



HAUT-COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME • OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
PALAIS DES NATIONS • 1211 GENEVA 10, SWITZERLAND

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.**

REFERENCE: UA  
LKA 6/2014:

26 June 2014

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; and Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 22/20, 25/5, and 17/5.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning alleged 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. The alleged impunity of perpetrators and the inadequate response by the police and judicial authorities to protect the lives, physical security and integrity, and the property and places of worship of these communities may encourage further attacks and a risk of spiralling violence.

According to the information received:

On 15 June 2014, a local group promoting extremist Sinhalese nationalist views, Bodu Bala Sena (BBS – The Buddhist Power Force), staged a large protest rally in Aluthgama, in south-western Sri Lanka, to express concerns for the safety of Buddhists in the area. The protest was sparked by a minor traffic incident on 14 June 2014 between Muslim youths and the driver of a van carrying a Buddhist monk.

At the rally, the BBS leader, Mr. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thero, gave a speech claiming that the majority Sinhalese population needed protection. He reportedly used inflammatory anti-Muslim language and advocated for racial and religious hatred, inciting discrimination, hostility and violence against Muslims.

Soon after the rally, violence erupted on both sides as the BBS and its supporters moved in procession through Muslim neighbourhoods, allegedly chanting anti-Muslim slogans. Muslim-owned homes, shops and mosques were reportedly attacked, vandalised and some were set ablaze by mobs armed with poles and other objects. Despite a curfew and deployment of approximately 1,200 police, violence apparently continued into the night as Muslim homes and properties were targeted in nearby Beruwala, Welipenna and Dharga. Reportedly four people were killed and about 80 were injured.

According to the information received, these events in Aluthgama and Beruwala, Welipenna, and Dharga were not isolated. In the last two years, more than 350 incidents of violent attacks on Muslims and over 150 similar attacks against Christians were reported and documented. Reportedly, Muslim and Christian communities are subjected to hate speech, discrimination, attacks and outright acts of violence throughout Sri Lanka on an almost daily basis. The real number of incidents might be higher as many instances are not reported. According to the information received, law-enforcement authorities have generally refrained from taking action to prevent or stop the incitement to violence and acts of violence, and have been refusing in some instances to record complaints from the victims.

The impunity of perpetrators appears to further encourage this violence. The apparent lack of action by public authorities to stamp off the violence by Buddhist groups professing extremist views against Muslim and Christian communities, gives rise to the perception that this violence is tolerated, or even condoned by some elements of the Government. Alongside BBS, other groups promoting extremist views, such as the Sinhala Ravaya and the Hela Bodu Powura purport themselves as the protectors of Sinhala Buddhism, which they claim is being threatened by Muslim and Christian religious minorities. These groups appear to use such claims as a pretext to legitimate their advocacy of racial and religious hatred inciting to discrimination, hostility and violence against minorities.

These groups allegedly proclaim the racial superiority of Sinhala Buddhists and spread fear among local population, for example, through allegations that Buddha statues are being bulldozed by religious minorities, or that evangelical Christians are forcibly convert youths and sick patients in their hospital beds, or that Muslims are smuggling drugs and birth control pills in order to destroy Sinhalese people and prevent their reproduction. These statements contribute to spread a climate of fear among Sinhala Buddhists, who constitute the majority population in Sri Lanka, and resentment towards minorities.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, we express grave concern at these allegations of growing violence against religious minorities in Sri Lanka. While we welcome the announcement made by the President of

Sri Lanka to appoint a high level panel to investigate these incidents, these allegations warrant the urgent attention and intervention of the Government of Sri Lanka, to stamp off the violence, to condemn unequivocally all calls for advocacy of religious and racial hatred that constitute incitement to discrimination, violence and hostility, to effectively protect religious communities against any attack, and to bring perpetrators of the violence to justice, in compliance with Sri Lanka's legal obligations under the human rights treaties that it has ratified.

The alleged violence appears to be in contravention of the right to life, personal security, freedom of religion or belief, as set forth respectively in articles 6, 9, 18 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by Sri Lanka on 11 June 1980, as well as the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (A/RES/36/55), and the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to national or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which refers to the obligation of States to protect the existence and the identity of minorities within their territories and to adopt the measures to that end (article 1) as well as to adopt the required measures to ensure that persons belonging to minorities can exercise their human rights without discrimination (article 4).

We would also like to remind your Excellency's Government that States have the responsibility:

- to protect persons from human rights violations committed by non-state actors, by exercising due diligence to prevent, punish, investigate and bring perpetrators to justice; it is explained by the Human Rights Committee in paragraph 8 of its General Comment No. 31;

- to prohibit by law and to ensure its full enforcement against every incident of advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence in accordance with article 20(2) of the ICCPR; it is explained by the Human Rights Committee in paragraph 8 of its General Comment No. 34;

- to condemn and eradicate all propaganda of ideas of superiority of one race or group of persons and incitement to racial hatred in accordance with article 4 of International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, ratified by Sri Lanka on 18 February 1982; it is explained by the Committee against Racial Discrimination in General Recommendations No. 15 and 35; and

- to identify and prosecute those responsible of violence against member of religious minorities, in order to bring an end to impunity and prevent the recurrence of such executions; it is explained by the Human Right Council in Resolution 17/05.

In the light of the above standards we would like to appeal to your Excellency's Government to urgently undertake all necessary measures in order to ensure the security of the members of all religious minority communities and their worship places, businesses and other property in Sri Lanka, as well as to show the citizens of your Excellency's country an example of respect of religious diversity and peaceful co-existence. In this context, we would like to bring to your Excellency's Government's attention the Rabat Plan of Action, which plays a crucial role as an important part of the global movement towards prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. The full realization of the freedom of religion or belief in conjunction with freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, as well as all other human rights plays a pivotal role in prevention of further inter-communal violence and in restoring mutual trust between communities.

We also recall to your Excellency's Government the outstanding requests for country visits to Sri Lanka by Special Procedures mandate holders in order to assess human rights protection in situ and to assist your Government to meet its obligations under the above stated standards.

The full texts of the human rights instruments and standards recalled above are available on [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org) /can be provided upon request.

In view of the urgency of the matter, we would appreciate a response on the steps taken by your Excellency's Government to safeguard the rights of the members of religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, in compliance with international human rights law.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and any comment you may have on the above mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide the full details of any investigation, which may have been undertaken into the acts of violence described above, as well as into all other acts of violence against religious minorities, which have taken place in the past two years; as well as the details of any judicial, disciplinary or administrative proceedings ordered against their perpetrators;
3. In particular, we would welcome information concerning the speeches recently made by Mr. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera, as well as the actions taken by law-enforcement and the Government to stop any

advocacy of racial and religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, and to condemn them;

4. Please indicate what actions have been taken to ensure the protection of religious communities in Sri Lanka, and to prevent the recurrence of acts of violence based on religious and racial grounds;
5. Please indicate the measures that have been taken to protect the victims of past acts of inter-communal violence, and their families, as well as of any assistance, medical or otherwise, including compensation afforded to them;
6. Please provide detailed information on the measures taken to ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief of all peoples in Sri Lanka, as part of the full enjoyment of all other rights, in line with the country's international human rights obligations;

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their recurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible of the alleged violations.

We are considering to publicly expressing our serious concerns in the near future in this regard as the information upon which these concerns are based seems to be sufficiently reliable to warrant immediate attention. A press release may be issued indicating that we have been communicating our concerns with your Excellency's Government's and sought to clarify the issue in question.

Your Excellency's Government's response will be made available in a report to be presented to the Human Rights Council for its consideration.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Heiner Bielefeldt  
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

IZSÁK Rita  
Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Christof Heyns  
Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions