



Diocese of Colombo



Church of Ceylon

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Diocese of Kurunagala

STATEMENT ON THE REPEAL OF THE PTA AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE PSTB

As Bishops of the Church of Ceylon, we are deeply disturbed by the decision of the National People's Power (NPP) Government to introduce yet another version of a draconian anti-terror law, this time under the name the Protection of the State from Terrorism Bill (PSTB). The PSTB, similar to previous draft laws introduced under various governments such as the draft Counter Terrorism Act (CTA) in 2018, draft Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) in 2023 etc., is brought in to replace the widely criticised Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act No 48 of 1979 (PTA). The Church of Ceylon has continuously and consistently opposed the PTA and its subsequent drafts at various times.

The President, in his election manifesto section 4.9, pledged the “abolition of all oppressive acts including the Prevention of Terrorism Act and ensuring civil rights of people in all parts of the country.” The introduction of the PSTB one and a half years into his governance therefore constitutes a clear breach of this commitment made to the voters and the people of Sri Lanka.

Over the past 47 years, the PTA has been widely criticised for its abuse and misuse by various security agencies. It has been employed to detain dissenting voices, journalists, human rights defenders and minority communities. Among the many criticisms levelled against the PTA are that this draconian law has enabled arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention without due process, justified the use of torture, permitted the extraction of confessions admissible in court, and conferred sweeping powers on law enforcement authorities that violated the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution.

We join the voices of civil society in opposing the proposed PSTB and reiterate that this legislation risks reproducing the same patterns of repression associated with the PTA. Like its predecessor, the PSTA contains a broad and vague definition of terrorism that could be used to suppress dissent and curtail freedom of expression. It grants extraordinary powers of arrest and detention, allowing suspects to be held without charge for up to one year. The Act further authorises security forces to stop, search, and arrest individuals, and to enter premises without a warrant, on the basis of reasonable suspicion. Among several other deeply concerning provisions, the PSTB also confers extensive powers on the President, including the authority to proscribe organisations and declare curfews. We are gravely



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concerned that such sweeping powers are vulnerable to misuse and abuse, as Sri Lanka's own history has repeatedly demonstrated.

None of the proposed draft amendments to the PTA have adequately addressed its fundamental violations of people's rights and freedoms. Therefore, it is our view that the PTA cannot be reformed, and it must be repealed. While anti-terrorism legislation exists in many countries, such laws are generally accompanied by robust safeguards, judicial oversight, and strict adherence to the rule of law. Therefore, we call upon the Government of Sri Lanka to immediately repeal the draconian PTA and withdraw the proposed PSTB draft Bill. We urge the Government to rely on existing legal frameworks to address security concerns and respond to terrorist threats in a manner consistent with constitutional guarantees and democratic values.

+Dushy Rodrigo



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Bishop of Colombo
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+Nishantha Fernando



The Right Reverend Nishantha Fernando
Bishop of Kurunagala

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