

52nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Agenda Item 4: The Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka
Oral Statement

Delivered by Fr Julian Patrick (Check Against Delivery)

22 March 2023

Thank you Mr President

Franciscans International¹ and Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, draw the Council's attention to the Easter Sunday bombings of April 2019, when three churches and three major hotels in Sri Lanka were bombed, killing 269 people and injuring more than 500. We are concerned about the increase in hate speech against minorities, in particular Muslims and the use of majoritarian discourse to vilify minorities for political purposes following the bombings. And nearly four years after, justice is being delayed for the victims.

The reports of a presidential commission, a presidential committee, and a Parliamentary Select Committee have not been fully published and none of the major recommendations from the published reports have been implemented.

In January 2023, in response to fundamental rights cases, the Sri Lankan Supreme Court ordered former President Sirisena and other senior state officers to pay compensation to the victims for failing to prevent the bombings. The amounts were below what was awarded in other cases. The court ordered disciplinary action against the former director of State Intelligence Service. In general, there has been no prosecution for criminal negligence of any state officials and no prosecution of the master minds responsible for the crimes.

We call upon the Sri Lankan Government to implement the Supreme Court orders; and to investigate and prosecute all those who planned, implemented, assisted the bombings, including based on principle of command responsibility; or those who did not prevent them. We also urge not to promote those who are suspected to be implicated through negligence, including Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police Deshabandu Tennakoon² whose promotion as Inspector General of Police has been reported in media.

We also call upon the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to support international justice initiatives for Easter Sunday bombings and to ensure that the United Nations' evidence gathering process based on Council resolution 46/1 includes Easter Sunday bombings.

The UN member States should proactively initiate and support prosecution of those responsible for the bombings through their national judicial processes.

Finally, the High Commissioner and United Nations member States should closely monitor and report on the domestic processes dealing with justice for Easter Sunday bombings.

Thank you.

¹ This statement is also endorsed by Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, Catholic Archbishop of Colombo.

² In its final report, the Presidential Commission of Inquiry that investigated the 2019 Easter Sunday Attacks recommended disciplinary action against DIG Tennakoon. At the time of the attacks, Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police Deshabandu Tennakoon was in charge of the Colombo North area. See Presidential Commission of Inquiry, Final Report, Vol. 1, p.313.