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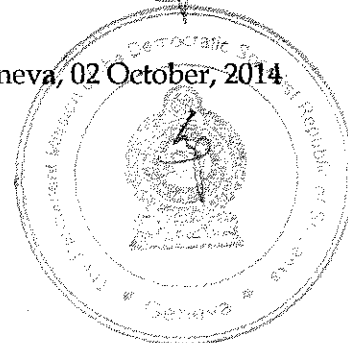
The Permanent Mission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the United Nations Office in Geneva and Other International Organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Office of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or of Belief, Office of Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions) and has the honour to acknowledge receipt of the Joint Urgent Appeal dated 26 June 2014 addressed to H.E. Mr. Ravinatha Aryasinha, Ambassador / Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva, by Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or of Belief, Ms. Izsak Rita, Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and Mr. Christof Heyns, Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, concerning the alleged attacks and violence against members of religious minorities in Aluthgama.

The Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka has the honour to transmit to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the response received from the Government of Sri Lanka on the Joint Urgent Appeal under reference. (Please see Annex)

The Permanent Mission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the United Nations Office in Geneva and Other International Organizations in Switzerland avails itself of this opportunity to renew to Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Office of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or of Belief, Office of Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions) the assurances of its highest consideration.

Geneva, 02 October, 2014

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),  
Palais Des Nations,  
1211- Geneva.



Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt,  
Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or of Belief,

Ms. Izsak Rita,  
Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues

Mr. Christof Heyns,  
Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions

**Response of the Government of Sri Lanka to the Joint Urgent Appeal dated 26<sup>th</sup> June 2014 by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief; Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues; and Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions**

The Government of Sri Lanka wishes to reaffirm and emphasize its commitment to uphold the fundamental rights guaranteed to the people, by the supreme body of law in the country, the Constitution of Sri Lanka. These include the freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the right to equality. The Government is firm in its commitment to uphold law and order and bring to justice any individual or group that causes communal dissension in the country. Sri Lanka's legislation contains necessary provisions to act against statements or behaviour intended to cause religious discord. Provisions in the Penal Code as well as specific terms of Section 3 of the ICCPR Act passed by the Parliament of Sri Lanka in 2007, also provides the means to initiate action. Whenever an alleged infringement of this right has been reported, the legal process has been set in motion. This is evidenced by the action taken to address reported incidents of disturbances as well as legal action taken against those who have violated the law of the land, once sufficient evidence has been gathered for prosecution.

Moreover, it is to be noted that mainstream opinion in Sri Lanka is moderate and reasonable and strongly opposed to violence in any form. For centuries, different faiths and practices have coexisted in harmony in Sri Lanka as part of a longstanding tradition of mutually reliant co-existence of communities in towns and villages.

In recent times, having suffered from terrorism for almost three decades, all sections of society are determined to resist any efforts on the parts of fringe elements to promote divisions, antagonism and religious discord.

Therefore, the Government of Sri Lanka categorically rejects the allegation of "systematic attacks and violence against members of religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, by certain extremist groups, which operate in Sri Lanka with apparent impunity," as mentioned in the Joint Urgent Appeal.

However, it must be noted that like in all countries where a number of communities with different religious affiliations reside, unfortunate isolated incidents can occur. As such, there have been sporadic incidents focusing on places of worship of all four religions. During the period from June 2009 to December 2013, these include 105 attacks on Hindu religious places, of which 95 cases were robberies committed by

locals. During the same period, there have also been attacks reported against 16 Buddhist, 41 Christian/Catholic and 20 Muslim places of worship. Out of a total of 182 such incidents, 147 were reported to the police. In all such instances, police have taken steps to report facts to Magistrate courts and action has been taken to produce suspects before the courts in instances where credible information has been available.

**With regard to the incident in Aluthgama/Beruwala in June 2014, the Government wishes to state the following:**

The initial incident that led to the disturbances took place on 12<sup>th</sup> June when the driver of a vehicle taking a Buddhist priest, Ven. Ayagama Samitha Thero, was assaulted by a Muslim youth from Dharga Town on *Poson Poya* day, a day of religious significance for Buddhists. When the Buddhist priest who was in the vehicle at the time tried to intervene and stop the assault, he too had been manhandled. The said priest had been warded at the hospital. On 15<sup>th</sup> June, another Buddhist priest from Dharga town had organized a reception/meeting to greet Ven. Ayagama Samitha Thero, who was released from hospital on the same day. Suspecting that the persons who were due to attend the reception/meeting might proceed to conduct processions after the meeting, the police took action to meet with the persons organizing the reception/meeting and with Muslim clergy and prominent persons in the area. The Muslim leaders had informed the police that they would, in order to ensure that there would be no trouble, close their shops early and as such there would be no problem even if the police allowed the persons attending the reception to proceed in procession after the meeting was concluded. The persons responsible for organizing the reception/meeting had also assured the police that there would not be any breach of the peace. The police presence was strengthened in the area and senior police officers were entrusted to ensure that there would not be any breach of the peace.

At the conclusion of the reception/meeting, those present had been informed by the organizers to disperse peacefully. However, some of the residents of Dharga town had wanted to escort Ven. Samitha Thero back to his temple in Dharga town. By then the police were informed that a large crowd of Muslim persons had gathered at the mosque, which was on the way to Dharga town. Suspecting a breach of the peace, the police had not allowed Ven. Samitha Thero to proceed on foot and he and his followers were sent by four (04) vans and placards in the possession of the crowd were also not allowed to be displayed. After Ven. Samitha had left, some of the Sinhala villagers walked back to their residences in Dharga town as a group. On the way, the group had to pass the mosque where the Muslims had gathered. The available video evidence suggests that stones were pelted towards the crowd going past the mosque. A confrontation had thereafter occurred with both sides pelting

stones at each other. The police had arrived at the scene and had managed to disperse the crowd.

At this time, a rumour had spread in and around the adjoining villages that two Buddhist priests were dragged inside the mosque and were being attacked inside the mosque. The police have not been able to ascertain who was responsible for spreading this rumour. However, this rumour had inflamed passions resulting in violence spreading to a larger area in and around Aluthgama/Beruwala. As this was a totally unexpected turn of events, it took the police a few hours to bring in reinforcements to the area. Senior police officers including the Inspector General of Police immediately went to the area to personally supervise and coordinate operations. A police curfew was declared and both Muslims and Sinhalese were directed to remain indoors. Even though police curfew was imposed, several mobs consisting of both Muslims and Sinhalese violated the police curfew. The police, using tear gas, were not able to immediately bring the situation fully under control. It must be noted that the police had to act with a degree of restraint on its part, given the sensitivities of the situation at hand, while acting to bring the situation under control. As such, the police refrained from shooting at the crowd, which would have caused harm to life and limb. The police also refrained from sending a police party into the mosque to ascertain the truth and veracity of the rumour that two Buddhist monks were being attacked inside the mosque.

The police were able to, within 24 hours, bring the situation under control whereby the major incidents stopped. However, sporadic incidents took place within the next 48 hours.

President Rajapaksa, who was abroad at the time of the incident, issued immediate instructions to bring the situation under control and to prevent passions from being inflamed by miscreant elements. Following his return, the President visited the affected area and met with religious leaders, leaders of civil society, government officials and other stakeholders and ensured the implementation of measures aimed at strengthening the bonds of religious co-existence and harmony that have existed between the Sinhala and Muslim people in Sri Lanka for centuries.

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, the Sri Lanka Police took steps to investigate the incidents and to bring the suspects before courts. Altogether 148 people (116 Sinhalese and 32 Muslims) have been arrested so far. Three (03) have been remanded for murder, three (03) have been granted police bail and 142 have been granted court bail. In addition, the Police have reported facts to court, in 461 cases, on the basis of complaints made.

The Criminal Investigations Department (CID) of the Sri Lanka Police has been assigned to conduct an overall investigation on the incident. In the course of its investigations, the CID has questioned suspects including those who were alleged to have indulged in hate speech, which includes 8 Buddhist monks. Upon completion of investigations, the report will be referred to the Attorney General for advice on the institution of legal proceedings.

In order to expedite the repair and reconstruction of damaged property, the Sri Lanka security forces were instructed, by President Rajapaksa, to repair all damaged properties. So far, construction work on 55 houses and 13 commercial buildings have been completed. The work on 114 houses and 34 commercial buildings are in progress.

Following the incident, vigorous campaigns aimed at promoting religious harmony and creating greater understanding between communities have been launched by government, civil society, professionals, academics, business and community leaders.