

Message of Hon. Rauff Hakeem, Minister of Justice Sri Lanka

Your Excellencies, Distinguish Delegates, and Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me at the outset offer my sincere regrets for not being able to attend the 1st Asia Pacific Dialogue on “Human Rights and Respect for the Dignity of Life” jointly organized by the Department of Justice and the Community of Sant’Egidio in cooperation with the City of Mundaluyong, Metro Manila Philippines.

Though I was keen to be a part of this important dialogue, circumstances beyond my control intervened and kept me away. However my thoughts and well wishes are with you all.

In Sri Lanka capital punishment spans a history of over two thousand years to the times of ancient Kings. Though the mode of execution and the offences for which the sentence was imposed evolved through passage of time, the punishment none-the-less has survived the test of time.

The history of the abolitionist movements in Sri Lanka too can be traced far back to the periods of Kings who on numerous occasions sought to do away with the death penalty. While the penalty existed in colonial Sri Lanka under the Portuguese and the Dutch, upon taking control of the entirety of the island in 1815, the British introduced the penalty for murder and waging war against the king. Following independence, the death penalty was abolished in 1956 only to be reinstated three years later after the assassination of the Prime Minister who had ironically abolished the death penalty.

I would describe Sri Lanka as a retentionist country. We remain an abolitionist country in practice although it retains capital punishment in its penal code. No execution has taken place since 1976 though the sentence is continued to be passed down by Court.

I strongly believe that one day humanity will witness the worldwide abolition of the death penalty and ensure to people their right to life.

Finally I thank the organizers for inviting me for this very important dialogue and wish them all success in this endeavour.

Thank you

