

# Sri Lanka: Muslims Protest on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2009

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Muslim Left Front organized a protest in Colombo against the repressive actions in the Muslim area, Maligawatta. Though, it was supposed to be the palace garden during the Kotte period in 16<sup>th</sup> century, now it has become the sanctuary for the Muslim poor. In the recent Ramazan period police and army organized a cordon and search operation apparently to catch underworld characters. This was a continuation of search operations started few months back to arrest "Muslim underworld". In this whole deployment over a dozen of people were killed. Police claim these were legitimate killings happened in the operation. But the Muslim community dismisses this claim in anger insisting it as an attack on the Muslim community. Over a thousand people from the area participated in the protest. Many were women. Faisal, Najibudeen, Darshana, and Abubakar led the campaign. Bahu in his speech made the following remarks.

"I am thankful to the Muslim Left Front and to comrade Faisal for organizing this protest and inviting me. It is most unwanted for the police to organize a repressive operation in the Ramazan festival time, in the sacred area of Maligawatta Jumma Masjid church. Do they make such operations around Buddhist temples during the Wesak period? Certainly not. Then why this discrimination? Do they claim there is a special Muslim under world in Colombo? Is it because Muslims feel they are not protected by the police? Are they having special problems to organize an under world armed actions? No answer is given by the government or the police. Result of these operations is the death of over dozen of Muslim youth. Does that mean the police are now empowered not only to arrest suspects but also act as secret courts, undercover prisons and finally executioners? Can the police stop criminal activities by resorting to illegitimate criminal actions? In order to keep law and order police has to be within the law. Now many poor families are in desperation, they have no bread winners and the responsibility is with the government. We demand that government pays adequate compensation."