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Thank you, Chair. Multiple challenges in the use of social media in Sri Lanka, especially Facebook include sexualized hate speech against minority women, most recently against Tamil women running for political office, such as acts deterring minority women from entering the political sphere. Second, hate speech has targeted ethnic and religious minorities, including Tamil, Muslims, and Christians, and fuel discord. Recently, a particular religious minority was blamed for spreading the coronavirus. However, measures to address hate speech, including UN recommendations must not become the basis for further action, but then in the past year, increased militarization of the civil administration, from health services to protecting of this heritage, and the dramatic expansion of the Executive power through constitutional amendments has set a climate of fear and impunity.

These factors together present the possibility to more draconian laws and regulations to suppress minority rights, freedom of expression and political dissent. Activists and journalists critical of the government have been arrested and charged under domestic legislation that operationalizes the ICCPR. President [?] has demonstrated a facility for appropriating legitimate online challenges to mask censoring legislation that guides the protection of redress, these include cyberbullying, hate speech, and other misuses of social media.

There is growing fear among the Tamil community, religious minorities, and human rights defenders, that regulatory and legislative measures in the name of fighting hate speech would be turned against minorities. The international community must not tolerate legislation that commodifies women and militarizes the civil space in the name of protection. An oversight mechanism is critical, but it can only work with grassroots access and protection of local activists. We recommend that communication platforms improve their filters for hate speech but remain independent of local governments. Thank you, have a good day.