



Freedom of religion and belief

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FROM PREVIOUS UPR CYCLES

Approx. 120 words noting recommendations made to Sri Lanka on the relevant theme in the first and second cycle .

During its second review, Sri Lanka received six recommendations on freedom of religion and belief. The need to promote interreligious dialogue as a vehicle for reconciliation, tolerance and peaceful-coexistence featured in three, accepted, recommendations. Noted recommendations concerned legislative amendments to the Penal Code to safeguard rights of women from all religious and ethnic communities, and to ensure that all citizens are able to freely express their opinions and beliefs, and in this context invite the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Approx. 200 words outlining relevant national legislation, statistics, policies and initiative.

The Fundamental Rights chapter of Sri Lankan Constitution guarantee Freedom of thought conscience and religion under Article 10. Article 14(1)(e) provides all citizens the freedom to adopt, practice and teach any religion of their choice. However, Chapter II, Article 9 of the Constitution states that “The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e).’

The Prevention of Terrorism Act prohibits hate speech and publications which would spread hatred among different religious communities. General penal law also prohibits hate speech.

70% of the population are Buddhists while 12.6% are Hindu, 9.7% are Islamic, 7.6% are Christians and Catholics. Ministries and Departments have been established to deal with Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Islamic affairs.

CHALLENGES

IMPACT

Religious intolerance

There has been a rise in attacks and hate speech against religious minorities by right wing Buddhist groups. Muslims in Aluthgama, Beruwala and Dharga town were attacked in June 2014. At least 4 were killed and 80 were injured and hundred were made homeless. No proper action was taken against the culprits. There have been 120 attacks on Christian Churches since 2015. In August 2015, a group of Buddhist extremists entered into a Church in Galle and the pastor and his wife were assaulted. The pastor assault has later been remanded.



CHALLENGES

IMPACT

Special Treatment to Buddhists	The constitutional provisions allow the government to give special treatment to one religion. The process of constitutional amendments have been criticised by religious extremist groups for religious secularity, forcing the President to include special provisions in the new constitution for Buddhism.
Impunity over violence against religious minorities	No proper action was taken against the culprits of the attacks in Aluthgama, Beruwala and Dharga town were in June 2014. A joint press conference convened by a Buddhist Monk and Islamic priests was disturbed by a mob group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Approx. 360 words extracting recommendations from CSO submissions and directly related to the challenges described above (approx 10 SMART recommendations in bullet points).

1. **Implement constitutional reforms that guarantee equal treatment of all persons regardless of their faith.**
2. **Eradicate all hate speech, incitement and violence against religious minorities.**
3. **Initiate legal actions against suspects for June 2014 attacks on Muslims in Aluthgama, Beruwala and Dharga town.**
4. **Appoint a commission of inquiry and grant compensation to those who lost assets as a result of the June 2014 attacks on Muslims in Aluthgama, Beruwala and Dharga town.**
5. **Assure that in Constitutional reforms, an article is included secularising the state and preventing the state from giving any special treatment to any specific religion.**