JOINT OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA
ON THE IMMINENT RESUMPTION OF EXECUTIONS

His Excellency Maithripala Sirisena
President of Sri Lanka
Presidential Secretariat
Galle Face, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

1 July 2019

Dear President,

On behalf of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty and 52 other co-signing organizations, I am writing out of our grave concern at the announcement that four executions are scheduled to be carried out imminently in Sri Lanka.2 We respectfully ask you to halt plans to resume the implementation of the death penalty in the country for the first time in more than 40 years, and establish an official moratorium on all executions as a first step towards abolition.

We represent more than 150 member organizations from all regions of the world, united in the effort to end the death penalty globally. We have long held Sri Lanka as a positive example in the Asia-Pacific region of a country which, despite adverse circumstances and prolonged internal conflict, has not wavered from its positive record of not implementing the death penalty. We have cherished the cooperation that several Sri Lankan officials have extended to us, including attending and contributing to debates that we held as part of two World Congresses Against the Death Penalty.3 Since the reports that you have signed four execution warrants have come to light, however, the eyes of the world have turned to Sri Lanka with great apprehension.

We are alarmed as the resumption of executions in Sri Lanka would set the country against the global trend away from the death penalty, as well as its track record over the past 40 years. It would also see Sri Lanka act in contravention of its obligations under international law. Executions for drug-related offences are prohibited under international human rights law, as they do not meet the threshold of the “most serious crimes” to which the use of this punishment must be restricted in countries that have not yet abolished the death penalty. We respectfully ask you to halt plans to resume the implementation of the death penalty in Sri Lanka.

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We are alarmed as the resumption of executions in Sri Lanka would set the country against the global trend away from the death penalty, as well as its track record over the past 40 years. It would also see Sri Lanka act in contravention of its obligations under international law. Executions for drug-related offences are prohibited under international human rights law, as they do not meet the threshold of the “most serious crimes” to which the use of this punishment must be restricted in countries that have not yet abolished it.4 State practice and decreasing figures in drug executions in recent years also suggest that the world is steady in its rejection of the implementation of death sentences for drug-related offences.5

1 The text of the letter has been translated into Sinhalese and included in Annex at the end of this document.
3 Hon. Thalatha Atukorale, Minister of Justice and Prison Reforms, attended the 7th World Congress Against the Death Penalty in 2019; Hon. Mangala Samaraweera, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, attended the 6th World Congress Against the Death Penalty in June 2016.
4 Article 6.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
There is no evidence that the death penalty has a unique deterrent effect. As recently as March 2019, the UN has reiterated in unequivocal terms that the application of the death penalty for drug-related offences does not respect the spirit of the international drug-control conventions and has the potential to become an obstacle to effective cross-border and international cooperation against drug trafficking.6

We look to you as the country’s highest authority to preserve Sri Lanka’s untainted record of more than four decades without any executions, as well as the country’s prominent role among the 142 countries that are abolitionist in law or practice at international forums and within our movement. We encourage you to do everything in your power to stop executions in Sri Lanka and consign the death penalty to the history books.

We thank you in advance for your consideration and remain at your disposal should you want to discuss the matter further.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Miguel Rivera Medina
President – World Coalition Against the Death Penalty

Letter co-signed by:

Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran
ACAT Belgique (Belgium)
ACAT Benin
ACAT Congo
ACAT France
ACAT Germany
ACAT Italia
ACAT Liberia
ACAT Luxembourg
ACAT RCA (Central African Republic)
ACAT Switzerland
Advocacy Forum – Nepal
Advocats Sans Frontières (France)
Amman Center for Human Rights Studies – ACHRS (Jordan)
Amnesty International
Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN)
Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche sur le Développement – AFTURD (Tunisia)
Barreau de Paris – Paris Bar (France)
Comitato Paul Rougeau (Italy)
Covenants Watch (Taiwan)
Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide
CURE (USA)
Death Penalty Focus (USA)
DITSHWANELO – The Botswana Centre for Human Rights
Fédération des Femmes pour le Développement Intégral au Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo)

6 UN Chief Executives Board, “What we have learned over the last ten years: A summary of knowledge acquired and produced by the UN system on drug-related matters”, UN doc.E/CN.7/2019/CRP.10, 13 March 2019
FIACAT – International Federation of ACATs (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)

FIDU - Federazione Italiana Diritti Umani (Italy)

Foundation for Human Rights Initiative – FHRI (Uganda)

German Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty – GCADP

Hands off Cain (Italy)

Harm Reduction International

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

ICJ Kenya – the Kenya Section of International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Japan Innocence & Death Penalty Information Center

Judicial Reform Foundation – JRF (Taiwan)

Justice Project Pakistan

KontraS (Indonesia)

Legal and Human Rights Centre (Tanzania)

Lifespark - Switzerland

Ligue ivoirienne des Droits de l'Homme (Côte d'Ivoire)

Maldivian Democracy Network

Mouvement des Abolitionnistes du Congo Brazzaville (Republic of Congo)

Odhikar (Bangladesh)

Pax Christi Uvira asbl (Democratic Republic of Congo)

SYNAFEN – Syndicat national des agents de la formation et de l'éducation du Niger (Niger)

Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty – TAEDP

Taiwan Association for Human Rights – TAHR

UIA – International Association of Lawyers

Union Chrétienne pour le Progrès et Défense des droits de l'homme asbl (Democratic Republic of Congo)

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
ANNEX – SINHALESE TRANSLATION OF THE LETTER

ඉතිහාසිකයින් විසින් මගින් ඉන්දියාවේ නානාමයන් මහජනගතාවක් විසින් බලපැවැතිය ලැබේ. 52 වර්ෂයකට ව Laden التأسيسيين مفهوماً جزءاً من الترتيب الديموکراتي في الدائرة، ممکن أن نكون مرتبطين بالمشكلات الاجتماعية والسياسية. 

6 පිටික, “නවින දින දකුණු තිරයේ පිළිගෙන් අපේක්ෂාකාරීගේ යාපවත පුරුම් විශේෂිතව සමන්විකාක්ෂණය” සහ 2018 04 25, 
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-drugs/sri-lanka-president-signs-death-penalty-for-four-drugs- convicts-idUSKCN1TR0EA?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews

7 පිටික, “ඉන්දියාවේ නානාමයන් මහජනගතාවක් විසින් බලපැවැතිය ලැබේ. 52 වර්ෂයකට ව Laden التأسيسيين مفهوماً جزءاً من الترتيب الديموکراتي في الدائرة، ممکن أن نكون مرتبطين بالمشكلات الاجتماعية والسياسية. 

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https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-drugs/sri-lanka-president-signs-death-penalty-for-four-drugs- convicts-idUSKCN1TR0EA?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews

9 පිටික, “ඉන්දියාවේ නානාමයන් මහජනගතාවක් විසින් බලපැවැතිය ලැබේ. 52 වර්ෂයකට ව Laden التأسيسيين مفهوماً جزءاً من الترتيب الديموکراتي في الدائرة، ممکن أن نكون مرتبطين بالمشكلات الاجتماعية والسياسية. 

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ක්‍රම යටතේ ක්‍රමය සංඛ්‍යාව පිහිටි අතර මෙමයේ පුළුල් ප්‍රකාශයේ විශේෂ අදාලී පොළොහෝ අතර මෙම සමාජ සංවර්ධනය සහ විශේෂ අතර මෙවැනි විශේෂයෙන් විසින් විශේෂයෙන් සමාජය සහ විශේෂ අතර මෙවැනි විශේෂයෙන් විසින් විශේෂයෙන් සමාජය මත මෙකරන්නේ 11.

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Kevin Miguel Rivera Medina
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