

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief**

REFERENCE:  
UA LKA 4/2017

19 July 2017

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 34/5, 26/7, 25/5, 34/18 and 31/16.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **alleged ongoing attacks, violence and harassment against Evangelical Christian communities in Sri Lanka. We would also like to bring to your attention the threats received by Mr. Lakshan Dias, a prominent human rights lawyer and defender, following his public criticism of the attacks against religious minorities.**

Recent violent attacks against various religious minorities in Sri Lanka were the object of previous communications sent to your Excellency's Government in 2017 (LKA 3/2017) and 2014 (LKA 6/2014). We thank your Excellency's Government for the reply of 6 December 2014.

According to the information received:

Incidents of violence against Evangelical Christians almost doubled from 2012 to 2013 while there were hundreds more incidents reported from 2013 to 2016. So far in 2017, more than 30 incidents have been reported. Among these are denials of burial ground for Christian families in public cemeteries, burning, demolition or closure of churches, death threats, intimidation and assaults of clergy and church members as well as forced displacement. Since the beginning of 2015, local authorities have allegedly been involved in different incidents of discrimination such as church closures or demands to stop prayer meetings on the

basis of registration. Meanwhile, there has been a rise in organized campaigns against religious minorities led by Buddhist extremist groups in 2017.

*Attacks against churches, clergy, Christians and interference with religious activities*

On 1 January 2017, in Kithusevana, Karuwalagaswewa (Puttalam District), a pastor and 12 congregants were accosted by around 10 villagers and a Buddhist monk from the village temple. It is alleged that the group threatened the Christian group with violence and stated that they would not allow the Christians to return to the village. A complaint about the incident was filed with the local police. On 4 January, the pastor and his lawyer visited the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the local police station, expressing the pastor's wish to proceed with legal action. The OIC requested, however, to first conduct an inquiry into the incident by interviewing both parties, who were summoned to the Police Station the next day. The Buddhist monk insisted that the Christians should leave the village and the OIC decided to refer the matter to the courts. That evening, a mob of around 100 villagers along with two Buddhist monks attacked the church, which was left completely destroyed.

On 15 January 2017, around 40 villagers and 7 Buddhist monks entered the Christian Freedom Church in Minuwangoda (Gampaha District), questioning the pastor about his religious activities. The group allegedly claimed that the village was a "Buddhist village" and demanded that the pastor discontinue his religious activities with immediate effect, to which the pastor responded by stating his fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief. Following a call to the police emergency hotline by the pastor, the police went to the church and took a statement from the pastor. The police also advised him to make a complaint at the local police station. However, when the pastor went to the police station, he was informed that a complaint had been lodged against him. That night, the pastor's house was stoned. The pastor, again, called the police emergency hotline and two police officers arrived at the pastor's house advising him to leave the village. On 16 January, the pastor filed a second complaint with the police and the matter was referred to the mediation board in the village. On 28 January, the pastor, his wife, and two congregants arrived for an inquiry by the mediation board, which was also attended by a number of villagers. The board demanded that the pastor discontinue his religious activities, which the pastor refused. On 18 February, during a second meeting with the board, the pastor was given a petition signed by the villagers and some Buddhist monks, demanding that he stop his religious activities and leave the village. The pastor stated that he would take legal action.

On 22 January 2017, the pastor of Shalom Christian Center in Balangoda (Ratnapura District), was informed that a group of villagers had circulated a

petition demanding that the pastor and his congregants cease their religious activities as it was a predominantly Buddhist village. It is further alleged that the local Divisional Secretariat (DS) stated that no legal action could be taken against the pastor and his congregation but encouraged the villagers to cause problems for them. Following this incident, the pastor reduced the number of prayer gatherings held at his place of worship.

On 10 February 2017, while the youth of the Calvary Church in Morawaka, Matara District, were in prayer, a police officer accompanied by approximately 30 villagers arrived at the church and demanded that they cease their religious activities. The youth were also summoned to a meeting at the local police station the same day. The pastor's wife as well as two other congregants met the OIC of the Morawaka Police Station who instructed them to register their place of worship with the local Divisional Secretariat, obtain a certificate of registration and present it to the police. He further stated that they should stop conducting religious activities until the church was registered.

On 25 March 2017, a mob of around 50 people led by 3 Buddhist monks forcibly entered the Christian Fellowship International Ministry in Ingiriya (Kalutara District), where they demanded that all religious activities be discontinued. The mob then proceeded to ask the names of the Christians present and questioned them on their reasons for attending the worship service. During the incident, a congregant called the emergency police hotline and registered a complaint. Two police officers arrived at the premises, and allegedly under the influence of alcohol proceeded to scold the Christians for breaching the peace in the community and requested the pastor to be present for a policy inquiry. The pastor, accompanied by a lawyer, visited the police station on two occasions regarding the incident, but was not granted a meeting with the OIC. On 2 April, the pastor was requested to cooperate with another police inquiry. When he arrived at the police station, a mob of around 200 people led by 20 Buddhist monks were present outside the police station. During the inquiry, the OIC questioned the pastor as to whether he had obtained permission from the authorities to conduct religious activities. The pastor responded that he was unaware of the existence of such a stipulation in the law. The OIC, however, stated that the pastor should immediately discontinue all religious activities warning him that he would face severe consequences if he failed to do so. When the pastor refused, the police took further statements from the pastor regarding his refusal and informed the pastor that a case would be filed against him on the charge of breaching the peace in the community. Following the inquiry, the mob began to shout threats at the pastor and prevented him from leaving the premises. It is alleged that the mob deflated the tires of the pastor's motorbike and put raw eggs into his helmet. When he arrived to his home, he found that his property had been damaged. Villagers who had gathered around his house shouted threats at him and when the pastor came

out, an unidentified person attempted to attack him with a pole. Following a complaint filed to the police by another pastor in the area, four constables arrived at the residence and requested the pastor and his wife to move to a safe place temporarily. Consequently, the pastor and his wife sought shelter at a Christian's residence.

On 25 March 2017, an unknown person and two Buddhist monks visited the pastor of Kings Revival Church in Ingiriya (Kalutara District), and questioned him about the legality of the religious activities held in the premises. When discussing the matter, one of the monks called the Grama Sevaka (Village Officer) and summoned him to the pastor's premises. The Grama Sevaka also questioned the pastor and called upon a Provincial Council Member to interrogate the pastor further. The provincial council member demanded that the pastor present all the legal documents in relation to the church. The pastor was told that if he failed to provide the documents, he would be taken to the area police station. During the incident, government officials took photographs of the pastor, as well as a copy of his national identity card and threatened him and his family using derogatory language. On the following day, after the Sunday worship service, the pastor received a phone call informing him that there was a van with armed Buddhist monks, waiting for him to attack him. The pastor decided to disperse some of the congregants and left the premises immediately. Three of the young people who were with the pastor were physically assaulted on their way home. It is alleged that the Grama Sevaka was part of the mob. On 27 March, the pastor went to the police station and lodged a complaint regarding the attack sustained by the three young members of his congregation. It is alleged that at the present time, the pastor continues to receive threats from the Buddhist monks and has gone in hiding out of fear.

On 31 March 2017 a letter by the Area Divisional Secretary was sent to the pastor of the Christian Fellowship International Ministry in Ingiriya, (Kalutara District), stating that his religious activities were not registered and that he could only continue with his worship activities if they were registered in compliance with a Circular issued by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs in 2008, requesting all new constructions of religious places of worship to be registered with the same Ministry. It is alleged that there is no legal requirement to register places of worship with the State.

On 11 April 2017, a pastor's home in Medirigiriya, (Polonnaruwa), was stoned at night by a group of unidentified individuals, causing damage to the roof. On the following day, two pastors went to the police station to file a complaint regarding the incident.

On 21 April 2017, five individuals belonging to the Kithusevana Church in Karuwalagaswewa (Puttalam District), went to the local police station to lodge a complaint regarding their alleged unfair dismissal from the village death welfare society as a result of their religious affiliation. The police summoned them to attend a meeting to address the issue on 5 May. On the day of the meeting, the chairman, the secretary and the treasurer of the death welfare society were also present. It is alleged that the secretary spoke in support of the Christians and admitted that their dismissal was not justified. Although the OIC reprimanded the members of the death welfare society for their actions and said that he would personally follow up on the issue with the other members of the society on 28 May. Such meeting did not take place.

On 23 April 2017, in Devinuwara (Matara District), while the pastor was away, a group of approximately 40 Buddhist monks, accompanied by the OIC of the Gandara police station, the Grama Sevaka and a mob of villagers accessed the Christian church, disrupted the Sunday service, threatened the congregants who were gathered there and filmed the incident.

On 5 May 2017, the pastor of Four Square Church in Ingiriya (Kalutara District), attended a meeting with the villager officer at the request of the latter. During the meeting, the villager officer questioned the pastor and asked him a number of details about his place of worship, including whether the pastor had been granted authorization from the Divisional Secretary to carry out his religious activities.

On 7 May 2017, in Ingiriya (Kalutara District), during the weekly worship service at King's Revival Church, the OIC of the local police station, three police officers and the Divisional Secretary entered the church and questioned the pastor about the religious service. The pastor immediately contacted his lawyer to talk to them. On 14 May, three police officers arrived at the pastor's place of worship and informed him that they had received a complaint from a villager regarding his continued worship activities. The pastor referred to his fundamental rights and expressed his displeasure at being intimidated and harassed. The police informed the Divisional Secretary that any future issues with the pastor should be addressed directly to him and not to the police.

On 9 May 2017, a mob of around 30 villagers led by six Buddhist monks forcibly entered the Assemblies of God Church ) in Thanamalwila (Moneragala District) in the afternoon and demanded that the pastor, who has been serving in this location for 21 years, stop his religious activities, and questioned the legality of such activities.

On 18 May 2017, in Devinuwara (Matara District), a demonstration led by villagers carrying black flags, marched through the streets of the village and

gathered outside the local Buddhist temple, where the villagers, together with Buddhist monks, called on the Divisional Secretary and the police to close down the Christian Church “Assemblies of God”. The pastor attempted to lodge a complaint with the Gandara police regarding this incident, as well as previous ones. It is alleged that the police refused to accept the complaint. Following legal advice from his lawyer, the pastor submitted his complaints by post.

On 23 May 2017, in Gonagolla (Ampara District), some Buddhist monks visited the Grama Sevaka and complained that the pastor had been allowed to build a church in the village. It is alleged that the pastor is building a house which will serve as his private residence. On the following day, the pastor was invited by the principal of his daughter’s school to attend a prize ceremony. When he arrived to the school, a Buddhist monk was present and refused to stay due to the presence of the pastor. In order to avoid tensions, the pastor decided to leave so that the monk could stay during the ceremony, who allegedly referred to the pastor using obscene language and made false allegations about him. Later that day, the pastor went to the school to address the incident with the principal, the latter urged the pastor not to report it in order to protect the reputation of the school.

On 9 June 2017, when the pastor returned from a trip to Colombo, he found that their place of worship “The Christian Fellowship” in Ingiriya, (Kalutara District) had been vandalized. Recently, a court order had affirmed the right of the pastor to continue his religious activities. The pastor immediately informed the local police about the incident. That night, a few government officials arrived at the premises to gather evidence. In total, the pastor and his wife have lodged six complaints to the Ingiriya Police Station regarding various similar incidents.

On 11 June 2017, in Dickwella (Matara District), during the Sunday service, three police officers entered the church “Assemblies of God” premises and questioned the pastor about his religious activities. They instructed him to speak to the OIC of the local police station. When the pastor arrived at the police station, the OIC questioned him about his activities, informed him about a complaint made against him via the police emergency hotline and indicated to him that he could not continue his religious activities.

On 15 June 2017, in Weeraketiya (Hambantota District), a congregant instructed by the pastor went to the church, which was closed, and found that it had been broken up and the furnishing in the premises had been robbed. When he informed the police, two police officers and two officers from the Criminal Investigations Department arrived at the premises to conduct an investigation, while at the same time, two congregants went to the local police station to file a complaint. It is alleged that the complaint was recorded but the police refused to issue a reference number. There are reportedly three ongoing court cases concerning the pastor, in

relation to attacks against him and his wife in 2012 and 2013 and the inaction by the police during the attacks against the pastor's church in 2012. As a result of those attacks, he was forced to move to Colombo due to death threats against him and his family.

On 17 June 2017, in Galgamuwa (Kurunegala District), around noon when the prayer meeting had concluded, a mob led by three Buddhist monks, as well as around 20 villagers, along with the OIC of the local police station, and some police officers arrived at the Elim Prayer Center and admonished the pastor for conducting religious activities in the village. It is alleged that the monks claimed that the pastor was converting the people of the village and the OIC ordered the pastor to stop his religious activities and to leave the village permanently.

#### Forced closure of churches

In 2015, there was a record of 24 incidents of forced church closures and demands for closures by local authorities and law enforcement officers. In 2016, at least 25 incidents were reported, and another nine have been reported in 2017 to date.

#### Discrimination in employment

On 19 May 2017, in Devinuwara (Matara District), a Christian individual employed as a bus conductor was allegedly fired when the bus owner learned that the man was a Christian. The man was offered a new job on 26 May, but was fired again by his new employer on the ground of his religious affiliation.

#### Ministry Circular 2008

Sri Lankan law does not require the registration of places of worship or religious bodies with the State. However, a Circular dated October 2008 issued by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs demands that all "new constructions" of places of worship should obtain approval from the Ministry. Provincial Councils and Divisional Secretaries were allegedly instructed by the Ministry to comply with this requirement before approving applications for the construction of places of worship. The Circular exempts 'traditional religions' from submitting documentary evidence to prove their bona-fide, however, there is no clear definition of 'traditional religion'. Consequently, this leaves great discretion to the local authorities to grant or deny permission. This Circular has reportedly resulted in evangelical Christian churches being routinely denied permission to construct places of worship solely because they failed to get approval from the Ministry.

Furthermore, the Circular 2008 should have no retrospective effect and apply only to new constructions. However, Government officials have reportedly used it to close down existing churches as well.

*Anti-minorities and social media campaigns*

On 2 June 2017, in Thanamalwila (Moneragala District), a campaign calling for the protection of Buddhism and the end to the presence of minority religious groups in the village took place. It is alleged that the Assistant Superintendent of Police and the OIC of the local police station were informed about the campaign but no action has been taken so far.

A number of social media campaigns using obscene and derogatory language have also been used by Buddhist fundamentalist groups to fuel hatred, incite violence, and propagate discrimination against minorities. These videos and campaigns have a strong supporter-base and wide viewership. Many incidents of violence against or intimidation of religious minorities have been recorded and uploaded on social media platforms.

*Human rights lawyer and defender, Mr. Lakshan Dias*

In this context, we would like to refer to the threats received by Mr. Lakshan Dias after publicly criticizing the attacks against Christians. Mr. Dias is a well-known human rights lawyer, human rights defender, and a long standing campaigner on the rights of religious minorities. He often meets with victim communities and represents them in the courts.

On 14 June 2017, Mr. Dias was invited to be part of a talk show panel called ‘Aluth Palimenthuwa’ (new parliament). The show was aired by Derana TV. During the discussions, Mr. Dias raised concerns about the level of religious intolerance towards Muslims and Christians. He highlighted that an estimate 195 cases of attacks on Christians had been reported between January 2015 and June 2017. He expressed the view that Buddhist monks were behind some of the attacks.

On 16 June 2017, on primetime television (ITN), the President of Sri Lanka referred to the talk show without naming Mr. Dias and dismissed the claims as false. The President referred to a conversation held with the Catholic Archbishop of Colombo, who allegedly had stated that no such attacks were taking place.

On 17 June 2017, on ITN, the Justice Minister, also Minister for Buddha Sasana (Religious Affairs) reiterated the Cardinal’s views and threatened to bar Mr. Dias

from the legal profession unless he retracted his statement and offered an apology within 24 hours.

On 18 June 2017, a protest march called for the arrest and punishment of Mr. Dias, whom the protestors claimed was a betrayal of the nation. The Bar Association convened on the 24 June 2017 and advised Mr. Dias to produce an affidavit to support his claims.

On 26 June 2017, the Justice Minister in a talk show called ‘Salakuna’ aired by Hiru TV once again criticized Mr. Dias and non-governmental organisations for falsely reporting about the state of religious minorities.

On 27 June 2017, a media outlet reported that Mr. Dias had been ordered by the Bar Association to name each church individually through an affidavit. The paper also reported that the Justice Minister had instructed the Bar Association to initiate disciplinary action against Mr. Dias if he failed to repudiate his statement.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, we express grave concern at the trend of violent attacks against Christians in Sri Lanka, which is taking place in a context of growing intolerance against religious minorities in the country. We express equal concern that the lack of investigation of these attacks and threats lead to impunity which can encourage new attacks.

We also express grave concern at the public statements made by the President and the Minister for Justice and Religious Affairs against human rights lawyer and defender Mr. Lakshan Dias, including threats to remove him from the legal profession due to the content of his expression on television. We express concern that the statements by the authorities appear to be an attempt to intimidate Mr. Dias and to obstruct his work as human rights defender and lawyer, and could ultimately have a chilling effect on civil society as a whole, weakening the democratic space and discouraging the denunciation of human rights violations for fear of reprisals.

The alleged attacks are in contravention of the rights to personal security, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, as well as the prohibition against advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, as set forth respectively in articles 9, 18, 19 and 20(2) 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). They also have a grave impact on the right to take part in cultural life without discrimination, as guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), acceded to by Sri Lanka on 11 June 1980.

As stated by the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights in her latest report, Governments must ensure there is a counterweight to fundamentalist and extremist discourses by publicly challenging them and by guaranteeing education in accordance with international standards specified in article 13 (1) of the ICESCR and article 26 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/HRC/34/56, para.24). In its General Comment No. 13 (1999) on the right to education, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stressed that education should strengthen respect for human rights, promote understanding, tolerance and gender equality and be informed by humanism.

The Special Rapporteur also stressed that States must respect, protect and fulfil human rights, in particular cultural rights, meaning that they must: (a) stop supporting directly or indirectly fundamentalist ideologies; (b) protect all persons from any act of fundamentalist or extremist groups aimed at coercing them into specific identities, beliefs or practices; and (c) design programmes aimed at creating conditions allowing all people to access, participate in and contribute to cultural life, without discrimination. Noting that fundamentalist and extremist assaults on minorities and their cultural sites and practices have become widespread around the world, she also recommended that States develop plans of action that are fully gender sensitive to protect religious, ethnic and sexual minorities and women from extremism and fundamentalism, and implement urgent action policies when such groups are the targets of fundamentalist and extremist threats or violence (A/HRC/34/56, para. 97k).

Recognizing that those affected are members of a religious minority in Sri Lanka, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government the international standards regarding the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, in particular to article 27 of the ICCPR 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; this is set out by the Human Rights Committee in paragraph 8 of its General Comment No. 31;
- to prohibit by law and to ensure full enforcement of the law against every incident of advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to

discrimination, hostility or violence in accordance with article 20(2) of the ICCPR, as set out 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; this is set out by the Committee against Racial Discrimination in General Recommendations No. 15 and 35.

Regarding the disciplinary procedures against Mr. Dias, we would like recall the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which establish that governments shall ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference, and that they shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics (Principle 16). We would finally like to highlight the fundamental principles set forth in articles 1 and 2 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which provide for the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In the light of the above standards, we call on your Excellency's Government to urgently undertake all necessary measures to effectively protect members of all religious minorities, including Christians, against any attack, to ensure the security of their members, as well as their businesses, places of worship and other property, and to bring perpetrators of violence against them to justice.

In this context, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government the Rabat Plan of Action<sup>1</sup>, 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.

Furthermore, we recall the recommendation made by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues following her visit to Sri Lanka in 2016, where she referred to the information received about difficulties in obtaining new places of worship, including for members of smaller Christian denominations and stated that article 9 of the Constitution, as well as the non-statutory government circular issued in 2008 by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs are sometimes used to the detriment of other religions, including as the basis for arbitrarily denying applications for construction of

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/SeminarRabat/Rabat\\_draft\\_outcome.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/SeminarRabat/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf)

places of worship<sup>2</sup>. In her report, she furthermore urges the strict application of the existing legislation to bring to justice perpetrators of hate speech aiming to incite discrimination or violence and states that ending impunity for those who incite ethnic or religious hatred and violence must be a priority<sup>3</sup>. We also recall her 2014 thematic report to the General Assembly “Preventing and addressing violence and atrocities against minorities”, where she referred to the statements made by BBS fueling tensions and contributing to more than 350 violent attacks against Muslims and over 150 attacks against Christians during the previous two years, and to the recommendations contained therein<sup>4</sup>.

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

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

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 regarding the acts described above, as well as the details of any judicial, disciplinary or administrative proceedings ordered against their perpetrators; If no investigation has been initiated, please explain why.
3. Please indicate what actions have been taken to ensure the protection of religious minorities in Sri Lanka, including Christian minorities, and to prevent the recurrence of acts of violence based on religious and racial grounds.

Please provide detailed information on the measures taken to ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief and the right to take part in economic, social and cultural life without discrimination of all people in Sri Lanka, as part of the full enjoyment of all other rights, in line with the country’s international human rights obligations.

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<sup>2</sup> A/HRC/34/53/Add.3, paragraph 29.

<sup>3</sup> A/HRC/34/53/Add.3, paragraph 71.

<sup>4</sup> A/69/266, paragraph 27 and 91-98.

4. Please provide information on the application of Ministry Circular 2008 and the measures taken to ensure that there is clear interpretation of “traditional religion and its compatibility with Sri Lanka’s obligations under international human rights law, in particular with articles 18 and 19 of the ICCPR.
5. Please explain how the threat of disciplinary procedures against Mr. Lakshan Dias is compatible with the right of freedom of expression and the standards concerning the independence of the legal profession, in line with the country’s international human rights obligations.
6. Please indicate what measures have been adopted by the Government to ensure that Mr. Lakshan Dias is able to conduct his legitimate functions as human rights defender without fear of threats or exposure to acts of intimidation and reprisals.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations against Christian communities 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. Furthermore, we urge that all measures be put in place to guarantee the right of freedom of opinion and expression and that the public expression of views is not translated into unfair penalties against Mr. Lakshan Dias.

We would further like to inform your Excellency’s Government that we intend to publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency’s Government’s to clarify the issue/s 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.

Michel Forst  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Diego García-Sayán  
Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

Rita Izsák-Ndiaye  
Special Rapporteur on minority issues

David Kaye  
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion  
and expression

Ahmed Shaheed  
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief