



CPA statement on High Security Zone Order No. 1 of 2022

25th September 2022, (Colombo) The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) is gravely concerned by [the Gazette](#) published by President Ranil Wickremesinghe on the 23rd of September 2022, containing High Security Zone Order No. 1 of 2022. These orders/regulations designate several areas within the Colombo district as “high security zones” and impose a regime of strict regulation of activities within such areas and provide for penalties and harsher bail conditions.

These orders/regulations are purportedly made under [the Official Secrets Act No. 32 of 1955](#). A close examination of that Act shows that these regulations are not within the scope of the Act, which has as its primary objective the protection of confidential information for the defence of the country. CPA notes at the outset that the substance of the orders /regulations and their purpose are clearly illegal and contrary to the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Furthermore, these fundamental rights cannot be restricted merely by regulations promulgated under the Official Secrets Act.

This clear abuse of the Official Secrets Act is the latest in a series of attempts by the United National Party [UNP] - Sri Lanka Podujana Party [SLPP] government to arbitrarily restrict fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution, stifle dissent and create a climate of fear within the country. The orders/ regulations are also another example of the use of public security laws by the UNP- SLPP government to clamp down on all form of dissent. This is against the backdrop of months long citizen mobilization that called for a change in governance and political culture, with the latest move stifling dissent and further eroding trust in government.

Sri Lanka is facing an unprecedented economic crisis and President Wickremesinghe has made repeated promises to arrest Sri Lanka’s economic collapse and to help improve the declining living standards of millions of Sri Lankans. Such an exceptional moment requires a government that addresses the needs of its citizens by upholding their rights and the rule of law and facilitating for economic growth and stability in adherence to the constitutional framework. These manipulations of public security laws to target citizens exercising their fundamental rights will not only erode public trust in the government and the legal system but undermine operations in

key sectors of the economy contributing to further instability and uncertainty. In such a context, CPA calls on the President to immediately revoke these illegal orders/regulations, and to halt the continued suppression of dissent.

A more detailed examination of the Official Secrets Act and the Regulations contained in High Security Zone Order No. 1, is provided [here](#).