

# **We call on the Government of Sri Lanka: Take Urgent Action to Stop Attacks on Muslims**

Friday 20 June 2014, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 18 June 2014).

We the undersigned Sri Lankans strongly condemn the Bodu Bala Sena's (BBS) highly inflammatory hate speech against, and brazen physical attacks on the Muslim community in Aluthgama, Beruwala, Welipenna and Dharga-Town in June 2014. We believe that the violence is directly linked to recent statements by the BBS targeting Muslims. We call upon the authorities to immediately conduct independent investigations into the incidents, and hold to account perpetrators and those complicit in such acts. We believe inflammatory statements made by the General Secretary of the BBS, Galagodathera Gnanasara, clearly demonstrates his pivotal role and responsibility for the violence. We therefore call upon the authorities to take immediate steps to arrest and charge him for the deaths and destruction in the area.

At the time of issuing this statement, reliable sources who have access to the area during the last few days confirm the devastation and destruction in the region, including the killing of at least three people, with unconfirmed reports that this figure maybe higher, and injuries to around 80 people. In addition, mosques have been attacked and vandalized, and many Muslim-owned houses and businesses in the area damaged and destroyed. Despite curfew being imposed in the area, the violence and the gathering of mobs continued with the inability or unwillingness of the security forces to control them. Many innocent men, women and children continue to live in fear of further attacks. We are extremely disturbed that there continue to be reports of mobs in the area and that the insecurity in these areas continue, despite the presence of security force personnel. On June 15<sup>th</sup> there was an incident where a shop was attacked in Dehiwela. There are rumours of tensions and incidents from other areas.

In such a disturbing context, we call on the Government of Sri Lanka to take immediate and effective action and ensure that the perpetrators of this heinous violence are held to account. The Government has an obligation to protect all citizens of Sri Lanka and end impunity. Given the brazen attacks on the Muslim community, the Government must deploy additional police and other law enforcement authorities, and ensure that they take preventive and responsive action to ensure the safety of communities at risk. We are aware of the authorities having made a number of arrests so far. However, media reports state that many were released within the day. Further, the BBS General Secretary Galagodaaththe Gnanasara is reported to be free to roam about and to incite further hatred and violence, and has not yet been questioned. Unimpeded access should also be granted to food and relief convoys as well as to independent actors and the media to report without hindrance or harm on the situation.

There are basic protections provided in the Constitution and the legal framework for the safety and security of all citizens. The President, who is also the Minister of Defence, and his brother, the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, must ensure that law and order is maintained and reassure the citizens of Sri Lanka that appropriate action is being taken to prevent any further violence and that the perpetrators will be held to account, including those who incited and spearheaded the violence. The authorities should also take this opportunity to issue a public

apology for failing to protect its citizens against violence.

We have in recent times seen the selective use of specific laws such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to arrest and detain civilians, civil society and media personnel in the name of “national security”. We have also witnessed the law being used to stop peaceful protests elsewhere in the country. And yet, the police permitted the BBS rally to take place despite the pleas of a number of actors, including politicians within the Government who argued that it would exacerbate tensions. The legal framework outside the PTA can and should be used to deal with situations such as this where there is an egregious violation of the Constitution and laws of the country.

There is a clear need for an impartial inquiry into the causes for the violence to identify perpetrators of the attacks and the role played by the police and armed forces. It is also paramount that the State fairly compensates those who suffered the loss of family members, and the destruction of and damage to property. We urge the authorities to take specific steps to build the confidence of the Muslim community as equal citizens of Sri Lanka. The recent attacks on Muslim places of worship and businesses are part of a wider trend of violent attacks against Muslims and other religious and ethnic minorities, including the Christian community. Hence, there is a need to address this wider issue of violence against religious minorities. Most urgently, to take preventive action, including deploying adequate security forces in areas where minorities are under threat from further violence.

More than five years after the end of the war, it is imperative that we explore avenues for coexistence and come together to build a society that cherishes and celebrates its inherent pluralism. Thirty years after the carnage of Black July 1983, this most recent violence is a tragic reminder of how little we as citizenry have learned from the past.

Finally, this statement expresses solidarity with our fellow citizens, the victims and survivors of the villages of Aluthgama, Beruwala, Dharga Town, Walpitiya and Welipenna. Much needs to be done to address the recent violence and we believe much can be achieved if the Government acts swiftly and decisively to fulfill its fundamental responsibility for protecting all citizens of Sri Lanka and we as Sri Lankans play an active role to renounce the violence and act in solidarity with those under threat.

Note by the drafters: Subsequent to the compilation of signatures for this statement an incident was reported. Ven. Watareka Vijitha Thero, was found beaten up, with his hands and legs bound, by the side of the Hirana bridge, in Panadura this morning (Thursday 19<sup>th</sup>). He is currently receiving treatment for his injuries at the National Hospital, Colombo. Ven. Vijitha Thero has been a vocal critic of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) and an advocate for inter-religious harmony. His outspokenness has resulted in him coming under attack and being subject to serious threats and intimidation allegedly by members of the BBS.

18<sup>th</sup> June, 2014

*Signed by:*

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7. Ajit Abeysekera
8. Ajita Kadirgamar

9. Ajith C. Herath - Hiru Newspaper
10. Aman Ashraff
11. Amana Hussain
12. Amarnath Amarasingham
13. Ameen Hussein
14. Anandha Joseph
15. Anberiya Hanifa
16. Angelica Chandrasekaran
17. Anita Nesiah
18. Anitha Selvarajah
19. Ann Jabbar
20. Annie Kurian - Director, Centre for Social Concerns
21. Anukshi Jayasinha
22. Anushaya Collure
23. Areeb Ahamed
24. Arjini Nawal
25. Asanka Brendon Ratnayake
26. Asanka Wijesinghe
27. Asker Khan - Secretary, Muslim Council of Sri Lanka
28. Azhar Ahamed
29. B. Gowthaman - Attorney-at-Law
30. B. Skanthakumar
31. Bhavani Fonseka
32. Buddhima Padmasiri
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35. Caryll Perera
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46. D.N. Ambalavanar - Batticaloa
47. Deanne Uyangoda
48. Deborah Philip
49. Dehini Wiratunga
50. Dhamsiri Fonseka
51. Dhanushka Fernando
52. Dilanda Pelpola
53. Dinesha Samararatne
54. Dinidu de Alwis - Editor-in-Chief, The Republic Square
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58. Dr. Dharmasena Pathiraja
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60. Dr. Jehan Perera - National Peace Council (NPC)
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62. Dr. Michael Roberts
63. Dr. Pushpa Ramlani Dissanayake
64. Dr. R. Cheran
65. Dr. Ramya Kumar
66. Dr. Ranil D. Guneratne
67. Dr. Sepali Kottegoda
68. Dr. Sivamohan Sumathy
69. Dr. Sunil Wijesiriwardena
70. Dr. Zulfika Ismail
71. Dumindu Karunasekera
72. Elane Savi Wijesekera
73. Elma Hussain
74. Emil van der Poorten
75. Ermiza Tegal - Attorney-at-Law
76. Esther Surenthiraj
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82. Farha Fathima
83. Farzana Khan
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89. Gamini Akmeemana
90. Gehan Gunatilleke
91. Githanjali Algama
92. Hans Billimoria
93. Hans Gray
94. Harean Hettiarachchi
95. Hasangi Nandasena
96. Hilmy Ahamed
97. Ian Ferdinands
98. Ikram Yakeem
99. Iromi Perera
100. Izhara Huzair
101. Jake Oorloff
102. Janaki Galappatti
103. Janakie Seneviratne
104. Jayanta de S. Wijeratne - Negombo
105. Jayantha Dhanapala
106. Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala
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109. Jehanki Anandha
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118. Karin Fernando
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121. Krishna Velupillai
122. Kuhanithy Gunachandran
123. Kumaran Nadesan
124. Kumari Kumaragamage
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126. Leana Pieris
127. Leila Udayar
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129. Lionel Bopage
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135. M.R. Rahman
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158. Nagulan Nesiah
159. Naloofa Kayaam
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168. Ninel Fernando
169. Nissanka De Mel
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226. Ruki Fernando
227. Rukkaiya Hussain
228. Rushdi Zackariya
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259. Shyara Jaleel Khan
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261. Silma Mohideen Ahamed
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  273. Sunila Mendis
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