

43rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 3 – Interactive Dialogue with the SR on Freedom of Religion and Belief

3 March 2020

Delivered by Budi Tjahjono – Franciscans International

Madam President,

We welcome the Special Rapporteur's report on Sri Lanka. We wish to highlight continuing attacks on freedom of religion and belief, including obstructions on places of worship, threats, intimidations, assaults on religious leaders and pressure to register places of worship.¹

We wish to draw attention to the discrimination and hostility towards Muslims, especially after Easter Sunday attacks, by state officials as well as vigilante groups. Muslims have faced regular physical attacks on their mosques, houses and businesses,² leading to deaths, injuries, displacement, severe trauma and fear. While recognising long drawn struggle of Muslim women to reform the Muslim marriage and divorce act which is stalled now, we also want to highlight the on-going attacks and hate campaign against Muslim women's dress code.

We are also concerned about competing claims to historic religious sites between Hindus and Buddhists, which has led to tensions and instances where some Buddhists had disregarded court orders, sometimes with the help of the military and police.³

We share the Special Rapporteur's concerns about the lack of accountability and widespread impunity for human rights violations, particularly violence and discrimination against religious minorities.

We are concerned that article 9 of the Constitution gives Buddhism the foremost place.⁴ This strengthens the extremist Buddhist forces in propagating hatred, discrimination and violence against religious minorities. We urge Sri Lanka to review article 9, implement the Special Rapporteur's recommendations, reforming the education system and supporting local inter-faith initiatives.

We regret Sri Lanka's withdrawal from co-sponsoring Resolution 30/1. We urge this Council to keep Sri Lanka on its agenda; hold Sri Lanka accountable to its obligations under international law; and establish an international accountability mechanism on Sri Lanka.

Thank you.

¹ All of which disproportionately affect Evangelical Christians.

² In areas such as Kurunegela and Puttalam districts in 2019, Kandy and Ampara districts in 2018 and several other districts

³ There are also reports of Buddhist monks disrupting Thai Pongal rituals at a Hindu temple.

⁴ While under articles 10 and 14 of the constitution all religions enjoy freedoms and rights.