



LAW SOCIETY
OF SOUTH AFRICA

PRESS RELEASE

23 April 2013: For immediate release

**LAW SOCIETY SUPPORTS COMMONWEALTH LAWYERS' CALL FOR
SUSPENSION OF SRI LANKA FROM THE COMMONWEALTH**

The Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) supports the call made last week by the Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA) for the suspension of Sri Lanka from the Councils of the Commonwealth due to its breaches of the rule of law and of the independence of the judiciary, as well as the gross harassment of members of the legal profession.

The LSSA supports the CLA resolution passed unanimously by some 900 judges and lawyers from across the Commonwealth who attended the 18th Commonwealth Law Conference held in Cape Town last week. The resolution

- calls on the Members of the Commonwealth, through the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, to place Sri Lanka on the agenda of its next meeting on 26 April 2013 and suspend it from the Councils of the Commonwealth for serious and persistent violations of the Commonwealth fundamental values. This suspension would not preclude the people of Sri Lanka from participating in non-governmental Commonwealth activities; and
- exhorts members of the Commonwealth to reconsider the holding of the next Heads of Government Meeting in Sri Lanka as to do so would
 - tarnish the reputation of the Commonwealth, especially given that the Sri Lankan Head of State will thereby assume the role of Chair-in-Office; and
 - call into grave question the value, credibility and future of the Commonwealth.

'The LSSA echoes the concern of lawyers from across the Commonwealth at the continued erosion of the independence of the judiciary through the impeachment of the Chief Justice Bandaranayake at the end of last year, and the subsequent relocation of magistrates and judges in Sri Lanka; the failure of the Sri Lankan Executive to abide by court orders; and the gross and persistent harassment of members of the legal profession and others who are seeking to defend these values in Sri Lanka,' say LSSA Co-Chairpersons Kathleen Matolo-Dlepu and David Bekker.

The LSSA expressed its grave concern in January this year at the politically motivated impeachment of the Chief Justice of Sri Lanka, Shirani Bandaranayake, and other rule of law violations, and urged the South African Government not to remain silent in the face

these violations, while at the same time increasing its bilateral and trade relations with Sri Lanka.

[Click here](#) to read the 'Resolution on the Rule of Law and Judicial Independence in Sri Lanka' adopted by the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, the Commonwealth Legal Education Association and the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association in Cape Town on 17 April 2013.

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA, KATHLEEN MATOLO-DLEPU AND DAVID BEKKER

by Barbara Whittle
Communication Manager, Law Society of South Africa
Tel: (012) 366 8800 or 083 380 1307
E-mail: barbara@lssa.org.za Website: www.lssa.org.za

Editor's note:

The Law Society of South Africa brings together its six constituent members – the Cape Law Society, the KwaZulu-Natal Law Society, the Law Society of the Free State, the Law Society of the Northern Provinces, the Black Lawyers Association and the National Association of Democratic Lawyers – in representing South Africa's 21 400 attorneys and 5 800 candidate attorneys.

The Commonwealth Lawyers Association is an international organisation which exists to promote and maintain the rule of law throughout the Commonwealth by ensuring that an independent and efficient legal profession, with the highest standards of ethics and integrity, serves the people of the Commonwealth. The LSSA is a member of the CLA.