



Her Excellency Ms Saroja Sirisena, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka

High Commission of Sri Lanka

No.13, Hyde Park Gardens

London, W2 2LU

Wednesday 20th September, 2023

Dear High Commissioner

The undersigned UK trade unions and civil society organisations are deeply concerned about developments in the field of labour law in Sri Lanka and the proposals for domestic debt restructuring that will target employee superannuation funds.

The government of Sri Lanka is proposing an overhaul of labour laws leading to a unified “One Labour Law” code. Prepared without due process, we are concerned that these proposals will eliminate the rights and protection of workers. In areas such as removing protections for the 8 hour working day, on employing female workers in night shifts, and rights to recourse and compensation on dismissals, the reforms will likely lead to a situation where workers will be at the mercy of their employers, without any recourse.

Over the years supervisory bodies of the ILO have drawn the attention of the Sri Lankan government to inconsistencies and deficiencies of local labour laws with its ratified Conventions. We also note with concern the arbitrary exclusion of some trade unions from the national tripartite consultation mechanism (National Labour Advisory Council).

In addition, the government has announced a restructuring of domestic debt. We are concerned the decision to target workers’ superannuation or pension funds (including the Employees Provident Fund) to singularly bear the burden of local debt restructuring; causing both the net and face value of the funds to shrink significantly, notwithstanding the severe erosion of value they had to undergo due to the unprecedented scale of currency depreciation encountered in the year 2022. Singling out the superannuation funds we believe is arbitrary and unfair and will no doubt seriously endanger social protection and the future sustenance of superannuation funds.

We support the calls of Sri Lankan trade unions and civil society organisations asking the Government of Sri Lanka and Central Bank of Sri Lanka to;

- Halt the present “One Labour Law” reforms and initiate a new genuine process for labour law reforms with the participation of all relevant trade unions and tripartite stakeholders leading to an inclusive, transparent, democratic and multi-stakeholder process of engagement.
- Halt all decision-making on the Domestic Debt Restructuring (DDR) targeting the Employee Provident and Employees Trust Funds and to initiate a meeting of the Monetary Board with a wide section of trade unions representing all sectors to provide alternative proposals on DDR.

We kindly request you to use your good offices to convey our concerns to the government of Sri Lanka and to urge the Government of Sri Lanka to initiate genuine processes of social dialogue.

Signed By

Asad Rehman, War on Want

Dominique Muller, Labour Behind the Label

Andy Prendergast, GMB

Matt Wrack, Fire Brigade Union

Paresh Patel, Unite the Union

Paddy Lillis, Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW)

Rozanne Foyer, Scottish Trades Union Congress

Shavanah Taj, Wales Trades Union Congress

Stephen Russell, Trades Union Congress

Lee Baron, East Midlands Trades Union Congress