

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**13 May 2024**

## **YUKTHI: A Platform for Working People in Sri Lanka's Economic Crisis**

On 13th May 2024, researchers, activists, civil society organizations, trade unions, and community leaders came together to launch a platform called **YUKTHI**. At an event in Colombo, titled “**From Dispossession to Development: Sri Lanka's Path to Debt Justice**,” YUKTHI was launched as a plural forum to support working people's movements and struggles for democracy and justice in Sri Lanka. This alliance aims to promote better understanding of working people's experiences, and critical analysis, and alternatives to neoliberalism, in Sri Lanka's ongoing economic crisis.

As Sri Lanka has only postponed its unbearable repayment of private and bilateral debt (with interest) to 2027; and is predicted to default on its foreign debt in the near future, leading to yet another IMF austerity Programme, **YUKTHI** seeks to build a broad movement for debt justice in Sri Lanka. It argues that the government's debt restructuring plans in the context of the IMF Programme is no cure for Sri Lanka's sick political economy; and only attacks the socio-economic rights of the working people while redistributing their few remaining assets and resources to the ruling elite.

Dr. Ahilan Kadirgamar, of the University of Jaffna, and Madhulika Gunawardana of the Feminist Collective for Economic Justice (FCEJ) unpacked the debt crisis and its impacts on working people, even as there is no end to their socio-economic crisis. Dr. Amali Wedagedara of the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM) explained why current negotiations with private creditors are unfavorable to Sri Lanka, and the significance of a public audit of Sri Lanka's debt. This panel was moderated by Balasingham Skanthakumar of the Social Scientists' Association.

This was followed by activists explaining how the debt crisis and the responses of the Government of Sri Lanka and the IMF are no solution to the problems of working people. Annalingam Annarasa, fisher leader from Kayts, described the worsening situation of small-scale fishers in the

Northern Province. Colombo Urban Lab founder Iromi Perera clarified the connections between rollbacks in social protection and the stress on the urban working poor. Young Researchers' Network member R. Babyshalini spoke of how plantation communities are hurting from IMF imposed conditionalities. With land reforms underway, Vidura Prabath Munasinghe of Law & Society Trust shared research findings on how restrictions on access to land will undermine the wellbeing of the rural poor. Peradeniya Professor Shamala Kumar of the Kuppi Collective analyzed reductions in state expenditure on free education and why privatization is part of the problem. Lawyer Ermiza Tegal closed the panel with a reminder on the political repression of new laws and proposed laws to enforce submission to the IMF Programme. This session was moderated by Melani Gunathilaka of Climate Action Now Sri Lanka and Yathursha Ulakentheran of Young Researchers' Network.

YUKTHI's website with resources on the structural roots of Sri Lanka's economic crisis and documenting how the costs of the crisis are being shouldered by its victims rather than the ruling elite who engineered it, went live during the event.

### **YUKTHI Website**

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