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## Plenty of laws but little enforcement: *Sri Lanka 2048* probes legal protection for our environment

Despite having close to 100 laws related to environment and natural resources, Sri Lanka is struggling to protect Nature and ensure a clean, safe environment for all. Wide-spread environmental degradation, habitat destruction and species loss continue, fuelled by a combination of poverty, population pressures, human greed and uncoordinated development policies.

The main reason for this gap between intentions and practice is weak or no law enforcement due to a lack of resources, personnel or specialised equipment. Even when all are available, they cannot work without the political will.

How can the law be an effective instrument for protecting both vulnerable communities and Nature? And instead of the traditional command-and-control formula - for example, fencing off protected areas with 'guns and guards' - can we adopt more participatory methods that need less money and gives more power to the local people to protect their own environment?

These questions will be discussed in this week's *Sri Lanka 2048*, which focuses on the law and environment. The one-hour debate, to be shown on Sirasa TV at 10.45 pm on Thursday 3 July 2008, brings together a group of lawyers, government officials, activists and ordinary people affected by environmental problems. *Sri Lanka 2048* is an innovative series of TV debates exploring prospects for a sustainable future for Sri Lanka in the Twenty First Century.

This week's panel comprises: Attorney-at-law Anandalal Nanayakkara, Legal Consultant on IUCN Knuckles Forestry Project; Attorney-at-law Ravindranath Dabare, Chairman, Centre for Environmental Justice; Ms. Kanthi de Silva, Director (EIA), Central Environmental Authority; and Samantha Gunasekera, Director, Biodiversity Unit, Sri Lanka Customs. The debate is moderated by Sirasa TV's versatile presenter Kingsly Rathnayaka.



The debate agrees that some of our environment-related laws need consolidation and rationalizing. There are too many laws on too many different subjects, each prescribing its own enforcement procedure, and sometimes setting its own standards that are inconsistent with some other laws. Some laws are also too idealistic, expecting individuals and companies to abide by too many rules.

The debate takes a critical look at how Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) - legally required for projects above a certain size - has been used for 15 years. It observes that while many developers see EIA as a tedious procedure, activists use its provisions to challenge any proposed project. The panel underscores the need for a broader method called strategic impact assessment - currently not available in our law - to consider cumulative impacts on entire ecosystems.

**Sri Lanka 2048** debates are co-produced by TVE Asia Pacific, an educational media foundation, and IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, in partnership with MTV Channel (Private) Limited. This editorially independent TV series is supported under the Raising Environmental Consciousness in Society (RECS) project, sponsored by the Government of the Netherlands.

For more information on **Sri Lanka 2048** series, visit: [www.srilanka2048.com](http://www.srilanka2048.com)

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