



*Re: Open Letter, for attention of the president of Sri Lanka, Maithripala Sirisena*

### Death Sentences for Drug Offences in Sri Lanka

This week, Sri Lanka's president signed death sentences for four people convicted of drug-related offences. This follows a 43-year moratorium on the death penalty in Sri Lanka, and the decision to reinstate the death penalty seems to have been driven by the hope that this will increase chances of presidential re-election later this year.

### The Ultimate Denial of Human Rights

The death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights, to the fundamental right to life. Sri Lanka seems to be following in the steps of other states who are increasingly violating the rights of marginalised communities in order to gain political support. In fact, the Sri Lankan president, Maithripala Sirisena, has previously praised the horrific war on drugs of President Duterte in the Philippines on numerous occasions, a violent war that has seen tens of thousands of people murdered in extrajudicial killings on the streets, a war that has seen mass detentions, human rights violations, and attacks on human rights defenders and civil society.

### Opposition of the Death Penalty for Drug Offences

But Sri Lanka and these countries are out of step with other nations who are abolishing the death penalty. There are 1,200 people on death row in Sri Lanka, all of whom are now at great risk of execution, but the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have both clearly opposed the death penalty for drug-related offences, and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has explicitly called upon states to abolish the death penalty for drug-related offences.

INPUD and ANPUD emphasise that not only is the death penalty a deplorable denial of the right to life, but international law also prohibits the use of the death penalty for all but the most serious crimes, involving the taking of life. Drug-related offences are not the most serious crimes, and those whose death sentences have been signed have committed no such crime.

### The Death Penalty Exacerbates Harm

If these executions go ahead, and if criminalisation of people who use drugs in Sri Lanka continues, people who use drugs will continue to be driven underground, facing huge barriers in accessing service provision, worsening health and wellbeing, and the welfare of the community at large. These executions will **increase harm, threats to wellbeing and health, fear, and social exclusion.**

### An Urge to Halt the Executions

**We call for the president of Sri Lanka, Maithripala Sirisena, to immediately call a halt to these executions. People who use drugs are human beings.** People who use drugs are mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, and grandparents. People who use drugs care for their families and communities, are students, workers, caregivers, doctors, nurses, healthcare providers, artists. We are shocked and saddened to note these regressive trends in countries in South and Southeast Asia, as well as in other parts of the world.

**We call on Sri Lanka to call an immediate end to the executions, focussing instead on health, wellbeing, human rights, and service and healthcare provision people who use drugs, and the communities in which they live.**