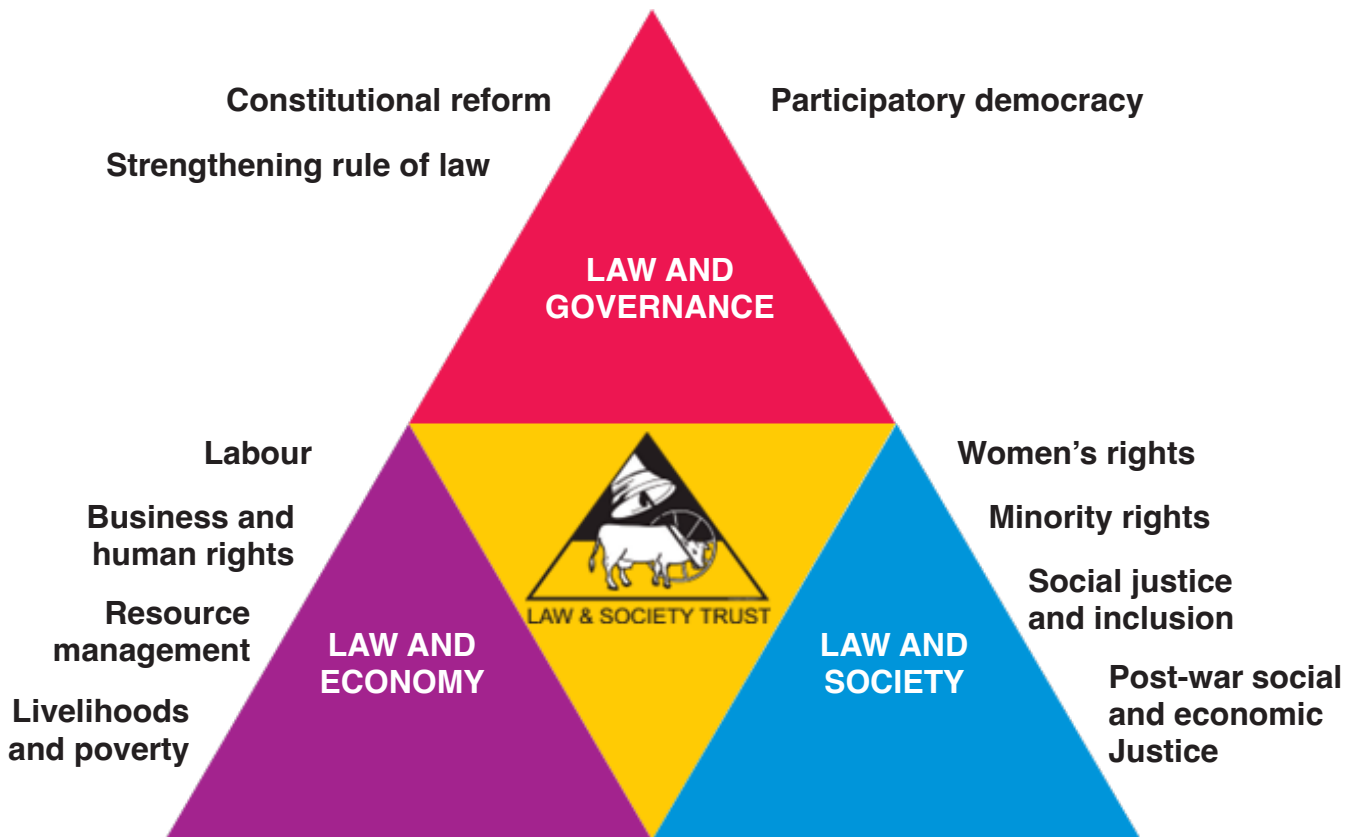
Mission

To utilise 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

LST'S INTERCONNECTED WORK CLUSTERS



HOW WE WORK



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. 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. Rachithra Sandanayaka - Head of Finance

Programme 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 Co-ordinator & Researcher
Mr. Sakuna Gamage - Project Co-ordinator
Mr. Malinga Prasad Jayaratne - Project Co-ordinator
Mr. Nikshan Vasantharasa - Project Officer
Ms. Marisa F. De Silva - Project Co-ordinator - from 01 March 2024

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

Publications

Ms. Dilhara Pathirana - Editor

Library

Ms. W.M.T. Arosha Wasala - Librarian - Project Support Officer

Support Staff

Mr. M. Chandran

Consultants

1. Mr. Prabath Hemantha Kumara - Co-ordinator
2. Mr. Michael Mendis - Researcher
3. Ms. Vraie Cally Balthazaar - Researcher - up to 31 March 2024
4. Mr. Amila Udagedara - Media Co-ordinator, People's Alliance for Right to Land
5. Mr. Chathuranga Pradeep Kumara - Researcher & Digital Content Producer
6. Ms. Sobiya Vincendepaul - Research Assistant from 01 February 2024 to 30 April 2024
7. Ms. Fathima Hasna Hasbullah - Project Co-ordinator
8. Ms. S.H.Tekla Maduwanthi - Library Assistant up to February 2024 - Communications Assistant 01 April to 30 June 2024
9. Mr. B. Skanthakumar - Researcher - up to 30 April 2024
10. Ms. G. Melani Rasanga Premasiri - Researcher & Project Co-ordinator
11. Ms. Amitha Priyanthi - Research Assistant
12. Ms. Ermiza Tegal – Researcher
13. Ms. Namashya Rathnayake - Research Assistant from 01 April 2024
14. Mr. Selvaratnam Subasgaran - Research Assistant
15. Mr. Ramasamy Vijayakumar - Research Assistant - up to 31 December.2024
16. Ms. Madulika Rupasinghe Gunawardena - Researcher - up to 31 March 2024
17. Ms. Hasara Fernando - Head of Finance - up to 18 February 2024
18. Ms. Yathursha Ulakendran - Research Assistant
19. Ms. Mohamed Rafaithu Shafiya Roshan - Research Assistant
20. Ms. Rajeshwaran Babyshalini - Research Assistant - up to 30 June 2024
21. Mr. Vasuthevan Vasantharajah - Research Assistant - up to 30 April 2024
22. Mr. Ashan Hasitha Kumara - Research Assistant
23. Mr. R.M. Tharindu Milan Davinda Ratnayake - Research Assistant - up to 31. October 2024
24. Mr. K.M. Damith Chathuranga Premaratne - Research Assistant
25. Mr. Upul Kumara Wickramasinghe - Researcher

26. Mr. H.P. Dhanusha Gihan Pathirana - Researcher
27. Ms. A.A. Hasini M. Abeysinghe - Research Assistant
28. Mr. W. Sudantha Madhawa Fernando - Research Assistant
29. Ms. Saranthaman Mangaladharshini - Research Assistant
30. Ms. Madhushika Ananthaseelan - Research Assistant – up to 30 November 2024
31. Ms. Kamaleshwaran Vithursha - Research Assistant
32. Ms. Isuri Udayangana Rodrigo - Research Assistant - up to 31 October 2024
33. Ms. V.P. Tharushi Dilshara Fernando - Research Assistant - up to 31 October 2024
34. Ms. Rajendran Thaneesha - Research Assistant - from 01 January 2024 to 30 June 2024
35. Mr. Mirak Raheem – Researcher – up to 30 April 2024
36. Ms. Selvarathnam Nishanthani – Research Assistant – from 01 February 2024
37. Mr. Kumaran Dineshkumar – Research Assistant – from 01 February 2024 to 30 April 2024
38. Ms. Jayantha Huluge Chandani Liyanage – Researcher & Advisor
39. from 01 February to 31 March 2024
40. Ms. Esther Hoole – Regional Co-ordinator – from 15 March 2024
41. Ms. Minoli Natasha Van-Hoff – Co-ordinator -From 01 April 2024
42. Mr. K.A. Kaushalya Kumarasinghe – Researcher – from 01 July 2024
43. Mr. M. Dinuka Bandara Gunawardena – Digital Content Creating – from 10 July 2024
44. Mr. D. Supun Rashinda Jayawardena – Researcher – from 14 August 2024 to 31 December 2024
45. Ms. G.D. Manuli Lavanya Sirikumara – Research Assistant – from 01 October 2024
46. Ms. Fathima Nabeela Iqbal – Communications and Coordination – from 08 November 2024
47. Ms. V. Harshani Maduprabashini – Research Assistant – from 01 November 2024
48. Mr. T.M. Janitha Chathuranga Premasundara _ Social Media Co-ordinator – from 01 December 2024

Interns

- Ms. Y.M. Shakila Savindi Balasooriya - from 01 February 2024 to 30 May 2024
- Ms. Oshadi Minsara Gajaweera – from 01 June 2024 to 31 December 2024
- Ms. S.L. Minadi Gunawardena – from 01 July 2024 to 30 September 2024
- Ms. K.A.G.G. Anupama Sewwandi - from 01 August 2024
- Mr. Thirukumar Ashan – from 15 September 2024 to 31 December 2024
- Ms. B. Anjali Crisma – from 11 November 2024 to 31 December 2024

2024 IN RETROSPECT

THE OLD ORDER GIVES WAY: A NEW ORDER STRUGGLING TO BE BORN

Sri Lanka muddled through the year of 2024 under the mushroom cloud of debt and political uncertainty. President Ranil Wickremasinghe was in the unenviable position of being a leader without a following – his party having no political presence in Parliament (save for a nominated Member appointed to fill the seat he vacated when he assumed the Presidency). He was supported in Parliament by the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), a once almighty, nationalist party which was also leaderless with former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa vacating his post and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa resigning from the Presidency.

During this period Sri Lanka and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reached a Staff-Level Agreement on the Second Review of Sri Lanka's Extended Fund Facility and concluded the 2024 Article IV Consultation. Civil society organisations were critical that a President who lacked popular legitimacy was making such far reaching decisions without proper consultations and they were equally critical of the terms of the structural adjustment programme. The IMF was nevertheless happy with this interface and in the language of the IMF, macroeconomic policy reforms were starting to bear fruit.

“The authorities are making good progress in implementing an ambitious reform agenda under the EFF with commendable outcomes, including rapid disinflation, robust reserve accumulation, and initial signs of economic growth while preserving the stability of the financial system. Public finances have strengthened following substantial fiscal reforms. Programme performance was strong, with all quantitative performance criteria and indicative targets for end-December 2023 met except for the indicative target on social spending. Most structural benchmarks due

before end-February 2024 were either met or implemented with delay. Reforms in some areas are still ongoing.”

The IMF also noted that sustaining the reform momentum also requires addressing governance weaknesses and corruption vulnerabilities. These are critical to put the economy on a path towards lasting recovery and stable and inclusive growth. However, civil society groups contested the IMF's commitment to holding authorities accountable for governance reforms and anti-corruption measures.

Behind the corporate veil and growth charts: Key socio-economic and political challenges facing Sri Lanka in 2024

Rise in poverty and malnutrition

Despite the glowing figures pointing to growth, there are dismal figures pointing to high poverty rates with food security remaining high and poverty nearly doubling to 23.4% in 2024. The national poverty line, which determines the minimum income threshold to meet basic needs, has nearly tripled in just over a decade. According to a report released by the Department of Census and Statistics. In January 2024, the national poverty line reached Rs. 17,014, increasing from Rs. 5,223 in 2012/13. The Colombo district reported the highest increase with a poverty line of Rs. 17608 in May 2024, showing a drop from Rs. 18350 at the start of 2024.

Sri Lanka has also seen a significant rise in malnutrition in Sri Lanka. According to the 2024 Global Hunger Index (GHI), the country ranks 56th out of 127 countries with a score of 11.3, reflecting a moderate level of hunger.

Cost of Living Crisis

In 2024, Sri Lanka experienced a cost-of-living crisis, with poverty rates remaining elevated and real wages contracting, despite signs of economic stabilisation. Starting off the new year with increased Value-Added Tax (VAT) and a withdrawal of VAT exemptions, Sri Lankans are struggling under a cost-of-living crisis that seemingly has no end in sight.

Most studies revealed that households have reduced their food consumption due to the economic crisis while some have sold their household assets and spent savings to meet their day-to-day needs. Moreover, the recent study titled 'Household Survey on Impact of Economic Crisis – 2023' by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) notes that a significant portion of households are experiencing a decrease of monthly income, an increase in monthly expenditure, a sharp rise in indebtedness, and negative impacts on education and health.

Impact of quick-fix policies

Various studies conducted over this period show rising levels of poverty among the populace amidst weakening social protections, with the Government's tax policy reforms posing an added burden on a growing number of poor and vulnerable people. The Government attempted to raise revenue by increasing the VAT rate to 18% from 15% effective from 1 January, removing VAT exemptions from 97 items out of 138 goods.

Some analysts have argued that the Government's revenue generating strategies are flawed with it adopting the easiest method rather than the best method. While VAT was necessary for the Government to increase revenue, it was employing erroneous strategies to quickly increase revenues and the easiest way is not always the best way. The policies were criticised as the Government's tax reforms were impacting those most vulnerable to economic shocks. Prof. Wasantha Athukorala, of the University of Peradeniya Department of Economics and

Statistics commented that the Government is implementing its policies without an analysis of the impact and of how to minimise the impact on the people, which will victimise the lower-middle class and the poor. The better strategy was to increase economic opportunities in the system so that people can find alternative ways of increasing income, but that is not a quick-fix solution.

Labour market challenges

In 2024, Sri Lanka faced many labour market challenges including high youth unemployment, skills mismatches, and concerns about the plight of manpower workers in Free Trade Zones (FTZs). The country also grappled with economic instability and the need for skills development, job matching and retaining skilled professionals in the country. Sri Lanka experienced a significant increase in outmigration, including a notable "brain drain" of skilled professionals seeking better opportunities abroad, with an estimated 300,016 individuals migrating, including IT, banking, marketing, and medical professionals migrating. Foolish policies encouraging outmigration of skilled professionals with the hope that they would send remittances and bolster foreign exchange reserves left many hospitals under-served. This has placed a strain on junior professionals in all sectors and impacted productivity.

Environmental challenges

Human-Elephant conflict

For several years Sri Lanka adopted policies that were detrimental to the environment. These included sand mining, deforestation and indiscriminate allocation of forest land for agriculture without consideration for preserving animal habitats.

The human-elephant conflict worsened in 2024, when 388 wild elephants were reported dead. Many of these deaths were caused by various accidents including poisoning, train accidents, road accidents, and elephants falling into wells used for

cultivation. There were 84 elephant deaths from shootings, 56 from electrocution, and 52 from consuming jaw bombs and 155 human lives lost to elephants invading villages and homes. Voice of America News in a 2024 report said that between the years, 2015 and 2024, the deaths of nearly 1,195 people and 3,484 wild elephants were accounted for as consequences of this Human-Elephant conflict.

Successive governments have failed to adopt appropriate policies to address this as they failed to recognise that much of this conflict is largely man-made due to government and community encroachment into forest lands. The intemperate remarks of Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Land and Irrigation K.D. Lal Kantha in Parliament that farmers can take any action regarding damages to crops by wild animals within their cultivated lands brought this issue to the forefront. He charged that damages to crops by wild animals, ranging from elephants to toque monkeys, has been a serious issue threatening not only farmers but the public as well. Describing the animal attacks as akin to “terrorism”, he advocated for a militarised response which has become a norm in Sri Lanka. He said there are no legal issues against farmers taking any action regarding crop damages caused by wild animals within their cultivated land. These remarks pitted the government and farmers against environmentalists and wildlife enthusiasts. There are no easy solutions to the problem of balancing the needs of farmers to protect their lives and their crops, the concerns to protect wild life for future generations and recognising that protecting animals is a good principle in itself in a society that claims to recognise the spiritual basis of respect for life and all living creatures.

Climate change

Devastating floods and mudslides hit Sri Lanka in 2024, serving as yet another stark reminder of the country’s vulnerability to climate change. Despite repeated warnings from environmentalists, the

government continued to push forward with development projects that disregarded the natural landscape. The lack of proper infrastructure and disaster preparedness became painfully evident as the floods displaced thousands and claimed many lives. The government’s response to the disaster was met with criticism, not only for its lack of preparedness but also for its failure to adequately address the root causes of such environmental disasters. Despite all the talk of economic recovery and social reform, Sri Lanka remained ill-equipped to handle the environmental challenges that were increasingly shaping the future of the nation.

POLITICAL ISSUES IN SRI LANKA IN 2024

Human rights and the rule of law under continuous siege

The controversial Operation Yukthiya (Operation Justice) was launched at the end of 2023. It became a full-blown anti-drug operation in 2024, whereby the Sri Lanka Police, Special Task Force and The Sri Lanka Army, following directives from the Minister of Public Security were empowered to search and seize drugs and conduct mass arrests on the basis of attacking the drug problem.

The operation has drawn criticism from the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, and various other human rights groups, who have expressed concerns over the mass arrests and potential human rights violations. Minister Tiran Alles has dismissed the criticism and reaffirmed his commitment to the operation.

During this period, the government led by President Wickremasinghe confirmed the appointment of the controversial Deshabandu Tennakoon as Inspector General of Police despite the Supreme Court finding him guilty of torture and other human rights violations and the appointment not being approved by a majority of the Constitutional Council.

The Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) condemned the government actions aimed at undermining the Supreme Court's interim order concerning the appointment of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Deshabandu Tennakoon. Issuing a statement in this regard, the BASL emphasised the government's claim that the Supreme Court does not have power to call into question appointments made by the President which are approved by the Constitutional Council is 'totally untenable'.

The BASL highlighted: "The decisions of the Constitutional Council are clearly amenable to the Fundamental Rights Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court {as per : Article 41E(6) of the Constitution}. It is equally clear that following the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, the exercise of powers by the President, except his power to declare war and peace, are subject to the Fundamental Rights Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court (as per Article 35 of the Constitution)."

Freedom of Expression undermined

In January 2024 the government passed the Online Safety Act, giving a government commission broad powers to regulate online content and punish individuals deemed to be posting "illegal" material. The Commission was further empowered to identify "prohibited" content, request removal of statements from internet service providers and disabling access for those deemed offenders. The government was clearly protecting itself from public criticism on social media. The Act was criticised by activists, civil society and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for its vague definitions of prohibited content, over-broad provisions and for its chilling effects on freedom of speech.

Proposed NGOs (Registration & Supervision) Act under fire

Attorneys and activists raised preliminary objections to the proposed NGOs (Registration & Supervision) Act on grounds that it lacked stakeholder consultation. The NGO Secretariat had repeatedly failed to respond to requests to

make the draft public in advance. CSOs raised a number of additional concerns relating to the freedoms available to civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs, both in terms of their legal recognition and operations.

CSOs noted that there is a well-documented history of over three decades of politically motivated State antagonism towards NGOs, community-based organisations, civil society groups and human rights activists under authoritarian governments, which have often framed NGOs and their activities as a threat to national security and sovereignty. It added that the subject of voluntary social service and NGOs continuing to be under the purview of the Minister of Public Security, instead of the Ministry of Social Services, without any justification, casts a shadow of security related objectives on the legislative reform process.

Alleging that there has been a complete lack of a meaningful consultative process, the CSOs commented: "When the present President (Ranil Wickremesinghe) was the Prime Minister in 2018, he requested civil society groups to submit their proposals on amendments to the VSSO. The CSO-NGO Collective was formed in response to ensure that due consideration is given to issues faced by the sector so that reform does not result in arbitrary or oppressive amendments. However, since the beginning, no draft has been provided for review. Civil society groups previously made several formal and informal requests to be permitted to review draft amendments and/or legislation without receiving any working draft, even though for nearly two years there have been indications from the Public Security Ministry and the Director General (DG) of the NGO Secretariat that such reforms were in the works. The Legal Draftsman had confirmed that a draft was submitted on 04 December of last year (2023) to the Ministry of Public Security under which the Secretariat functions."

The CSOs analysing the Preamble of the Bill states that the objective of the Bill is to efficiently regulate activities of all VSSOs, including NGOs. This is distinct from

“supporting, facilitating and promoting the work of such groups. The Bill casts a wide net over all non-governmental groups and activities, including development organisations, educational institutions, charities, corporate social responsibility foundations, human rights organisations, research institutes, and political think tanks, among others.

The CSOs further note that the Bill: “... seeks to control, restrain and interfere, and in some instances, prohibit selected activities and organisations. In a context of several repressive laws recently proposed (and enacted) under the present Government, it is of serious concern that the reform of the present Law (the VSSO Act) has failed to address any of the concerns raised for years by civil society groups regarding the workings of the NGO Secretariat, and the oppressive surveillance and interference of security agencies, especially in relation to human rights, political reform, transitional justice and accountability related work.”

Noting that mandatory registration shuts out informal, voluntary collectives from legal recognition, the statement highlighted that international human rights standards and the Sri Lankan Constitution guarantees the freedoms of association and expression. It said that citizens should be free to associate in any form, and that restrictions may only apply once an activity is suspected or found to be illegal. In this context, it said that the proposed Bill seeks to regulate all non-governmental activity, which encompasses a broad spectrum of organisations, i.e., informal, formal, voluntary, paid, non-profit, for profit, national, district focused, community based, and village based, and a broad range of types of activities and aims. By regulating all forms and not focusing on harm, it was further explained that the Bill may be successful for the purpose of surveillance and casting a wide net of control, but will administratively cripple certain groups and activities.

The draft Bill also empowers entry without a warrant and the search of premises, further constituting interference with physical liberty

and the rights to privacy. Under the existing law it can only be interfered with under judicial supervision.

The definition of a NGO is overly broad, the statement pointed out: “The smallest of community-based groups to the largest of national and international organisations are required to register. This includes those engaged in social services, social welfare, consensus building, advocacy, and strengthening the civil society. The draft also contemplates the competent authority having power over NGOs that are not required to register, such as religious institutions, trade unions, and cooperatives. The application of similar rules to all categories of NGOs will be particularly prohibitive for smaller organisations. Current experience whereby the NGO Secretariat and State officials are compelling organisations to obtain numerous, cumbersome approvals, and provide quarterly activity reports and proposed plans, has been too onerous for small organisations who work with few members of staff or engage in voluntary work.”

Finally - accountability and justice in safeguarding people’s health and well-being

On 2 February 2024, former Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella was arrested for his involvement in procuring unregistered medicines and sub-standard drugs. Subsequently, he was remanded following widespread public outcry and activism marking it a historic moment, since this was the first time a sitting Cabinet Minister has been arrested in Sri Lanka. Despite numerous allegations against other prominent figures, many have managed to evade legal consequences. However, shocking reports about sub-standard medicines administered in State-run hospitals resulting in disabilities, loss of eyesight, and even fatalities instilled fear among the public, deterring them from seeking medical care. Rambukwella’s arrest was a powerful lesson that in the post-Aragalaya context the public would demand accountability and justice in safeguarding their

health and well-being. It is remarkable that the people prevailed over such powerful and corrupt individuals.

Presidential Elections: Winds of change

Presidential elections were held on 21st September 2024. A proliferation of 39 candidates contested the elections but the main contenders included the incumbent Ranil Wickremasinghe, contesting as an independent, Namal Rajapaksa of the Sri Lanka Podujana Perumana (SLPP); Sajith Premadasa of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the National Peoples Power (NPP).

Ranil Wickramasinghe focused on his accomplishments in stabilising the economy, albeit by taking bold and unpopular measures and Sajith Premadasa assured the people that he would re-negotiate the terms of the agreement with the IMF and promote capitalism with a human face. Anura Kumara Dissanayake campaigned on promoting economic freedom, accountability, combatting corruption and improving the lives of the working poor.

It was agreed that this was the first presidential election where the campaign did not rely on racial and religious chauvinism. Significantly, this was also the first presidential election where the preferential votes were tallied as no single candidate received a clear majority. It was with the count of presential votes that Anura Kumara Dissanayake tallied 55.8% of the votes.

Anura Kumara Dissanayake's first act of immediate significance was to appoint Dr Harini Amarasuriya, a respected university academic as Prime Minister and he dissolved parliament the next day, calling for General elections on 14th November 2024.

Parliamentary elections: A gale force for change

The result of the election was a landslide victory for the left-wing National People's Power coalition led by recently elected president Anura Kumara Dissanayake. The NPP won 159 seats, more than any Sri Lankan political party in history, the second highest proportion of seats in the nation's history, and won every district except Batticaloa. This was the first election since 1977 where a single party managed to achieve a supermajority and the first time the Jaffna District was won by a non-Tamil political party. This election also saw a record in women's representation with 21 female MPs elected, the highest in Sri Lanka's parliamentary history. A record number of more than 150 MPs are first-timers in Parliament. Fifty nine MPs did not re-contest and this list included several senior and junior members of the Rajapaksa clan. 31 MPS are between the ages of 21-41 and there are approximately 55 professionals in Parliament including 20 medical doctors, and a mix of engineers, university lecturers, teachers, economists, sociologists and agriculturalists.

The re-appointment of Dr. Harini Amarasuriya is considered by many a victory for gender equality. However, the cabinet of 21 was not demonstrably inclusive, as it has a total of 2 women and 1 Tamil minister. It was noted by many Muslim activists that the failure to include a Muslim in the cabinet was a matter of concern to the community.

An early scandal confronting the government involved the Speaker of the House who claimed to have higher educational qualifications that he did not possess. There was public pressure on him and the government that he should step down and keep intact the image of a clean-parliament and he complied. This was a positive indicator that the public had higher expectations of this government and would hold them to account.

People's Mandate: A compass for the future

Undoubtedly the “People have spoken”. The People have given the new government a mandate but the mandate is not a blank cheque. It is tied to their expectations that democracy and the rule of law will be protected and promoted, the government will hold the corrupt and abusers of power accountable and that they will focus on improving the lives of the poor – looking to enhancing their political, social and economic rights. Dismantling odious laws and addressing odious debt, creating opportunities for decent work with decent pay– these are high on people’s agenda and will constitute the prism from which they will review government performance in 2025.

In a world which is seeing the rise of right-wing, authoritarian governments and populations expressing their frustration with parliamentary democracy, Sri Lanka has bucked the trend. People are watching eagerly to see if Sri Lanka will stay the course.

Dr. Sakuntala Kadirgamar
Executive Director

LAW & SOCIETY TRUST IN 2024:

Recognising the Challenges and Seizing the Opportunities to Invest in the Future

In the year 2024, Sri Lanka has seen significant political transformation. The National People's Power (NPP), seen as an outsider by the dominant political ruling class, captured power in the country through victories in both the Presidential and the parliamentary elections.

This victory is significant in many ways. It can be attributed to the public's anger and frustration towards the traditional, elite political class, who were seen as the main reason for Sri Lanka's economic and political crises. Some political experts, see these election results as the culmination of the people's struggle (The Aragalaya) that started in 2022, demanding a "system change".

Another significant factor in the NPP's election victory was the support it received in the North, East, and Hill Country where the majority of people are Tamil-speaking. The NPP was traditionally regarded as a Sinhala-dominant political party that will not win the trust of the Tamil-speaking minorities. These elections have shown otherwise and this presents numerous opportunities as well as challenges for the Government to consider as they frame their approaches to addressing reconciliation, nation-building and post-war justice issues.

This political transformation has created new challenges and opportunities for the Law & Society Trust (LST) as well and we must strategise approaches to use the freshly created spaces and address any challenges that arise from these changes.

Some of these opportunities and challenges will include:

Addressing the economic crisis through economic reforms that are fair and just:

While expressing its commitment to work within

the framework of the IMF agreement, the new government has repeatedly emphasised the importance of holding fast to its mandate and commitment to enhance social protection, reduce poverty, and address the difficulties of poor and vulnerable communities. However, the IMF and debt restructuring agreements that the previous government agreed to, give very limited space for the new government to navigate in and they are already facing severe challenges to fulfilling promises to reducing the economic burden carried by the people and to increase investments in poverty reduction and local economic development.

Strengthening democracy and human rights

Through its election manifesto and during the campaign, the NPP has repeatedly confirmed its commitments to constitutional governance, and legal reforms, which strengthen democracy and human rights in Sri Lanka. Some of the key promises included the commitment to abolish the executive presidency, repeal the PTA and other oppressive laws, draft a new constitution with deeper power devolution, address the issues of war-affected communities, including the militarisation of land and release political prisoners, among others. These reforms will need a strong political will and leadership to garner public support if they are to be implemented. Strong resistance can be expected from the conservative, nationalistic forces who have been crushed for now but are waiting to rise again.

Strengthening participatory democracy

Events in the last two years have shown the resilience and versatility of democracy in Sri Lanka. After the Aragalaya, the people were able to topple the government through public protests. Now, the country has seen another transformation through two of the most peaceful and fair elections in history. This is also a new experience for Sri Lanka and it demonstrated how a different model of participatory democracy

can work and its impact on governance. People's participation in governance is one of the key "system-changes" the Aragalaya highlighted, and now we have a unique opportunity to experiment and strengthen different models of participatory democracy at various levels to strengthen democracy in all its manifestations.

In 2024, LST worked with different sectors of society that were discriminated against due to the dominant socioeconomic and cultural systems. Through this work, LST has built strong networks and worked with movements from the local to the national level, representing the needs and aspirations of various sectors of society. People's Alliance for Right to Land (PARL), People's Parliament, UNITE trade union alliance, Yukthi Collective, Women's Collective for Economic Justice, Collective of women workers in free trade zones, and community governance platforms are examples of some of these collective platforms facilitated by LST.

LST supported these collective platforms to enable people and their organisations to articulate their concerns and demands for necessary changes at different levels. The People's Commission on Land Rights, the People's Manifesto, policy briefs on workers' rights, the rights of women farmers, people with disabilities, solutions for the debt crisis, etc., are some examples of the collective articulations on human rights by people and their organisations.

LST through its research has also, built a strong knowledge base on policy, legal, and system reforms that are required to strengthen Sri Lanka's social, economic and political fabric. LST's research on anti-terror legislation, constitutional reforms, minority rights and women's rights will be immensely useful in advocating for the positive reforms in dialogues with the new government.

The appointment of a new government has, in its election manifesto and throughout its campaign, promised to implement most of the progressive reforms that LST and other civil society movements have been advocating. It creates an opportunity for civil society to engage with government to support a progressive economic and political transformation. We hope that this opportunity is not lost.

Sandun Thudugala
Director of Programmes

THE LAW & SOCIETY TRUST'S WORK IN 2024

The aim of LSTs programmes in 2024 is to ensure that people of all identities are working together for a society that recognises and respects plurality, equality, and justice for all; and that citizens' groups engage with government to influence government policy formulation and implement processes to ensure the rights of people and democracy are being protected at all times. This includes rights protection during the COVID response, in the economic crisis and during the political transition. In this respect LST's programmes support social, economic and governance reforms and analyses all reforms and actions for the impact that they have on society, the economy, and the legal and political process.

LAW & SOCIETY

People's Commission for pandemic justice

LST convened a public consultation body called the People's Commission for Pandemic Justice and Right to Health. The Commission successfully established an inclusive platform where citizens, civil society leaders, and academics collaborate to address systemic injustices and advocate for equitable health rights.

LST convened 15 public hearings in 15 districts (Jaffna, Mannar, Killinochchi, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Kandy, Moneragala, Nuwara Eliya, Ratnapura, Ampara, Batticaloa, Galle, Colombo) with approximately 40 to 50 people attending each public hearing. Thus, approximately 800 citizens of Sri Lanka participated and shared their experiences regarding their access to healthcare and the human rights violations they experienced during the pandemic and economic crisis. In addition, over 20 focus group discussions were conducted, which included diverse groups such as persons with disabilities (PWD), the LGBTIQ+ community, Indigenous communities, urban poor communities, women-headed families, farmers, fishermen, garment workers, Malaiyaha community, vegetable farmers, individuals affected by the forced cremation-related policies, healthcare workers, pre-school teachers, daily wage workers, government employees, homemakers, CSO members, journalists, and university students.

Along with a national-level survey, LST systematically documented the health-related impacts of the pandemic and economic crisis. These efforts led to tangible outcomes, including increased public engagement and comprehensive documentation of health rights violations. Through these interventions, LST formed a platform of 60 key people drawn from various sectors and regions all over Sri Lanka, united in fighting for the health rights of the people in their respective regions and beyond.

Based on the findings of the People's Commission on Pandemic Justice, LST is developing policy briefs under five thematic areas: Patients Health Charter, Mental Health, Social Protection, Economic Crisis, and Access to Essential Medicines. Once completed, these policy briefs are anticipated to provide evidence-based recommendations to guide policymakers in addressing systemic gaps in healthcare, strengthening social protection mechanisms, and ensuring equitable access to essential medicines during economic challenges. These policy briefs are expected to be a vital advocacy tool for driving meaningful policy reforms that uphold health rights and social justice.

This is the first initiative in Sri Lanka where the people from various sections of the society were able to share their experiences, concerns and make suggestions on issues related to the right to health and other human rights during the pandemic and economic crisis. This body of knowledge will provide a platform to engage with the government on issues related to right to health as well as in developing a human rights based approach when facing future emergencies such as the pandemic.

Addressing gender discriminatory norms

LST conducted 7 focus group discussions (FGD) with 58 journalists and social media influencers across the five districts in the Northern Province. A report was generated on the basis of the discussion: “Identified technological gaps and other causes of the gender divide and gender-based digital exclusion in the Northern Province”. During the FGDs, 20 journalists and social media influencers were selected who needed support to overcome the above gaps. Based on the report 6 capacity-building workshops were conducted for the selected 20 social media influencers and journalists.

These participants engaged in advocacy initiatives to reduce the identified gaps in the Northern Province. The team developed 4 videos related to gender-based digital exclusion and plans to publish them. This campaign is led by local journalists and social media influencers in the Northern Province who confronted different barriers to accessing effective digital platforms.

Women’s rights activists, opinion creators and the general public were engaged in framing the national level discourse to: establish and address the intersectionality of women’s issues; address gendered norms and national narratives that are discriminatory.

Building bridges connecting women leaders in the North and South: Supporting their campaigns for justice

Melani Manel is a journalist who participated in two exchange programmes, and she wrote different articles on the national news websites on the disappeared persons’ issue, learning from the experiences she heard during the exchange programme .

Link: <https://www.vikalpa.org/article/43266>

Learning from the exchange programme Melani Manel expressed interest in keeping connections with the mothers’ groups she met in the North. Later she joined with the Mothers.

March in Kilinochchi and highlighted their demands in the national news channel as a journalist.

<https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Tamil:-truth-and-justice-for-the-%27desaparecidos-60200.html>

Learning from the exchange visit, one of the main changes she contributed towards in the South is described below:

“I am happy to say that the biggest achievement of the exchange programme for me was, that I could bring two women leaders of the Association for Relatives of Enforced Disappearances (ARED) from Kilinochchi to the International Women’s Day celebration held at Caritas SEDEC National Centre on the 07th of March and gave them an opportunity to address the gathering. The two women leaders were Sabitha amma and Sarojini amma. Sabitha addressed the gathering very perfectly and they were happy to have this opportunity. So, I thank much to the LST for selecting & sponsoring me in this Exchange Program.”

Melani Manel,
A journalist who participated in the 1st exchange visit

Taboo Talk

LST led an active media campaign to address the gender discriminatory social norms on domestic violence, rights of the LGBTIQ+ community, issues of underprivileged women, period poverty, different gender identities, and the impact of the economic crisis on women.

Taboo Talk Season 02 was launched in celebration of International Women’s Day 2024, introducing a fresh and engaging format for the video series. To maximise reach and engagement, we published the full videos on our YouTube channel while sharing short-form content on Facebook and Instagram, ensuring wider accessibility. This season continued to break societal taboos, sparking important conversations and amplifying diverse voices.

This season focused on critical themes, such as Period Poverty, Digital Security for Women, Women in the Economic Crisis, and Women with Different Sexual Identities. Each episode featured women with first-hand experiences and provided the platform for them to engage with industry professionals for meaningful discussions and aimed at breaking the social taboos and silence around these subjects.

Women leaders who work with different communities shared their experiences linking with the causes derived from gender discriminatory social norms. The media campaign was conducted through the LST YOUTUBE channel and short videos were published on Facebook and Instagram. The series reached a total of 4480 viewers on YouTube.

The link for the video series:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLo-Qm3M8QcdJDuMPFP_cPTd91kaZBkXcln

An interactive discussion took place through the “comments” section and some of the comments are included below:

“This video is for those who believe that under the name of freedom of speech, anything, even defamation, can be done”.

“The rights of the LGBTIQ+ community should be protected in the workplace”

The Fourfold Path is a documentary film produced by LST in collaboration with Freedom House, focusing on the real-life experiences of four individuals from the LGBTIQ+ community as they navigate the complexities of their coming out process. The film uniquely represents these journeys through the four natural elements—Water, Fire, Earth, and Wind—symbolising the challenges, resilience, and transformation of each individual’s experience. In addition to these deeply personal narratives, contemporary artist Yashodha Rasanduni is featured as the performer of universal energy, adding an artistic dimension that enriches the storytelling. By blending documentary filmmaking with artistic expression, The

Fourfold Path aims to bridge the gap between LGBTIQ+ individuals and wider society, and build empathy and understanding about the struggles faced by those seeking acceptance.

This campaign created a platform to address hidden conversations and issues faced by various groups of women and the LGBTIQ+ community, stemming from gender-discriminatory social norms.

Fellowship programme on human rights: Building capacities of journalists and media influencers

Safe use of digital platforms

Around 250 schoolchildren and 20 teachers in two schools in the Mullaitivu district were capacitated on online safety. This event was facilitated by the journalists who themselves were capacitated through the LST fellowship programme on human rights for media influencers and journalists. The film screening and handouts distributed during the sessions helped developing a conversation with school children and teachers on the safe use of digital platforms.

LST capacitated 4 journalists and media influencers in the Vavuniya district who linked with LST’s fellowship programme on human rights for media influencers and journalists and conducted an advocacy initiative with 60 school children in the Vavuniya district. A film screening and leaflets distribution were included in the programme to ensure personal security on social media. An interactive discussion was conducted and the need of ensuring girls’ safety in social media and this was highlighted as an important policy initiative.

During the discussion, the lack of facilities for female students to access the digital equipment and platforms was raised. The need to assure a secure digital space for school children emerged as a policy recommendation. This and other policy recommendations will be incorporated into the policy brief to be developed on “Access digital security and addressing the digital gender

divide: Countering the gender based digital exclusion”.

Political rights of the transgender community

LST supported and facilitated the Jaffna Transgender Network (JTN) in conducting the workshop for 15 members of the transgender community, including non-binary and gay individuals, to enhance their understanding of their political rights (these including the rights to equality, equal protection of the law and non-discrimination) and to learn advocacy strategies for better political representation. Key workshop findings were later incorporated into LST’s programmes on citizens’ political rights. A policy brief is being developed by the Jaffna Transgender Network on the political rights of the transgender community and will advocate the regional civil society organisations to support the campaign for ensuring the political rights of the LGBTIQ+ community.

As a result of these initiatives, LGBTI+ rights activists frame advocacy messages based on a sound conceptual foundation and link with local and national level networks, and human rights defenders to advocate for their rights.

Youth across identity groups engaged in reframing human rights discourse

Thirty young lawyers and law students in the Northern Province were connected with “The Fellowship programme for Gender and Human Rights” in the course of the year. They were exposed to the issues of domestic violence, persons with disabilities, community, enforced disappeared persons, and land rights through visits to different communities in five districts of the Northern Province. After the community visits, they enhanced their capacities and legal knowledge on certain themes through three capacity development programmes. Thereafter, they joined 3 advocacy tours to share their learnings and to link with the organisations who work with the victims of the above issues.

The JustDoc Fellowship successfully trained 19 fellowship holders, equipping them with the skills to create documentary films. After a rigorous selection process, 15 successful documentaries were chosen to be featured on our YouTube channel, based on their quality and thematic value. Among them, the top five films were selected for a special theatrical screening at PVR Cinema, One Galle Face, which drew a house-full audience, reflecting the strong public interest in justice-driven storytelling. Simultaneously, all 15 documentaries were launched on YouTube, ensuring broader accessibility and engagement. The screening event was a resounding success, celebrating the creativity and dedication of the Fellows while creating meaningful conversations on justice and social change

Ten Young law students launched 10 documentary videos on human rights, including social, cultural, and economic rights. They produced these videos through comprehensive capacity development workshops on documentary filmmaking. The law students who have creative ideas beyond the confines of the legal profession linked their legal knowledge with peoples’ real-life issues and produced these videos under the Just Doc programme.

Around 50% of the workshop participants have already developed linkages with the victim group and the organisations to provide on-going support. The capacitated law students have already initiated legal research with the groups they met. Moreover, these lawyers and law students will support the victim groups through legal aid campaigns and other advocacy initiatives.

One of the films was screened in an event of Women’s Day celebration in 2024 at BMICH and these films are used for the LST advocacy programmes on land rights and human rights.

Link for the video series:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLoQm3M8QcdJDzIYCjidRdm3e-LTUy87MM>

LAW AND GOVERNANCE

Protecting survivors of torture and ill treatment: Advocacy for judicial reforms

LST worked with lawyers and rights activists to build their capacities to engage effectively in protecting survivors of torture and ill treatment: and to advocate for necessary judicial reforms.

Fundamental rights litigation

The people's movement, 'Aragalaya' that started in March 2022 in Sri Lanka was severely suppressed by the government from July 2022. Large numbers of activists were arbitrarily arrested and detained. By the end of 31st of December 2024, 558 activists (533 men, 27 women and 1 transgender) were under arrest. LST has intervened in facilitating and coordinating support for the activists and lawyers in relation to 35 cases pending in the Magistrate Court. All those who were arrested after the Aragalaya have received legal support and got bailed out from their cases and 1 case has been dismissed with all the accused acquitted.

As part of its overall commitment to support Fundamental Rights (FR) cases, LST has directly challenged the Anti-Terrorism Bill (ATB) and Economic Transformation Bill (ETB) that were tabled in the Parliament, and has supported trade unions and other activists to challenge other oppressive bills (ATB, ETB and Online Safety Bill) as they violate the fundamental rights of the citizens.

LST has continuously maintained a database of records of arrested activists after the Aragalaya (845 men, 43 women), Magistrate Court Cases related to Aragalaya (53 Cases) and Fundamental Rights violation cases (82 Cases).

Advocacy against oppressive laws

As a result of continued advocacy and pressure from the activists and CSOs, the government was unable to push through

most of the oppressive law reforms they were planning to enact. Specifically, the previous government was unable to present the Anti-Terror Act (ATA) to the Parliament. The ATA has also been challenged by more than 30 petitioners (including LST) and the Supreme Court has ruled certain sections of the bill to be unconstitutional and requiring amendments. Due to the pressure created by civil society, both nationally and internationally, the government has hesitated in presenting the revised bill to the Parliament for approval.

Despite being enacted as a law; the Government is yet to fully implement the Online Safety Act. Arguably, this is due to the amendments proposed by the Supreme Court. More than 50 petitions were filed by CSOs and activists and although the bill was passed, the Government is obligated to give effect to the Court ruling and to enact those amendments fully. There is also a significant pressure from human rights organisations, media organisations and private sector against the restrictive provisions of the legislature which made government hesitant in implementing the law.

Similarly, the Government delayed publishing in the gazette the proposed NGO Act, which has been criticised by CSOs as an effort to restrict people's freedom of association and expression.

The power of the people and their advocacy was evident in the results of the Presidential and Parliamentary elections where the previous government and parties associated with it lost vote-share significantly. A small party which promised to repeal or revise the oppressive laws and provide justice to the activists who were arrested is now in office. LST will continue to engage with the new government to ensure justice for the activists.

Continued advocacy against oppressive laws

As a result of the continuous advocacy against the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), the current government (which was established after the parliamentary elections (September 2024), promised to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). This was their stance during its election campaign and they maintained this stance after getting elected. Currently the government is planning to appoint a committee to look in to the consequences of repealing of PTA.

LST has published more than 5 papers analysing the human rights impacts of PTA and created a series of video documentaries on this matter. The contents of these were used to create awareness among activists, CSOs and the general public about the negative aspects of the PTA with LST also conducting a series of public seminars on the PTA.

Gaining the commitment of the current government to repeal PTA and other repressive laws is a significant achievement in the struggle to strengthen human rights and in promoting a just and fair legal system in Sri Lanka. However, despite expressing this commitment publicly, the current government tried to use the PTA to arrest people soon after they came to office. But due to the continuous pressure by activists and general public, through social media and mainstream media, the government was forced to drop these charges in many cases. This also shows the widespread public awareness on the issue generated through CSO campaigns against the PTA.

Campaign for voter education

The Voter's Education Campaign – EachVoteMatters is a five-week initiative aimed at educating and engaging voters on their rights and responsibilities through strategic digital content and interactive discussions. The primary outreach method

involves producing engaging materials in various formats such as videos, infographics, podcasts, and social media posts. The campaign was designed to foster informed decision-making by countering misinformation, encouraging civic participation, and leveraging influencer collaborations to reach a broader audience. The campaign's engagement strategy includes interactive content fostering direct voter involvement.

The structured campaign rollout included a teaser phase, a campaign launch, vox-pop video series, roundtable discussions, user-generated content by selected creators, and myth-busting & awareness videos. A key highlight was the roundtable programme, which featured political representatives, youth activists, and professionals, discussing the importance of voting and responsible decision-making. The campaign also incorporated survey findings, presented through infographics and analysis videos, to highlight public concerns and insights.

Through this voter-education campaign, over 1 million viewers gained a better understanding of the voting procedure and marking choices on the ballot paper. The 2024 presidential election introduced the consideration of 2nd and 3rd preference votes, making the voting process more complex and significant. This campaign played a crucial role in helping voters understand the voting and vote-counting process, particularly in cases where no candidate achieved 50% of the votes.

The People's Parliament

The People's Parliament is a citizen-led initiative founded in response to Sri Lanka's political, economic, and social crises which emerged in 2022. The purpose of this initiative was to engage and consult with citizens, across various communities in different parts of the country. In response to the economic crisis in 2022, with people demanding political accountability, this 'People's Parliament' programme was unveiled as a creative way

of engaging people in a conversation on their aspirations and their rights on April 12, 2022 during the people's struggle protest movement started at Galle Face Green, Colombo on April 09.

The People's Parliament can be described as an open and deliberative space for citizens' participation and public opinion. The first and second deliberations of the Peoples Parliament were held from 12th April 2022 to 15th July 2023 and from 11th December 2023 to 24th July 2024 respectively.

LST has used People's Parliament report to engage with policy makers before and after the Presidential election to influence them in including the aspirations and proposals by the people in their election manifestoes. The report which consisted of more than 30 recommendations under the themes of economy, governance, peace and reconciliation will provide a platform for collective civil society engagement with political parties and the government for favorable policy, legal and system reforms.

A Community Governance Platform (CGP)

A regional-level discussion on women's leadership in addressing the economic crisis was held in March 2024 to celebrate Women's Day. The event, organised by women leaders from the Community Governance Platform (CGP), provided a space for participants to discuss the various challenges women face during the economic crisis. The discussion emphasised the need to develop and identify collective mechanisms to help women overcome these difficulties. Additionally, the role of women politicians in highlighting the impact of the economic crisis on women through the platforms available to them was also explored.

The members of the CGP have decided to enhance women's participation in upcoming local government elections and conducted a capacity assessment within the group to identify the capacity requirements.

Women leaders in CGP raised concerns on women's issues faced during the economic crisis in the CSO collectives and other platforms where they participated and demanded policymakers' attention to such issues.

After being capacitated, women leaders in the CGP will raise awareness among other women on the importance of women's political participation.

LAW AND ECONOMY

Women, youth, workers and rural communities were empowered to influence policy, legal and system reforms to ensure economic justice and environmental sustainability.

Free trade zone workers empowered to protect their rights during the COVID period

Over the last three years LST has worked with UNITE Trade Union collective and with 5 women led trade unions in export processing zones to equip and support them in mobilising against the harmful labour reforms that the previous Government was trying to enact.

As a result of the continuous engagements the previous government was unable to enact the labour policy reforms. The new government, established in late 2024 has promised to revisit the proposed reforms in consultations with workers and their organisations. LST with partner trade unions have drafted proposals for labour law reforms and submitted to the government.

In 2024 and 2025, three women leaders from trade unions that previously partnered with LST were appointed as members of the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC). NLAC is the apex tripartite entity (workers, employers and government) which takes key policy decisions about workers' rights. These three women leaders are the first women representatives appointed to the NLAC in its history.

From January to October 2023, these women-led trade unions were able to access justice for 12 workers (6 women, 4 men and 2 transgender) in factories in the Katunayaka and Vavuniya export processing zones. These workers were victims of sexual harassment, abuses and labour rights violations. They have done this by working through a legal support system created with 4 other women-led trade unions and a group of lawyers working with export processing zones workers in Sri Lanka.

LST's capacity building initiatives have provided women leaders and activists with knowledge and resources on labour law and procedures, as well as education and advocacy on labour rights. These initiatives have enabled effective involvement in basic legal mechanisms, community mobilisation through women-led alliances for worker rights, and local advocacy.

Continuous engagement of LST over the last few years with women workers and their organisations in EPZs in Sri Lanka, helped them to organise as women-led movements and to engage in key advocacy initiatives as a collective. This has helped them to get 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 meeting and engage in consultations.

These continuous engagements have resulted in these women leaders being recognised by the Government and employers as the voices of women workers and as representatives of National Labour Advisory Council. The appointment of these women who have worked with LST is a key achievement. These women leaders have also developed close relationships with and gained recognition from the new government and so will be able to engage in policy making processes to ensure that workers' rights are strengthened.

As a result of these initiatives, Free Trade Zone workers and their organisations are able to hold Government, Board of Investment (BOI) and private sector accountable in ensuring their rights being protected during the COVID period and in the aftermath of the economic crisis.

Alternative economic models and environmental sustainability

Based on the findings of the research on rural economy, land and irrigation, LST developed a land policy framework to support advocacy on land and rural development.

Before the election, LST had meetings with members of key political parties to initiate a discussion on the land reforms process. After the election also LST team had meetings with a number of Cabinet Ministers whose portfolios are connected with land, irrigation and environment.

The government has expressed the need to develop a land use policy to address the land, environment, and development issues in the country. LST plans to use the findings of irrigation research to constructively engage with the government's land use policy development using the developed relationship with the Ministries after the aforementioned meetings. The aforesaid land policy framework will also be an important tool in these engagements.

Unaddressed issues and ad hoc decisions on the rural economy, land and irrigation over the years have not only disrupted Sri Lanka's economic progress but also paved the way for wide social unrest. Policy framework developed by LST will provide a basis for a more inclusive and sustainable approach in policy making in relation to these areas. The current government has pledged to formulate a new land use policy and LST will use this opportunity to present its policy framework as a basis for engagement in advocating for reforms.

Activists, academics, policy makers, development specialists and Government officials are engaging in a discussion on a viable alternative for the economic crisis and social security measures to protect vulnerable groups and they are also engaging in a discussion on rural economic models which ensures the rights of rural communities and environmental sustainability.

Yukthi and Debt justice

LST facilitated the launch of a platform called YUKTHI (www.yukthisl.org) as a collective of researchers, activists, civil society organisations, trade unions, and community leaders. The forum was launched at an event in Colombo, titled "From Dispossession to Development: Sri Lanka's Path to Debt Justice," YUKTHI was launched as an inclusive forum to support working people's movements and struggles for democracy and justice in Sri Lanka. This alliance aims to promote better understanding of working people's experiences, and a critical analysis of neoliberalism while proposing alternative strategies to those proposed through the advocates of neoliberalism in the context of Sri Lanka's ongoing economic crisis.

With Yukthi, LST has published a common CSO position on debt justice in Sri Lanka and this will be used as the common position of the civil society movement in Sri Lanka. (<https://yukthisl.org/debt-justice/>)

So far, YUKTHI has been able to create a wide public discourse on the impact of IMF reforms, debt restructuring, and the need to consider alternatives both nationally and internationally. YUKTHI launched its position paper on debt restructuring on May 13, 2024, in Colombo.

YUKTHI website (www.yukthisl.org) was launched as a common platform to share articles, analysis and information on debt and economic justice issues in Sri Lanka.

Ten district level advocacy events were held with the participation of the tea estate employees, women farmers, micro financing victims, trade union members, fisher groups and other various stakeholders of the economy. During these discussions, the impact of the repressive laws on the public and the linkages of the economic reforms and the repressive laws that keeps putting more and more pressure on the working people, farmers, and fishers were discussed. The participants expressed their displeasure with the current

economic reforms and the challenges they faced in expressing dissent due to heavy state repression and the fears more repressive laws will be introduced.

LST has published a paper under the theme “A Brutal Experiment IMF – 17 and Sri Lanka” along with an animation video which have been used as the key documents in district level awareness programs.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATbGvC-6c2HY>)

LST also supported YUKTHI to organise a series of events from 9th- 11th June with four internationally recognised economists (Prof. Martin Guzman, Prof. Jyati Gosh, Prof. C.P Chandrasekar and Dr. Charles Abugre) in Sri Lanka. During the visit, the experts conducted a workshop with Sri Lankan economists and activists on challenges and alternatives for debt restructuring and a public seminar. Experts also visited leaders from the major political parties (National People’s Power (NPP), Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) and Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) for discussions and the experts also conducted a number of TV interviews during their visit.

All the parties have promised to renegotiate or exit the IMF led debt restructuring programme. While National People’s Power (NPP) has promised to renegotiate and revise the Debt Sustainability Assessment to start a new round of discussion on debt restructuring, SJB has also promised renegotiations. FSP has gone further and demanded debt cancellation and exiting of the IMF programme.

The expert visit stimulated significant interest among mainstream media and among intellectuals. The event was written-up in the newspaper by one of the prominent political analysts in the country: ‘Is There Another Way? Debt Restructuring, the IMF and the Future of Sri Lanka’, and the event was described as below:

“... the most educative, enlightening public policy event of this year. Organised by Yukthi a newish civic association spearheaded by Ahilan Kadirgamar, Ermiza Tegal and Melanie Gunatilleke, it featured three reputed international economists, Prof. Jayati Ghosh, Prof. Martin Guzman-former Economics Minister of Argentina and Charles Abugre.”

Daily FT - https://www.ft.lk/dayan_jayatileka/Debt-politics-declining-Hindutva-hegemony-and-the-Russia-war/10527-762989

Articles were also written in the press by the international experts supporting the initiative.

<https://www.ft.lk/columns/Sri-Lanka-must-renegotiate-IMF-Agreement-for-sustainable-recovery-from-crisis/4-763403>

[Promoting broad civic engagement on IMF structural adjustment policies and economic reforms](#)

During the last year LST and Yukthi have published analyses of the current economic crisis, the impact of the IMF reforms on society and alternative strategies Sri Lanka could and should consider in more than 50 articles, social media products and television programmes. The analysis has reached more than 2,000,000 viewers (assuming mainstream newspaper article will reach at least 10k viewers). Some links to the articles published are given above.

The Government which came to power in 2022 after the Aragalaya was determined to continue one sided IMF led economic reforms process. Lack of public consultation, transparency and the negative impacts of the reforms to the most marginalised communities have raised lots of concerns about the process and the results.

LST has worked with UNITE and Yukthi to build a public discourse about the economic reforms introduced through the IMF programme, its impact on the people and possible alternatives. The publications, seminars and social and mass media contents developed by LST with Yukthi Collective has

resulted in a significant discourse among the public, academia and political groups. This continued discussion has broadened the public awareness of the current economic crisis, impacts of the economic reforms introduced by IMF and possible alternative options. This was evident when the current government promised to renegotiate the IMF agreement to provide more support and protection for the most marginalised communities. The government has already taken some actions to widen the social safety network, decrease the tax burden, increase investments for public services such as health, education etc., and commit not to privatise key sectors of the economy such as transportation, energy, electricity etc.

Trade Union activists, CSOs and academics now have information and analysis to critique government economic policies in relation to IMF reforms and the debt restructuring programme.

Supporting campaigns on people's land rights

National and local CSOs are using People's Land Commission Report effectively to influence policy and legal reforms to land rights

People's Alliance for Right to Land (PARL), launched the People's Land Commission report in 2021. In 2021 and 2022 PARL initiated discussions with ruling and opposition MPs about the recommendations outlined in the report of the People's Land Commission (PLC). To facilitate this, various officials responsible for government lands (including the Minister of Lands, Land Secretaries, Land Commissioner General, Provincial and Inter-Provincial Land Commissioners, Divisional Secretaries, Colony Officers, Land Officers, and Grama Niladharis) were engaged.

As a result of these engagements over a period of time, the government has implemented one of the key recommendations of the PLC report – i.e., to amend the Land Development Ordinance and it was amended

in March 2022. Prior to the amendment, the ownership of government land was transferred to the eldest male child of the family. However, under the new amendment, both male and female children are now eligible to inherit land rights. This will significantly contribute in enhancing women's land rights situation of the country.

One of the recommendations in the National Land Commission report was that private lands occupied by the armed forces in the Northern and Eastern provinces should be returned to their original owners, allowing them to access and develop these lands. Following pressure exerted by the People's Alliance for Land Rights on the current government before it assumed power, they have promised to release all the military held private land after the elections. Some steps have already been taken to return land in the Thelippalai area of the Northern Province to its original owners. During a meeting with activists from the Northern Provincial Committee of the People's Alliance for Land Rights, the Northern Provincial Governor confirmed that plans for releasing more land.

Thus in 2024, we see the fruits of the work initiated by PARL several years prior.

Advocacy for comprehensive land use policy

The People's Land Commission observes that the lack of a comprehensive land use policy within the state machinery is the primary cause of land disputes in Sri Lanka. As a result of discussions and awareness programmes with politicians on this issue, the current government has started to formulate a National Land Use Policy.

LST has supported PARL to strengthen its provincial level networks in 5 provinces. This has enabled local communities and their organisations to build their strength to campaign and advocate together for their rights. Supporting the development of common action plans and linking them with national level action plans of PARL has enabled local

organisations to get the maximum results from their efforts and to build synergies. Horizontal and vertical linkages created among local communities and with national networks have enabled them to raise their voices at higher levels and also provided the opportunity for PARL to develop stronger evidence base advocacy initiatives.

People's Land Commission (PLC) report, which was built on the experiences and suggestions of people who have been affected by various forms of land rights violations, has provided a common framework for affected communities to advocate together for favorable policy, law and administrative reforms. This is one of the first instances in Sri Lanka where the affected and vulnerable communities have been consulted in drafting a land policy framework. The report has strengthened and inspired ongoing advocacy and campaigns as communities mobilise and take forward the contents of this report, as well as use it in their own work. This was evident in significant victories PARL members achieved in amending gender discriminatory provisions of the Land Development Ordinance, getting the government committed in releasing military occupied land in North and East and also to initiate a process to draft a national land use policy.

Being a part of the entire process, PARL members, community organisations and land rights activists have developed their understanding, capacities and analytical skills to lead the advocacy efforts to push for a new land policy in Sri Lanka. The framework presented in the report will enable communities from all ethnic and religious groups, women, and other marginalised groups to work together for solutions that can be acceptable for all.

People's Alliance for Right to Land strengthened: A resource centre to document information on land and a hub for national and international advocacy

LST has continued to support People's Alliance for Right to Land (PARL) to strengthen its national and provincial networks as a people's movement to campaign and advocate on people's land rights. By the end of 2023 PARL has been working with more than 75 community-based organisations, community groups and CSOs in 5 provinces (i.e., the North, North Central, Eastern, Uva and Central Provinces). Currently a database of more than 450 cases of land rights violations has been recorded by PARL and provincial groups have developed strategies and action plans to address them.

During 2022 / 23, LST supported PARL to develop their online and offline media and communications strengths. PARL website (<https://www.parlsl.com/>) has regularly being updated to be used as a resource centre on land rights related information, research and publications.

Online land disputes database and information portal

Lack of data and information on violations of land rights in Sri Lanka has always been a challenge for land rights activists in their campaigns and advocacy efforts. The development of the PARL online land disputes database and information portal is an effort to create a central resource centre which brings together the studies, publications and other resources related to land rights in Sri Lanka into one place. The Land Dispute Database can be used by activists and their organisations in national and international level advocacy. Capacities of PARL members are being developed through a series of training programmes to use this online platform and to gather and provide information to the database.

PARL online database has recorded around 37 cases of common land rights violations. The database has been updated regularly based on the information received from the regional networks and local PARL members. (<https://www.parlsl.com/land-disputes>).

PARL social media presence have been expanded to:

- Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/parlsl/>)
- Twitter (<https://twitter.com/ParlSI>)
- Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/@parlsrilanka2547>)

PARL's long journey: Supporting land officers to effectively resolve community land issues

LST has a long engagement with PARL and PARL has trekked the long journey advocating for land rights. PARL has empowered land officers with knowledge, access to information, links with other agencies and enabling systems and as a result land officers resolve community land issues more effectively.

In 2022 the then government launched a new programme to provide farmers with land deeds giving them the right to sell the land if they wished. PARL feared that this initiative would result in farmers losing their land to creditors and other predatory market forces if it were to be implemented without addressing the poverty and indebtedness of farmers.

In 2022 and 2023, LST supported PARL to launch an island wide awareness and public campaign against this programme. A national conference was held in Colombo, with regional programmes in the Uva, Eastern, and Northern provinces to educate the public. In November 2024, the Ministry of Land issued a statement recognising the problems of the programme and paused the programme until a proper review was completed.

Since 2010, the government and the Mahaweli Authority have attempted to allocate 149 hectares of traditional farming land from the villages of Dehigama and Akiriyan Kumbura for a sugar factory. However, these efforts were thwarted due to the opposition from the local communities. In 2021 and 2022, the government made another attempt to acquire 65,000 acres for sugarcane cultivation, but with the support of civil

society organisations and local politicians, this was also prevented. Since 2021, the People's Alliance for the Right to Land has been involved in the Rideemaliadda Farmer Land Struggle, providing legal assistance and conducting training programmes on land rights. As a result of this interventions, the farmers in Rideemaliadda were able to secure their right to the land and are now able to cultivate their land year-round, including permanent crop cultivation, which was not possible before.

In 2023, the estate administration notified 35 families who are working and residing in the Batalagoda Estate in Kurunegala to vacate their land. Upon learning of this, the People's Alliance for the Right to Land intervened, taking legal action against the forced eviction. A year later, the estate administration agreed to settle the case and, on 24.06.2024, offered 29 plots of 10 perches of land to 29 families residing on the estate. This represents an important step in securing land and a place to live for these families.

In 2024, the previous government took steps to approve two Indian companies and a Singaporean company to extract mineral sand from the coastal strip between Pulmoddai, Muttur, Wakare, and the Yala National Park in the Eastern Province. The government announced that 300 meters of the coastal strip would be allocated for landward mining. However, this project was carried out without consulting the public or following required environmental impact procedures. In response, the People's Alliance for the Right to Land organised awareness programmes to unite fishermen and farmers from the coastal zones, and included communities from Pulmoddai to Panama. As a result of pressure from the local communities, the Trincomalee District Secretary acknowledged their concerns and temporarily stopped the project till proper consultations were done.

PARL and strategic litigation

The construction of Yan Oya Reservoir across the Yan Oya River, which flows through the Anuradhapura and Trincomalee districts, was started in 2014 and was completed in September 2018. However, the project displaced 1,725 families from six villages in the Horowapathana division and 1,400 families from seven villages in Trincomalee. Although the government proposed alternative lands and compensation, these promises were not fulfilled. LST has supported People's Alliance for the Right to Land to file a fundamental rights petition in the Colombo Supreme Court. As a result, the court ordered the provision of alternative lands, settlements, and essential infrastructure such as roads, water, and electricity for the displaced families. Compensation for damaged crops has been provided on two occasions, and most infrastructure facilities are now completed.

The Women's Forum for Economic Rights: Securing rights of women farmers and building their capacities

The Women's Forum for Economic Rights was established in March 2023 to ensure the sustainability of women farmers' initiatives, which they have been engaging in to secure food sovereignty and sustain the rural economy. Thirteen women's organisations, including 90 members, initiated the forum, and one of its key areas is to influence policymakers to develop progressive and sustainable policies that secure women farmers' land, economic, and social rights while recognising their contribution to ensuring food security.

The forum presented their proposals to the national budget in 2024 and plan at a national level forum with the participation of national and provincial level stakeholders, including the Departments of Agrarian Development, Agriculture, Irrigation and the Ministry of Land and other CSOs in 2025.

The newly elected Prime Minister met with the members of the forum, who handed over their demands as women farmers to be

considered in the preparation of agriculture, land, and economic policies.

The women farmers at the grassroots level directly contribute to policy discussions through the Women's Forum for Economic Rights. The national-level opportunities they have received to voice their issues and demands to stakeholders, including the Prime Minister, have led to the inclusion of their concerns in policies and manifestos. The Prime Minister responded to the demands presented by the women farmers, stating that she would bring them to the attention of policymakers, including budget preparation committees.

Moreover, a representative from the Women's Forum for Economic Rights has been appointed as a consultant to the consultative committee for the proposed Microfinance and Credit Regulatory Authority Bill. This bill appears to be drafted in a way that favours profitable companies rather than addressing the demands of microfinance victims. As a member of the consultative committee, the Women's Forum has critically analysed the bill, highlighting the devastating impact of microfinance debt traps on rural women and recommending progressive changes to ensure a more just and equitable Act. As a result of litigation and advocacy efforts against the bill, the government decided to withdraw the bill.

Moreover, the budget proposals presented by women have influenced policymakers to develop gender-sensitive budget proposals, recognising women's contributions to economic development.

The organisational structure of the Women's Forum for Economic Rights ensures the active participation of grassroots-level organisations from different districts across the country, collectively organising and strengthening the movement to secure women's economic rights. The forum functions as a network, welcoming other women-led organisations to join and expand the understanding of women's crucial role in economic development.

The members of the forum have developed an annual work plan and adopted a collective participatory approach, supporting each other's struggles as a key strategy. They have actively participated in campaigns and protests related to microfinance issues and have linked with the May Day celebration organised by the Walawe Wam Iwura Farmer Society to advocate for farmers' rights.

The Women's Forum for Economic Rights has encouraged women to connect with similar groups, fostering the exchange of experiences and knowledge on agroecology, food security, and entrepreneurship. Recently, forum members visited the Bogawantalawa Women Farmers' Society to learn about collective farming in a limited landscape.

Today, these women farmers have the knowledge, skills, linkages and support to develop practical solutions to develop climate resilient, just and equitable food systems.

The climate-resilient livelihood models have played a significant role in helping communities adapt to the impacts of climate change. Five climate resilience models, led by women farmer societies, have successfully enabled women to secure household food security while strengthening their economic capacities. These models serve as effective strategies for sustainable agriculture and economic resilience in the face of climate challenges.

Through networking, women members have been able to support each other's struggles for land, resources, markets and in resisting challenges such as microfinance debt traps. This solidarity has strengthened their collective advocacy efforts and empowered them to push for sustainable economic rights and policies. Women's rights activists and their networks are strengthened to hold duty bearers accountable in protecting women's economic rights.

Sharing success stories

Vimukthi Gemigovi Kantha society uses the building as market and store. Currently 60 families sell their vegetable products via this market. Kaveri women society in Trincomalee produced cereals (like samaposha) and generated six direct jobs for women in the village. Thirty-two women from Bogawandalwa women society are adapted for agroecology and continuing part time agriculture activities. Also, the women in Bogawandalawa engage with other movements and national women forums to advocate their issues on land and housing. Kaveri women society, Vimukthi Gemigovi kantha society became entrepreneurs. They are involved in secondary products like yoghurt, gee, organic fertilizer, traditional seeds, coconut oil and oilcake (punnakku).

Women farmers have been actively engaged in knowledge, experience, and resource exchange programmes, sharing essential resources such as seeds and plants. These exchanges have not only strengthened their agricultural practices but have also fostered solidarity and mutual support in their struggles.

In 2024, a women's group visited the North to explore cooperative models that can be replicated in the South as sustainable, people-led economic models. This initiative has further strengthened inter-regional connections and enhanced collective efforts toward economic resilience and food sovereignty.

Citizens' and civil society organisations have information, knowledge and skills to advocate for democratic governance reforms at the national and local level. Citizen's and CSO movements are engaging effectively with constitutional development and other governance reforms processes with a sound understanding on fundamental constitutional values that protect the rights of every citizen.

As a result of these initiatives, Women's representatives of LGIs have the information, knowledge, and skills to identify the needs of women in their areas, develop proposals to address those needs, and to secure funding and other resources for those projects. Women's rights activists are successfully influencing policy makers on progressive reforms to ensure economic and social rights of women.

Campaign against the Microfinance and Credit Regulatory Authority Bill

Vimukthi Gami Govi Kantha Samithiya led the campaign against the Microfinance and Credit Regulatory Authority Bill which was proposed in 2023 amending the Microfinance Act. This Bill completely avoids addressing the most serious issues relating to micro credit and microfinance, namely the predatory practices by banks and financial institutions. This Bill will effectively stifle small community-based micro credit groups in which women borrowers have a direct stake and decision-making power. Pointing out the above adverse impacts, Vimukthi Gami Gove Kantha Samithiya conducted continuous awareness and organised protest at regional and national level. LST facilitated the campaign by producing video documentary interviews on this issue and shared them on media platforms.

LIBRARY

The library is in excellent condition and has been rearranged according to the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system. The total collection of books in the LST library has increased to 9765. The 8911 bibliographic records are available in the integrated library management system (KOHA). Online Public Access Catalogue Link - <http://46.202.164.13/>

The Law & Society Trust Library has moved to JSTOR Arts and Sciences Collection I from Arts and Sciences Collection VI. The Law & 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 purchased more books based on the requirements of LST staff and members in the past years. Distribution of LST Annual Reports, LST Review journals, and the State of the Human Rights Reports (SHR) to members, foreign embassies, institutions, and universities. LST provided and distributed publications as per requests made during LST workshops. The LST library created a Facebook page to communicate information to members of the public.

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

To enhance engagement with the LST Library, we are launching a Study Circle project for all staff and members, featuring discussions on book chapters, films, and more—held every two months. LST Library secures ISBNs from the National Library of Sri Lanka specifically for publications authored by members of the Law & Society Trust. LST Library successfully rebounded and repaired damaged books, preserving the library’s valuable collection.

PUBLICATIONS

LST focuses on providing education that promotes values like inclusion, democracy, and diversity. This helps fill the gaps in formal education, which often lacks focus on human values. LST publishes books and reports in all three languages of Sri Lanka to raise awareness about human rights. All of their publications are available online at <https://lst.lk/> and printed copies are shared with important groups like the Board of Directors, members, donors, embassies, universities, selected libraries and political parties.

Books

- We Must Prepare to Reflect: Selected Writings of Vijay Nagaraj in Sri Lanka 2024, (English)
- Understanding Clandestine Gravesite Investigations: Guide for Families of the Missing and Disappeared, 2023 (English, Sinhala, Tamil)

Reports

- A Guide to Land and Development Plans in Sri Lanka, 2024 (English, Sinhala, Tamil)
- A Brutal Experiment IMF-17 & Sri Lanka, 2024 (English, Sinhala, Tamil)
- Sri Lanka Racked with Political and Economic Instability: How did the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) Respond? 2024
- A Peoples' Agenda: for the Future of Sri Lanka – 2024, (English, Sinhala, Tamil)
- Presidential Election 2024: Aspirations of the People, 2024, (English, Sinhala, Tamil)

Periodical

- “RULE BY LAW” REPLACING THE “RULE OF LAW” : A Review Of The Post-Aragalaya Legislative Agenda Impacting The Social, Political And Economic Rights Of The People (LST REVIEW, Vol.32, Issue No. 350, June 2024), (English, Sinhala, Tamil)

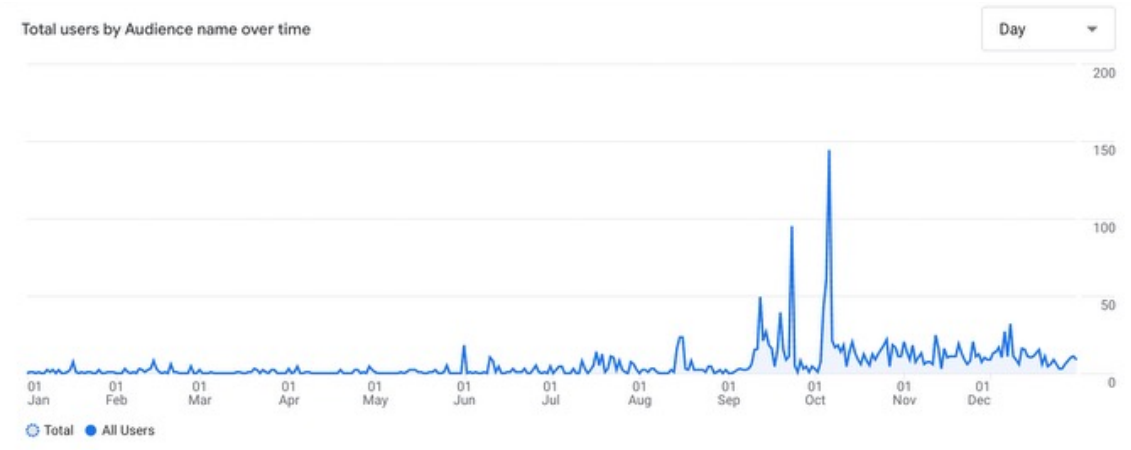
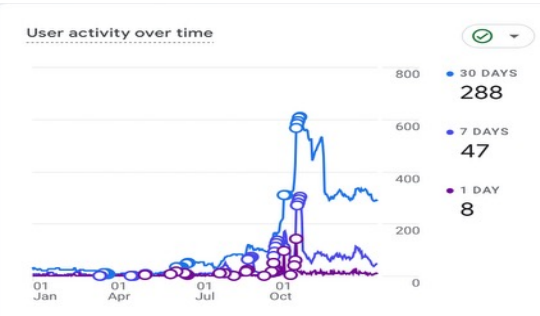
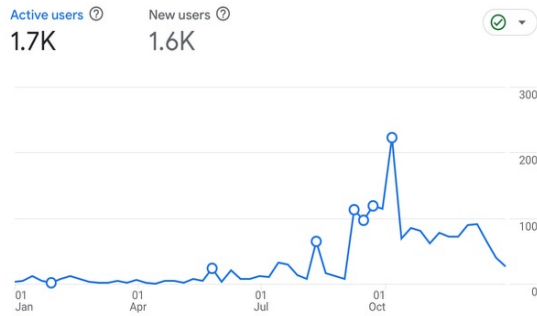
Brochures

- People's Commission on Pandemic Justice and Right to Health: “Ensuring equity, accountability, and Right to Health for All”, 2024 (English, Sinhala, Tamil)

COMMUNICATIONS

DIGITAL MEDIA : OVERVIEW & SPECIFIC ANALYSIS

Website analysis



Plot rows Search... Rows per page: 10 1-1 of 1

<input type="checkbox"/>	Audience name +	↓ Total users	New users	Sessions	Views per session	Average session duration	Total revenue
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Total	1,668 100% of total	1,639 100% of total	2,650 100% of total	1.97 Avg 0%	3m 46s Avg 0%	\$0.00
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1 All Users	1,668 (100%)	1,639 (100%)	2,650 (100%)	1.97	3m 46s	\$0.00 (-)

Social media overview in the year - 2024

Facebook	2024
Reach	1.9 million
Views	956,000
Content interactions	37500
Page visits	55000
Video views	1.1 million
Followers' growth	6800

Instagram	2024
Reach	113,000
Reaction	1500
Page views	2600
Link clicks	1800
Followers' growth	310

YouTUBE	2024
Views	46500+
Watch time (hours)	2900
Subscribers	605+

+

LinkedIn	2024
Views	18160
Reactions	535
Visitors	635+

LST maintains an active presence on X (formerly Twitter); however, we are currently unable to access performance analytics for the platform, as this feature is restricted to premium accounts. Without a premium membership, we do not have access to detailed analytics and engagement insights.

2024 LST IN RETROSPECT

2024 has been another active year for the Law & Society Trust (LST). There were highlights and some sad moments to recall as well.

A highlight of 2024 was the appointment of Dr. Harini Amarasuriya as Prime Minister after the Presidential elections of September 2024 and her re-confirmation as Prime Minister after the Parliamentary elections of November 2024, where she received an overwhelming majority of votes. Dr. Amarasuriya was a former board member of LST and she brings to her office her deep commitment to human rights and social justice. In addition, several academics and researchers who worked with LST over the years were elected as Members of Parliament making this the Parliament with the largest female representation and the greatest number of professionally qualified members. In September 2024, the Law & Society Trust conducted a national survey on the presidential election, and the final results were officially launched at a public event held on the 10th of September at The Thaprobané, Colombo. The same event also marked the official launch of LST's newly developed website, which has since been recognised at the BestWeb.lk Awards Ceremony with two awards for its excellence in mobile user experience and overall design in the non-profit category. Specifically, LST received awards for the Best Mobile User Experience Website and the Best Website - Gold Award in the Non-Profit Category.

The partnership with IDEAS and YUKTHI to build professional and activist networks to engage in alternative discourses around debt restructuring and economic reforms, has been rewarding, and we hope to work closely with them in the coming year too.

We continue to have close partnerships with FORUM-ASIA and collaborate on the ANNI report, and on issues relating to human rights defenders, business and human rights labour in export processing zones.

We have a close collaboration with the University of Edinburgh in monitoring the support required for torture survivors and their families.

A sad moment for LST in 2024 was the decision we made to move from 3 Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8 – the office space that LST had occupied since its inception and which was closely associated with our founder, Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam.

The team has since grown, and we faced space and other challenges, and so reluctantly and sadly we moved at the end of the year. But we have found an alternative and suitable space and believe that it will be a good convening centre in the years to come.

We faced further challenges in 2024 when we were informed that some of our core funders were re-aligning their development priorities in the coming years. We will have to develop the resilience required to mitigate these challenges.

DONORS IN 2024

- Diakonia
- National Endowment for Democracy
- CAFOD
- WeEffect
- Open Society Foundation
- Internews
- European Union (Lead partner Chrysalis)
- USAID (Managed by PACT)
- USAID (Managed by MSI)
- USAID (Managed by DT Global)
- Bread for the World (Managed by FORUM-ASIA)
- HR Defender (Managed by FORUM-ASIA)
- University of South Carolina (Managed by SIPL)
- University of Zurich
- United Nations
- Feminist Alliance for Rights - Funded by MADRE
- Feminist Alliance for Rights - Funded by WFA
- War on Want
- Anni Report (Managed by Forum Asia)
- Freedom House (Managed by Bpotential)
- British Academy Navigation
- Jubilee Germany

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Amounts are in '000

	2022	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year	2023	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year	2024	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year
Income						
Grant Income	108,060	33%	147,049	36%	226,222	54%
Publication Income	47	236%	33	-30%	27	-19%
Interest Income	4,748	81%	9,671	104%	6,188	-36%
	2022	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year	2023	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year	2024	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	10,977	538%	19,096	74%	(4,675)	-124%
Total Assets	123,174	8%	207,283	68%	178,018	-14%

* There was a reinstatement done to the 2023 income due to the reason mentioned herewith - The Organisation has recorded fund receipts for restricted projects in the statement of comprehensive income as a incoming resources and relevant expenditure as a Project expenditure. Where grants are received for use in an identified project or activity, such funds are held in a restricted funds account and transferred to the Statement of Comprehensive Income account to match expenses incurred in respect of that identified project. Unutilised funds are held in their respective fund accounts and included under restricted fund in the Statement of Financial Position until such time as they are required.

* The increase in grant income in 2024 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, Bolstering Civil Society under USAid Pact and the Pandemic Justice project under CAFOD.

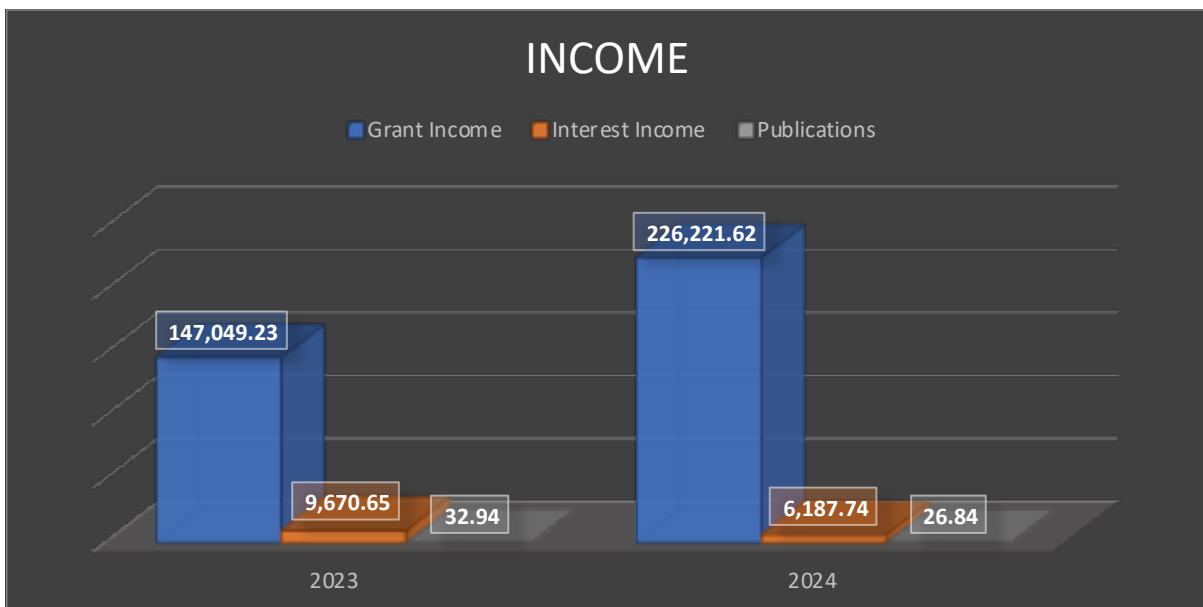
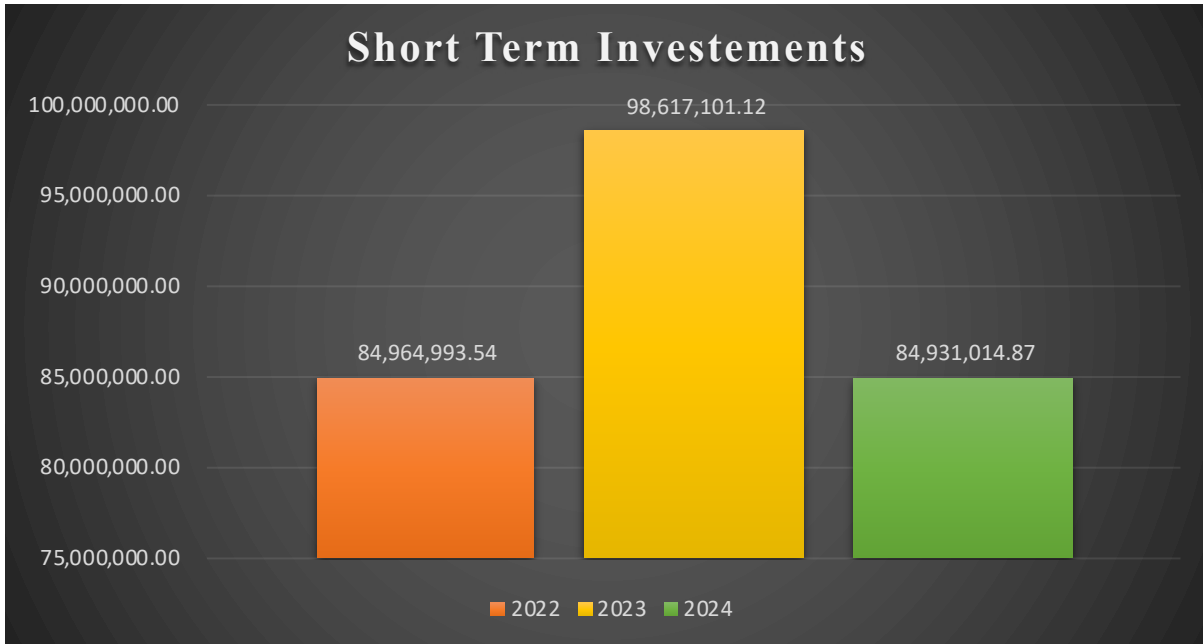
** Interest income reduced by 36% due to a substantial decline in bank interest rates in 2023. The maturity period of the fixed deposits falls between 2023 and 2024, carrying forward the effect to 2023.

*** The decrease in net surplus is due to two factors: a drastic decline in other income, which include consultancy fee income and interest income from fixed deposits. Consultancy fee income has reduced by about 100% which is the main contributing factor for the effect on other income. Secondly, the operational expenses has increased by 23% compared to 2023. Moreover, the organisation incurred an exchange loss due to foreign currency translation in 2024.

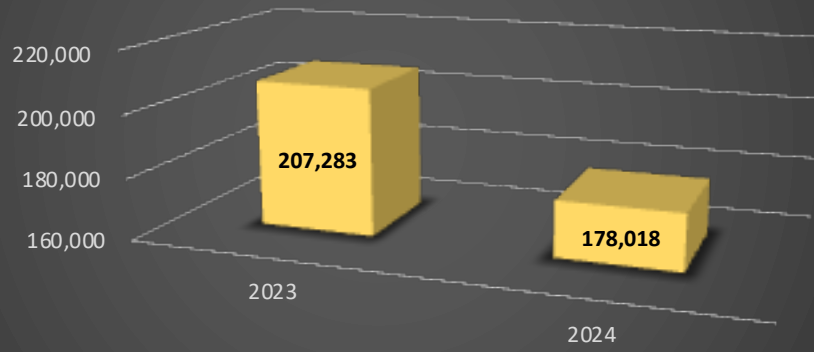
STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL RESERVES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Reserves	2023	2024	Percentage increase /(decrease) year on year
Restricted Funds	55,279	18,595	-66%

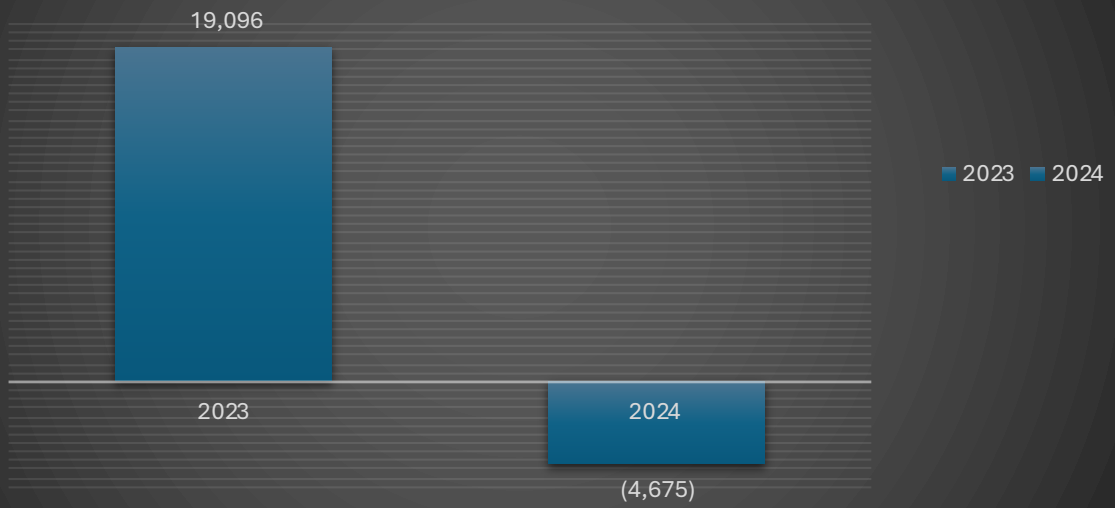
Amounts are in “000



Total Assets



Net Surplus/(Deficit)



LAW & SOCIETY TRUST

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTORS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2024

The Directors present herewith the Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Law & Society Trust for the year ended 31st December 2024.

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 centres 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 2024 include the Income Statement, Statement of Financial Position and the notes to the financial statements as set out on pages 03 to 21 of the audited financial statements.

Auditor's Report

The Auditor's Report is set out on page 01 to 02 of the audited financial statements.

Accounting Policies

Accounting policies used are summarised in Note 02 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 2024 were as follows:

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

Dr. J A S Felix retires by rotation in terms of the Articles of Association of the Trust and being eligible offers himself for re-election.

Resolutions for the appointment of Mr. Tissa Jayatilaka, Mr. G J T Alagaratnam, Prof. R S Scharenguivel and Ms Anushya Coomaraswamy 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 17 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

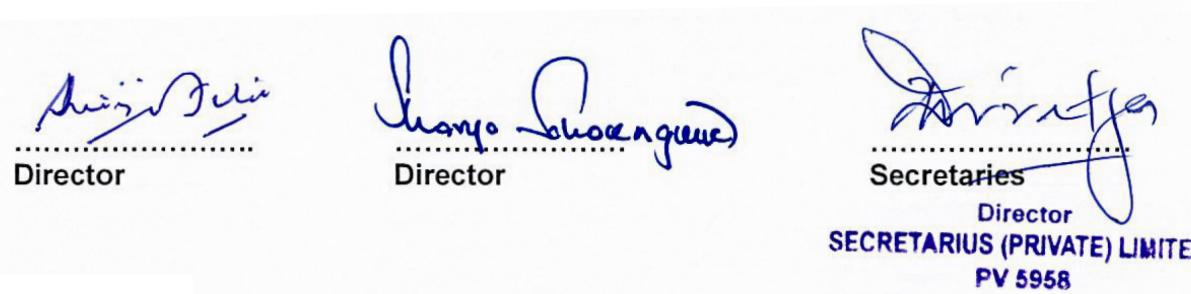
The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis. After making adequate inquiries from the management, the Directors are satisfied that the Trust has adequate resources to continue its operations in the foreseeable future as a going concern.

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.

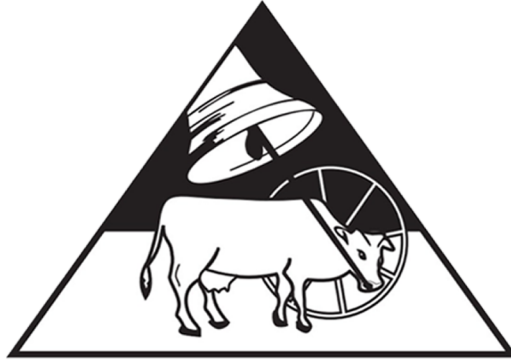
This Annual Report of the Directors has been signed on behalf of the Board by:



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

Colombo

19.05.2025



LAW & SOCIETY TRUST
නීතිය හා සමාජ භාරය
சட்டம் மற்றும் சமூக நம்பிக்கை

LAW & SOCIETY TRUST

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