

Sri Lanka puts International Delegations on hold

The International Bar Association (IBA), a global legal organisation has expressed grave concern at the Sri Lankan Government's refusal to issue visas to members of an international delegation due to visit the country to discuss aspects relating to the rule of law.

The delegation was convened after the international legal community raised concern at the announcement by the Sri Lankan President Kumarathunga that there will be a referendum on constitutional reform. The President was recently reported as saying that should the referendum produce a majority vote in favour of replacing the Constitution, the Government would push through a new constitution, without reference to Parliament.

The Minister of Justice had agreed to meet the delegation on August 21. In keeping with the IBA's independent and impartial status and its desire to discuss current issues surrounding the constitutional debate, meetings had also been sought with the President of Sri Lanka, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Constitutional Affairs and Industrial Development.

Delegation members include IBA Council Member, Lord Brennan QC, former Chairman of the General Council of the Bar of England and Wales, Honourable Justice VS Malimath, former Chief Justice of Karnataka and Kerala, India, and Mah Weng Kwai, Chairman of the Bar Council of Malaysia.

“ The delegation's visit would have led to a report on the facts of the present situation. Any conclusions reached would have been independent and objective,” said Lord Brennan QC. “Each member of the delegation is from a country with close and important relations with Sri Lanka, and it is regrettable that the group is unable to carry out its role on behalf of the international legal community at the present time.”

The IBA has a distinguished record of undertaking similar visits to other countries, including Japan, Kenya and Pakistan. The concern of the IBA is the promotion of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary as they are crucial for the welfare of the people in any country.

The delegation to Sri Lanka had intended to report on matters relevant to the administration of justice and to provide relevant authorities with an opportunity to comment prior to publication. The IBA will be pursuing this matter further and is confident that the Sri Lankan Government will soon allow the delegation entry to complete its work.