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Dambulla Mosque attack: Concerned citizens' statement against religious intolerance

Sunday 27 May 2012, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 24 April 2012).

It is with great concern that we the undersigned protest against the growing trend of increasing religious intolerance in Sri Lanka with regard to minority religions.

We specifically condemn the recent violent attack on the Mosque in Dambulla by a group of anti social actors. The Hindu community has also been asked to move their temple from the vicinity.

The Dambulla Khairya Jummah Mosque had been in existence for over 60 years and the mosque trustees have legal documents regarding its construction. On Friday the 20th of April 2012 a tense situation arose as regular Friday prayer at the Mosque was prevented by a gang led by Buddhist monks who claimed that it was an illegal construction. The group stated that both the Mosque and Hindu shrine were built on sacred Buddhist ground. It is further regrettable that law enforcement authorities could not take appropriate action to stop the forceful entry into the mosque and the intimidation of the community

On the 23rd after a discussion with the Buddhist monks deputy minister Hizbullah made a public announcement to the media that the monks have agreed to give three months to identify alternative land and relocate the Mosque. However the very affected members of the community have not been part of this discussion and are still unable to express their opinion freely. While we are in support of reaching a solution through negotiations with the Muslim community, we would like to stress that any decision taken on this issue should not be unjust towards the minority communities in the context of post-war Sri Lanka.

The mosque has been in existence for over 60 years and the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim persons in the region had been living together in a spirit of amity for decades, if not centuries. Yet, today we see that that religious intolerance is on the rise and the state has done little to check this.

The incident in Dambulla is not an isolated one. Last year a Muslim shrine (Dargha) was destroyed in Anuradhapura . In Ashraf Nagar the military has taken over land that belongs to 69 Muslim families, including land that was allotted for a Muslim burial ground. In Illangaithurai Muhathuwaram (now renamed Lanka Patuna) a Shivan shrine was removed and a Buddhist statue was built in its place.

A group of Buddhist monks and people attacked the four Square Gospel Church in Kaluthara North last year. The Police have prevented the church from functioning claiming that it would lead to a breach peace.

In Ambalangoda the Assembly of God church was attacked in February this year. A pastor in Kalutara was attacked and a house belonging to a Christian was vandalized by Buddhist monks alleging that the church was engaged in conversions. The police failed to frame charges against

Buddhist monks.

Recently the government has also tried to pass the Town and Country Planning bill which allows for religious land to also been acquired in municipal and urban areas for economic, social, historical, environmental or religious purposes.

Even though the bill has been challenged in court and withdrawn there is a move to bring the bill back as law through other avenues. Such acts increase the sense of insecurity that minorities in general feel in this as regards the practice of worship and co existence.

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community in which religious acceptance and protection of religious and cultural rights and the freedom to practice their religion anywhere in the country is a basic tenet of the Constitution and a protection assured to all citizens.

We appeal to the President, state institutions and officials, and those in the executive to take appropriate action on the incident in Dambulla that serves to build confidence among minority communities in the state structure and mechanisms.

We strongly believe that the people of this country, Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Christian and Burgher wish to live in harmony with each other. We also strongly believe that it is a marginal amount of people who take to violence in riding rough shod over the rights of others.

We strongly urge the state to take measures to curb the growing trend of intolerance and to do its utmost to make minorities feel in every way people of this country. In the post war context this is of the utmost importance for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence.

We also appeal to religious and community leaders to initiate dialogue at all possible levels so that minority communities feel secure. We pledge our support for a pluralist Sri Lankan society.

SIGNATORIES:

1. Affected Women's Forum (Akkaraippattu)
2. Association of War-Affected Women
3. Centre for Human Resource Development (Viluthu)
4. Centre for Human Rights and Development
5. Centre for Mass Communication and Media (Mannar)
6. Centre for Policy Alternatives
7. Equal Ground
8. Families of the Disappeared
9. Human Rights office Kandy
10. IMADR- Asia
11. INFORM
12. Jaffna Civil Society for Equality
13. Lawyers for Democracy
14. Mannar Women's Development Federation
15. Mothers and Daughters of Lanka
16. Mullaitheevu Women Development and Rehabilitation Trust
17. Muslim Women's Trust - Puttalam
18. Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum
19. National Peace Council
20. Red Flag Movement
21. Right to Life Human Rights Center

22. Rights Now Collective for Democracy
23. Sakhi Collaboration
24. Stand Up Movement
25. Voluntary Service Development Organization
26. Women's Action Network
27. Women and Media Collective
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