

23 February 2015, Monday ✦ 12.00am – 2.00pm ✦

Federal Bartholomew Conference Room, Federal Building, NUS (BTC)

The Sri Lankan Constitutional Transition: From Populist Authoritarianism to Constitutional Democracy?

by Dr Asanga Welikala
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ABSTRACT

The Sri Lankan presidential election on 8th January produced an unexpected and dramatic change of government. A populist authoritarian regime was rejected in favour of a common opposition that promised deep constitutional reforms in respect of substantial reductions in the scope, nature, and form of executive power. In this presentation I will look retrospectively at how the reform movement gathered pace, discuss the new government's '100-day reform programme' and its main substantive proposals (abolition or major reform of the executive presidential system), what is missing in this process (especially the question of accommodating minority aspirations) and why, and speculate about the constitutional challenges that remain. I will also attempt to place these rapidly evolving events in some kind of conceptual framework (drawing upon Bell's framework in *Public Law*, 2014), so as to better understand the nature of the change, as well as to better focus scholarly and policy interventions in support of it.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER



Dr Asanga Welikala is ESRC Teaching Fellow in Public Law at the School of Law, University of Edinburgh, and the Associate Director of the Edinburgh Centre for Constitutional Law. He teaches Public Law of the United Kingdom and Scotland (PLUS), Public Law and Individual Rights (PLAIR), and Constitutional Law Honours. Asanga is also a Senior Researcher of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), Sri Lanka. His publications include, as editor, *Reforming Sri Lankan Presidentialism: Provenance, Problems and Prospects* (2015); *The Sri Lankan Republic at 40: Reflections on Constitutional History, Theory and Practice* (2012); as author, *A State of Permanent Crisis: Constitutional Government, Fundamental Rights, and States of Emergency in Sri Lanka* (2008); and as co-editor, *Essays on Federalism in Sri Lanka* (2008), and *Power Sharing in Sri Lanka: Political and Constitutional Documents 1926 – 2008* (2009).

He is currently working on a monograph on the Sri Lankan constitution for the Hart Constitutional Systems of the World Series, a co-edited collection (with Sujit Choudhry and George Anderson) on territorial cleavages in constitutional transitions (Oxford UP), and a collection of essays on Sri Lanka's on-going constitutional reform programme. In addition to Sri Lanka, he has worked on aspects of constitutional and legal reform in a number of countries including Iraq, the Maldives, Nepal, Indonesia, Thailand, Nagorny-Karabakh, Ethiopia (Ogaden), Libya and Egypt. His broader research interests lie in comparative constitutional law, applied constitutional theory, and Commonwealth constitutional history.

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