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THINK TANKS IN INDIA, MALAYSIA, AND SRI LANKA NAMED FINALISTS FOR 2020 ASIA LIBERTY AWARD



April 20, 2020



The Asia Liberty Award annually celebrates think tanks whose work most successfully encourages prosperity and human flourishing in Asia. This year's finalists are: [Centre for Public Policy Research](#) in India, for their work to liberalize night work for women; [Islam & Liberty Network](#) in Malaysia, for their “Muslim Case for a Free Society” project; and [Advocata Institute](#) in

Sri Lanka, for their "Don't Tax My Period" project. The winner will receive \$7,000 and the runners-up will each receive \$1,500—made possible by the Templeton Religion Trust's sponsorship of our Regional Liberty Awards, part of the Templeton Freedom Award prize program.

[Tune into Asia Liberty Forum Online](#) for the live announcement of the winner!

Centre for Public Policy Research: Liberalizing Night Work for Women

In practice for decades, the Kerala Shops & Establishment Act regulated the labor and working hours of shops and commercial establishments in Kerala, India. The Act did not allow women to work in night shifts and restricted the choice of entrepreneurs in matters related to weekly holidays, 24/7 operation of shops, shifts for the workers, and more. Licensing and regulatory hurdles were made very cumbersome. The Act essentially disincentivized innovation and operational flexibility.

The Centre for Public Policy Research formed a team of lawyers, social entrepreneurs, economists, sociologists, and public policy researchers to work on labor reform, and their work to implement more liberal work practices was acknowledged by the Government of Kerala. The significant changes to the labor laws CPPR helped work toward include permitting women to work at night, allowing 24/7 operation of businesses, and introductions of shifts for employees and an online permit application system to open a business. CPPR believes these reforms will create better working conditions for employees, increase wealth creation by entrepreneurs, increase tax revenue, and boost Kerala's economy—of which the services sector accounts for 70 percent.

Beyond the policy change, CPPR expects a parallel and important social impact. Increased economic opportunity for women will contribute to greater empowerment, and 24/7 operations of businesses will help in the creation of jobs in restaurants, hotels, transportation, and more—all

leading to a more robust business climate in Kerala.

CPPR demonstrates the importance of working toward the economic freedom of all segments of society, and their work will contribute to greater economic freedom for women, youth, and those in the informal sector.

Islam & Liberty Network: Muslim Case for Freedom

Over the last three years, the Islam & Liberty Network has built an intellectually rigorous “Muslim Case for Freedom” that is grounded in Islamic teachings and that supports the values of a free society.

Through scholarly articles and publications, in 2017 they built a Muslim case for liberal democracy; in 2018, a Muslim case for economic liberty; and in 2019, a Muslim case for religious freedom. Islam & Liberty Network's last three conferences in Malaysia, Pakistan, and Indonesia examined each of these three issues.

Since 2017, Islam & Liberty Network has published 51 papers and 2 books on these topics, and a third book is in progress. They have also produced 20 podcasts and 11 webinars, published 31 articles, and have engaged almost 100 scholars whose papers were presented at their events or used in their publications.

This important work has laid an intellectual foundation for a Muslim case for liberty, and Islam & Liberty Network's work has turned from an abstract conception into an achievable platform of ideas.

Advocata Institute: Don't Tax My Period!

One in three Sri Lankan women participate in the country's formal economy, and Advocata Institute believes the nation's high taxes on menstrual products to be a contributing factor in keeping women home. The think tank's research has also found that 60 percent of Sri Lankan parents kept their children home from school

during their periods because of an inability to afford proper menstrual care. With such an unacceptable status quo, Advocata Institute has made a priority of making sanitary napkins more affordable by removing the nonsensical taxes on such products.

Thanks to their work, the Sri Lankan government has reduced tariffs and taxes on sanitary napkins 49.2 percent over the last two years. This reduction from 101.2 percent to 52 percent came from the removal of the relevant cess and a reduction in the value-added tax (VAT) and nation-building tax that had been placed on feminine products. The momentum Advocata Institute has enjoyed with these tax reductions comes as the Finance Ministry plans to begin phasing out 1,200 “para-tariffs” over the next few years.

Advocata Institute’s effective advocacy with their “Don’t tax my period!” project has made sanitary napkins more affordable for 4.2 million women in Sri Lanka.

Find out more about:

Centre for Public Policy Research

Islam and Liberty Network

Advocata Institute

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Atlas Network

Two Liberty Center

4075 Wilson Boulevard

Suite 310

Arlington, VA 22203

T+ 202-449-8449 | F+ 202-280-1259

