

Sri Lankan educators and students support today's global school strike

Our correspondents
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Sri Lankan educators and students have spoken out in support of the October 15 global school strike. Called by Lisa Diaz, a UK parent and member of the SafeEdforAll (Safe Education for All) campaign group, today's action follows the first school strike on October 1, which was backed by parents, educators and workers across the globe. Diaz called for the second strike on Twitter on October 9, as the pandemic continued to infect and kill children as a result of governments internationally reopening schools.

The Rajapakse government plans to reopen Sri Lankan schools on October 21 amid unsafe conditions and with around 800 coronavirus infections and 30 deaths being reported daily. Sri Lankan testing rates are very low which means that these figures are a dangerous underestimation of the real situation.

The Teacher-Student-Parent Safety Committee, established under the political guidance of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka, is fighting to unite teachers, students, parents and the working class to fight the government's premature school reopenings. About 250,000 Sri Lankan government schoolteachers are maintaining an online teaching strike, after walking out three months ago to demand decent salaries.

The comments below by teachers, education professionals and students are in support of today's global action.

Lakmal, a technology teacher in Colombo: "There is an attempt to cover up the truth about the reality of the pandemic around the world and to normalise it. I fully oppose this. It's a murderous experiment using people's lives.

"Lisa Diaz is fighting to rally opposition to this criminal policy of capitalist governments around the world. I fully support it. We have already seen the dangerous results when schools were reopened in Sri Lanka from time to time and we are going to face it again from October 21. I

see the necessity for gathering international solidarity to fight this, as UK parents are doing now."

Sakuntha Hirimuthugoda, a University of Sri Jayawardenepura student and International Youth and Student for Social Equality member, said: "As a university student, I strongly support the call by Liza Diaz for a second school strike against the unsafe and murderous school reopenings in the UK and globally. The ruling class in Sri Lanka is implementing the same criminal policy of 'living with COVID-19' in order to secure the profit interests of big business.

"Thousands have already lost their lives from the pandemic as a result of this policy and many more people are suffering from long-COVID symptoms. School reopenings will fuel this situation like the people in the US and UK are now experiencing.

"We should take immediate action to stop this social murder. No more lives should be sacrificed for the profits of the capitalists. The majority of people around the world, across national boundaries, confront the same issues. How can we face this?

"The strike action called by Diaz is a great example of what to do. It is not only their struggle but our fight too and should be a worldwide struggle. As the WSWs has explained, the eradication of the pandemic is the only way to stop the destruction, so I urge everyone to support this struggle."

Danidu Thisal, a grade 11 student from Kandy said: "I'd like to go to school with my friends but I'll never sacrifice the lives of myself and my friends to this deadly virus. In my view all the necessary measures to eradicate COVID-19 should be taken before governments can tell us to go back to school. The reopening of schools in various parts of the world has affected a large number of children and a significant number of them have already died.

"Governments around the world say schools should be

opened so that the education of children is not disrupted. But I've learned from reading the WSWs that this is a lie. They want to send children to school in order to send their parents back to work for the profits of big business. I'm shocked by this policy. Are our lives so worthless?

"I insist that schools should not be reopened in Sri Lanka or any other country until the pandemic is eradicated from the earth. If they do so regardless of our lives, we must all oppose it. I fully support Lisa Diaz's campaign and it needs backing from all over the world."

Dr. Lakshman Nugapitiya, a Sinhala Department lecturer at the University of Peradeniya, said that the reopening of schools was a step towards the complete reopening of the economy and was to benefit the capitalists. "They have already made huge profits, now they want to sacrifice more lives for more profits," he said.

"UK parent Lisa Diaz has come forward against this criminality. I express my support for that. I see the mobilisation of international support around it as a revolutionary initiative. I appreciate the SEP and the WSWs for their political support in this vital struggle," he said.

Anupama, a mother of two, said: "When we think about the congestion in public transport in Sri Lanka and in the schools, we are fearful of the situation that will be created after the schools have been reopened. Parents' fears are justifiable and understandable. When the schools were previously reopened in Sri Lanka amid the pandemic, the sanitation provided by the government was inadequate. This showed that the government didn't care about the lives of our children. Finally, we, as parents, had to collect the money by ourselves to buy necessary sanitation materials.

"UK parents opposing sending their children to school is the correct way to answer the government. Why shouldn't they fight to save the lives of their children? I fully support the October 15 strike and I hope we parents in Sri Lanka will be able to initiate the same fight here."



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