

3) Reform: filling the gaps in the implementation of the human rights of minorities

Thank you, sir chair, I'm Navindu Mendis representing the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka.

I would like to bring to your attention the current landscape of Sri Lanka with regards to religious freedom. Even though Sri Lanka guarantees equal treatment to ethnic and religious minorities through its constitution¹ and through ratifying the ICCPR, minority communities in Sri Lanka face significant challenges to their freedom of religion or belief.

The 2008 circular², which requires newly constructed places of worship to be registered with the Ministry of Buddha Sasana³, continues to act as a major hinderance to religious freedom. The circular is used by authorities to arbitrarily demand the closure of religious places of worship. Even though the circular has been criticized, the ministry has manifested their intention to formulate laws regarding the registration of religious places. Through a circular issued in 2022 the Ministry has extended its scope to include not simply buildings, but any sites of religious activity.

Additionally, following the 2019 Easter attack state surveillance particularly on minority religious places has significantly increased. In some instances, state officials resort to forcibly entering places of worship to gather information about the activities of religious minority communities.⁴

In conclusion, we request the Sri Lankan government to repeal the 2008 and 2022 circulars, to decrease surveillance on minority communities, and lastly, take the necessary measures to ensure religious freedom for all, and implement the Articles set forth in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Minorities.

¹ Article 12, 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka, all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law.

² MinorMatters.org, "Fact sheet | 2008 circular", <https://www.minormatters.org/storage/app/uploads/public/5b5/5a4/4be/5b55a44be214a270694958.pdf>

³ A designated state institution to manage Buddhist affairs in Sri Lanka under which the departments of minority religious affairs fall under.

⁴ A report by a faith-based organization in Colombo, Sri Lanka and interviews with those who were surveilled * names are not disclosed due to security reasons