

[EU 2018 Annual Report on Human Rights and Democratisation - Country Updates on Human Rights and Democracy 2017](#)

See caste-related passages highlighted

Sri Lanka

In 2017, the human rights situation in Sri Lanka has improved but the progresses expected such as the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and alignment of the Code of criminal procedure with international standards were not yet made

On 19 May 2017, Sri Lanka was readmitted to the Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) scheme, giving the country preferential access to the European market. The ratification of both the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture and the Ottawa Convention were positive developments. Other commitments, including the replacement of the Prevention of Terrorism Act with legislation that meets international standards and amending the Code of Criminal Procedure to allow suspects to have access to a lawyer from the time of arrest are yet to be implemented.

In November 2017, the Government launched a National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights focusing on a five year period from 2017-2021.

Incidents of violence targeting Muslim and Evangelical Christian communities continued in 2017. The President and the Prime Minister publicly condemned incidents of anti-Muslim violence which occurred earlier in the year and ordered the police to enforce the law against the perpetrators. In November, homes and businesses were attacked and several properties damaged as a result of Buddhist-Muslim violence which required riot police interference and imposition of a curfew to bring the situation under control. The anti-Muslim sentiment spread, to include Rohingya refugees whose safe house was attacked by a mob led by Buddhist clergy.

There continued to be multiple challenges to the promotion and protection of women's rights, including deep-rooted and widespread violence against women and girls, discriminatory customary laws, and increased vulnerability of female heads of households in the post-conflict areas resulting in sexual exploitation and bribery, as well as their exclusion from welfare, resettlement, and other state programmes.

Women remained seriously underrepresented in the public and private sectors. In 2017, Sri Lanka adopted a 25% quota for women representatives in local and provincial council elections. The quota will be implemented for the first time during local elections scheduled for February 2018.

The EU continued to support the government's agenda for reform, including constitutional reform, to strengthen the protection of human rights, democracy, rule of law, and the process of national reconciliation. In addition, Sri Lanka's renewed commitment to respecting international law and upholding its international human rights obligations, labour rights and environmental obligations contributed to the European Commission's recommendation to reinstate the GSP+.

The 2nd EU-Sri Lanka Working Group on Governance, Rule of Law, and Human Rights meeting took place in Colombo from 13-14 March 2017. Both sides recognized the need for further progress on reconciliation and agreed that the full implementation of the UNHRC resolution remained a priority. Discussions also extended to progress and remaining challenges on issues such as freedom of expression and media; strengthening of civil society; rights of women, children and minorities; labour rights; migration; implementation of treaty obligations; and the rule of law. The EU stressed

the importance of addressing areas of concern, especially the alignment of Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP) with international standards on torture, violence against women, and the need to combat corruption.

The EU allocated EUR 80 million for Democratic Governance and Reconciliation, of which EUR 22 million has been committed. A EUR 40 million programme titled 'Strengthening Transformation to Inclusive Democratic Engagement (STRIDE)' which aims to improve the capacity of elected institutions for development, service delivery and reconciliation, as well as strengthen citizens' participation in local governance through partnership, dialogue, and mediation was also under development. The EU also provided catalytic support to peacebuilding through IcSP project worth EUR 8.1 million.

Sri Lanka continued to engage with the UN system in 2017: three special mandate holders undertook visits to Sri Lanka—the Special Rapporteur (SR) on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, the SR on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence, as well as the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. A resolution at the Human Rights Council in March 2017 gave Sri Lanka a further two years to show progress on its national reconciliation commitments.

At the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2017, Sri Lanka accepted 177 out of 230 recommendations and undertook 12 voluntary pledges including to fulfil commitments contained in UNHRC resolution 30/1 towards the operationalisation of the Office on Missing Persons, and the establishment of a truth seeking commission, an office for reparations, and a judicial mechanism with a special counsel.