ශ්‍රී ලංකා මානව හිමිකම් කොමිෂන් සභාව
இலங்கை மனித உரிமைகள் ஆணைக்குழு
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

Press Statement No: HRC/PS/i/E15/10/25

## Building a Safer Future: Strengthening Legal Protection of Children

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) observes an increase in reports of child rights violations, particularly cases involving corporal punishment. These practices not only cause physical injury but also create lasting emotional harm, which in some instances has led to severe trauma and even suicide.

In response to this serious concern, the Penal Code (Amendment) Bill (to amend Chapter 19) was gazetted on 4 July 2025. The purpose of this Bill is to prohibit all cruel, degrading, and harmful punishments – both physical and non-physical – against anyone under 18 years of age.

Sri Lanka's laws already provide a strong foundation for the protection of children. The Children and Young Persons Ordinance sets out safeguards for the care and protection of children while the Penal Code criminalises cruelty to children. Article 11 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka further guarantees that no person shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. Corporal punishment, whether at home, schools, alternative care facilities, or justice institutions, is inconsistent with these protections.

The HRCSL emphasises that this call for reforms must be understood as part of a collective effort to abolish corporal punishment in every setting. Discipline is important but should be based on positive and respectful approaches that build children's dignity and confidence, rather than on fear or violence.

It is vital that the public understands the purpose and significance of these reforms. Laws designed to protect children should be openly discussed in a respectful and informed manner. However, they should not be misrepresented or turned into negative campaigns that create confusion and weaken protection for children. Such action risks harming the very group these reforms are meant to protect.

The HRCSL recalls that at the center of this issue is the principle of the best interest of the child. Protecting children from harm is both a legal responsibility and a moral obligation. Importantly, abolishing corporal punishment is not about undermining parental authority or teachers'

responsibility to guide children. Instead, it is about ensuring that guidance and discipline are carried out in safe, constructive, and non-violent ways that foster trust, respect, and positive development. This is a responsibility shared by families, educators, policymakers, and society as a whole.

Justice L.T.B Dehideniya
Chairperson
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

15th October 2025