

Sri Lanka : violence contre les membres de la minorité musulmane

Recherche rapide de l'analyse-pays

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1 Introduction

Le présent document a été rédigé par l'analyse-pays de l'Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés (OSAR) à la suite d'une demande qui lui a été adressée. Il se penche sur les questions suivantes:

1. Les membres de la minorité musulmane au Sri Lanka sont-ils exposés à des actes de violence ?
2. Existe-t-il des éléments indiquant que les personnes musulmanes au premier plan de la lutte pour les droits des personnes musulmanes sont susceptibles d'être menacées ?
3. La police et les acteurs de l'Etat protègent-ils les membres de la minorité musulmane contre les actes de violence ?

Pour répondre à ces questions, l'analyse-pays de l'OSAR s'est fondée sur des sources accessibles publiquement et disponibles dans les délais impartis (recherche rapide) ainsi que sur des renseignements d'expert-e-s.

2 La minorité musulmane : cible d'actes de violence

2.1 Actes de violence contre la minorité musulmane

Intimidation, menaces, climat de peur. En mars 2018, le *UK Home Office* rapporte, sur la base de diverses sources, que, ces dernières années, les membres de la minorité musulmane font régulièrement l'objet d'intimidations et de menaces de la part de la population et des partisans des groupes nationalistes extrémistes cingalo-bouddhistes. Les musulman-e-s vivent, selon cette même source, dans un climat de peur et d'hostilité, activement alimenté par les nationalistes bouddhistes. Egalement après l'élection du nouveau président Sirisena, les musulman-e-s ont fait l'objet de menaces, de marches de protestation, de discours de haine (*Hate speech*) et d'attaques de la part de ces groupes. Le rapport annuel 2017 du *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade* (DFAT) australien, cité par le *UK Home Office*, fait état d'une augmentation ces derniers mois des tensions religieuses entre la minorité musulmane et la majorité bouddhiste. Selon cette source, ces tensions sont alimentées par les groupes bouddhistes nationalistes, en particulier par le biais des réseaux sociaux. Une *personne de contact sri-lankaise spécialisée dans la situation de la minorité musulmane* a indiqué dans un e-mail daté du 7 avril 2018 que des discours de haine à l'encontre des musulman-e-s avaient actuellement lieu dans de nombreux endroits et étaient propagés par le biais des réseaux sociaux.

Destruction ciblée des biens de personnes musulmanes. Le rapport du *UK Home Office* de mars 2018 souligne, sur la base de diverses sources, que des groupes cingalo-bouddhistes nationalistes ou des acteurs non identifiés ont régulièrement attaqué ces dernières années des sites religieux, des commerces et des biens de la minorité musulmane.

Violence organisée et ciblée à l'encontre des personnes musulmanes en février et mars 2018. *Human Rights Watch* rapporte que la récente vague de violence à l'encontre de la population musulmane a commencé fin février 2018 dans le district d'Ampara, dans la province de l'Est. En mars, des émeutes antimusulmanes ont également éclaté dans le district de Kandy, dans la province centrale (HRW, mars 2018). Selon les informations fournies par *BBC News* (2018), lors de ces violentes émeutes contre la population musulmane dans le district de Kandy, deux personnes ont été tuées et près de 450 maisons et commerces appartenant à des musulman-e-s ont été endommagés et 60 voitures ont été brûlées. Pour la première fois en sept ans, l'état d'urgence a été imposé pendant dix jours et des centaines de troupes ont été stationnées à Kandy (BBC, 2018). De plus, les autorités ont bloqué les réseaux sociaux dans tout le pays (HRW, mars 2018). L'*International Crisis Group* (ICG) indique qu'il ne s'agissait pas de flambées de violence locales, mais d'attaques organisées et ciblées par des groupes militants actifs au niveau national. Selon cette même source, la violence s'est intensifiée après qu'une mosquée et des commerces musulmans ont fait l'objet d'attaques à Ampara. Selon l'ICG, il existe des éléments indiquant que ces attaques ont été planifiées et menées par des militants bouddhistes non locaux. *Human Rights Watch* (mars 2018) rapporte que le Premier ministre sri-lankais Wickremesinghe a également évoqué l'existence de violences systématiques et organisées à Kandy.

Les membres d'une unité spéciale de la police impliqués dans les attaques de mars 2018. Selon diverses sources (*Reuters, Sri Lanka Brief* ; mars 2018), des forces de police ont été impliquées dans les émeutes antimusulmanes. Cette information est en partie attestée par des enregistrements télévisés sur place ainsi que par de nombreux témoignages. Selon *Reuters*, l'implication des forces de police laisse penser que le gouvernement a perdu le contrôle de certaines parties de ses forces de sécurité. Selon *Reuters* et *Sri Lanka Brief*, des membres de l'unité spéciale « *Special Task Force* » de la police étaient activement impliqués dans les actes de violence. Ceux-ci ont brutalement attaqué des musulman-e-s devant et dans la mosquée Hijrapura à Digana avec l'aide de matraques et ont pourchassé celles et ceux qui prenaient la fuite. Selon *Reuters* et *Sri Lanka Brief* (mars 2018), Abdul Saleem Mohamad Faizal, homme politique local de confession musulmane ainsi qu'une autre personne présente à ses côtés ont été brutalement roués de coups à son domicile à Digana par des membres de la « *Special Task Force* ». En outre, un médecin cinghalais a par la suite refusé d'apporter des soins médicaux à Faizal à l'hôpital, alors qu'il était gravement blessé (*Sri Lanka Brief*, mars 2018). Lors de l'attaque de la mosquée Hijrapura et de l'attaque contre le politicien Faizal, les forces de police ont tenté sur la base de fausses preuves d'attribuer aux victimes musulmanes la responsabilité d'une partie des violentes émeutes de Digana (*Sri Lanka Brief*, mars 2018). Les membres de l'unité spéciale « *Special Task Force* » de la police ont en outre renoncé à porter secours à des musulman-e-s en se retirant peu avant qu'une foule violente n'attaque la mosquée Noor Jummah à Digana. D'après les images télévisées, la police a également laissé passer des groupes de militants à travers leur cordon de sécurité (*Reuters*, mars 2018).

Des politiciens locaux impliqués dans les attaques de mars 2018. Des politiciens locaux du parti politique *Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna* (SLPP, *Sri Lanka People's Front*), soutenu

par l'ancien président Mahinda Rajapaksa, ont également été impliqués dans les émeutes violentes selon divers témoins et d'après des images télévisées (*Reuters*, mars 2018). Selon les indications fournies à *Reuters* (mars 2018) par le *Minister für Law and Order*, les allégations à l'encontre des politiciens du SLPP et des forces de police font l'objet d'une enquête de la part des autorités.

Divers groupes antimusulmans actifs au Sri Lanka. Selon les indications fournies le 9 avril 2018 par e-mail par une *personne de contact*¹ active sur place dans le domaine des droits humains et disposant d'une expertise sur la situation de la minorité musulmane au Sri Lanka, il existe plusieurs groupes antimusulmans actifs au Sri Lanka. Selon cette source, leur objectif commun est d'alimenter les conflits entre la majorité bouddhiste et la minorité musulmane et d'infliger des dommages économiques, culturels, religieux et sociaux aux musulman-e-s. *Hilmy Ahamed*, directeur du *Sri Lankan Secretariat for Muslims*, a indiqué à *Reuters* (mars 2018) que la crainte que les musulman-e-s ne parviennent à prendre le pouvoir et ne finissent pas réduire le niveau économique des non-musulman-e-s était largement répandue au Sri Lanka. L'analyste politique d'expérience *Jayadeva Uyangoda* a déclaré que le nationalisme bouddhiste au Sri Lanka était un « monstre hors de contrôle ». Les bouddhistes sri-lankais s'inspireraient des activités des extrémistes bouddhistes au Myanmar et des hindous radicaux antimusulmans en Inde (*Reuters*, mars 2018). Le rapport annuel 2017 du *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade* (DFAT) australien, cité par le *UK Home Office* (mars 2018), mentionne comme exemples les groupes bouddhistes nationalistes *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS) et *Sinhala Ravaya*, qui ont alimenté les tensions religieuses et ethniques. Le *UK Home Office* cite (mars 2018) également une information de *Minority Rights Group International* selon laquelle les activités antimusulmanes sont menées par des groupes nationalistes bouddhistes tels que, entre autres, *Sinha Le*, BBS, *Sinhala Ravaya* et *Ravana Balaya*.

Depuis 2017, résurgence des groupes bouddhistes militants sous le gouvernement actuel. Selon les estimations d'ICG, les actes de violence de février et mars 2018 sont un signe de la résurgence des groupes bouddhistes militants qui étaient apparus pour la première fois entre 2012 et 2014 avec le soutien du gouvernement de Mahinda Rajapaksa d'alors. Selon ICG, le nombre d'attaques contre les musulman-e-s auraient diminué au cours des deux premières années sous le gouvernement Sirisena actuel. Diverses sources citées par le *UK Home Office* (mars 2018) confirment cette information. Toutefois, en 2017 déjà, à savoir durant six semaines entre avril et mai et pendant deux jours au mois de novembre, des militants bouddhistes ont, selon ICG, mené des attaques contre des musulman-e-s. Selon les estimations d'ICG, il est certain que ces groupes bouddhistes ont été encouragés par la passivité du gouvernement actuel, qui n'a pas poursuivi pénalement les responsables des violences bouddhistes et des discours de haine sous le gouvernement Rajapaksa. Le *UK Home Office* cite diverses sources selon lesquelles le groupe BBS, coresponsable des émeutes de masse en Aluthagama en 2014, aurait menacé d'y perpétrer de nouvelles violences. Ainsi, en juin 2016, le secrétaire général du BBS a menacé de « lancer la deuxième phase d'affrontements violents si le gouvernement ne garde pas la communauté musulmane sous contrôle » (*UK Home Office*, 2018).

Attaques régulières contre la minorité musulmane au cours des dernières années. Le *Sri Lankan Secretariat for Muslims*, groupe issu de la société civile, a documenté plus de 600

¹ La personne de contact est issue de la société civile et œuvre au Sri Lanka en tant qu'activiste des droits humains. Elle était impliquée dans la Reconciliation Mechanism Task Force du gouvernement sri-lankais.

attaques et menaces à l'encontre des musulman-e-s au cours des cinq dernières années. Selon les indications fournies à *Reuters* par *Hilmy Ahamed*, directeur du *Sri Lankan Secretariat for Muslims*, la violence antimusulmane a pris de l'ampleur ces dernières années (*Reuters*, mars 2018). Dans son rapport du 25 janvier 2018, le *Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux droits de l'homme* (HCDH) s'est dit préoccupé par la violence intercommunautaire, les attaques et les discours de haine contre les minorités en 2017 (HCR, 2018). Le rapport mentionne notamment une série d'attentats à la bombe à essence perpétrés en mai 2017 à travers tout le pays contre des mosquées et des commerces tenus par des musulman-e-s. Il mentionne également, outre des incidents survenus entretemps, de graves attaques commises à Gintota (province du Sud) en novembre 2017, au cours desquelles plus de 70 maisons et commerces de musulman-e-s ont été endommagés. Selon le HCDH, ces attaques ont été alimentées par les discours de haine et la rhétorique antimusulmane diffusés sur les réseaux sociaux par les groupes nationalistes cingalo-bouddhistes. Les rapports de *l'Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés* (OSAR, 2015) et du *UK Home Office* (mars 2018) indiquent, sur la base de diverses sources, que des attaques ont été commises de manière régulière contre des musulman-e-s ces dernières années. Selon diverses sources citées par l'OSAR (2015), des menaces de mort et des attaques contre des musulman-e-s ont été commis en 2015, parfois par des représentants des autorités. En particulier, les sources citées par le *UK Home Office* (2018) et l'OSAR (2015) font état d'émeutes de masse menées en juin 2014 à l'encontre des musulman-e-s en Aluthagama, qui ont entraîné la mort de quatre personnes et fait plus de 80 blessés. Pendant plus de six jours, 6000 personnes ont été enfermées dans des mosquées et privées de nourriture. *Bodu Bala Sena*, en particulier, aurait mobilisé la population pour mener des attaques contre les musulman-e-s durant ces émeutes (*UK Home Office*, 2018).

Situation sécuritaire difficile pour les personnes musulmanes. *Human Rights Watch* souligne dans son rapport annuel 2017 que les minorités religieuses au Sri Lanka peuvent subir des menaces (HRW, janvier 2018). Selon les indications fournies le 9 avril 2018 par e-mail par une *personne de contact active sur place dans le domaine des droits humains et disposant d'une expertise sur la situation de la minorité musulmane au Sri Lanka*, la situation sécuritaire des membres de la minorité musulmane doit actuellement être considérée comme plutôt critique en raison des tensions actuelles. Cela est particulièrement le cas depuis les actes de violence de mars 2018. La personne de contact rapporte, sur la base de ses propres constatations, que, en avril 2018, des personnes non musulmanes ont tenté d'entrer en conflit avec des musulman-e-s en raison de leur tenue vestimentaire traditionnelle. La personne de contact a déclaré que les personnes musulmanes craignent en permanence de devenir la cible d'actes de violence sur la base de prétextes quelconques, par exemple, lorsqu'elles sont impliquées dans un accident de voiture.

2.2 Menaces à l'encontre de personnes activement engagées pour la minorité musulmane

Les personnes qui s'engagent de manière active pour la minorité musulmane peuvent devenir la cible d'actes de violence. Selon les indications fournies le 9 avril 2018 par e-mail par une *personne de contact active sur place dans le domaine des droits humains et disposant d'une expertise sur la situation de la minorité musulmane au Sri Lanka*, les activistes et avocat-e-s s'engageant pour les droits de la minorité musulmane s'exposent au risque de devenir la cible d'actes de violence. Ainsi, selon cette même source, des avocat-e-

s engagés établis à Colombo subissent en permanence des menaces de la part de tiers. Les personnes qui s'engagent en dehors de Colombo pour la minorité musulmane sont, selon ce contact, encore davantage vulnérables et sont exposées à de plus graves menaces. En mars 2018, l'homme politique musulman Abdul Saleem Mohamad Faizal a ainsi été violemment roué de coups dans sa propre maison par des membres de l'unité spéciale de police « *Special Task Force* ». Selon Faizal, les forces spéciales l'ont attaqué car il avait tenté de manière active d'empêcher des foules de militants cingalo-bouddhistes de commettre des actes de violence à l'encontre des personnes musulmanes (*Sri Lanka Brief*, mars 2018).

Les personnes qui s'engagent de manière active pour les minorités religieuses ou contre les militants bouddhistes s'exposent à des menaces. Selon diverses sources, les personnes qui s'engagent pour d'autres minorités religieuses ou contre les militants bouddhistes peuvent, elles aussi, subir des menaces. *Human Rights Watch* et *OHCHR* mentionnent ainsi le cas d'un avocat qui, en 2017, a reçu des menaces publiques de la part de l'ancien ministre de la justice Wijeyadasa Rajapaksa, parce qu'il avait exprimé des critiques concernant le manque de protection gouvernementale dont bénéficiaient les minorités (HRW, janvier 2018, HRC, 2018). Dans un e-mail daté du 7 avril 2018, l'activiste sri-lankais pour les droits humains *Ruki Fernando* a en outre cité le cas du moine bouddhiste modéré *Watareka Vijitha Thero*, qui s'est montré critique contre *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS) ces dernières années. Celui-ci a subi des attaques répétées de la part de membres de BBS et d'autres individus, mais n'a bénéficié que d'une faible protection de la part de la police.

2.3 Protection de la part d'acteurs de l'Etat

Protection insuffisante de la part des acteurs de l'Etat. Selon des informations fournies le 7 avril 2018 par e-mail par l'activiste sri-lankais des droits humains *Ruki Fernando*, les acteurs de l'État et en particulier la police sont dans tout le Sri Lanka réticents à protéger les personnes persécutées par des groupes bouddhistes extrémistes. *Ruki Fernando* connaît de nombreux cas où les responsables de persécutions n'ont pas été poursuivis ni condamnés malgré l'existence de preuves évidentes. Selon des renseignements fournis le 9 avril 2018 par e-mail par la *personne de contact active sur place dans le domaine des droits humains et disposant d'une expertise sur la situation de la minorité musulmane au Sri Lanka*, les forces de police ne protègent souvent pas suffisamment les musulman-e-s. *Amnesty International* (2018) indique également dans son rapport annuel 2017 que la police sri-lankaise n'a pas réagi de manière suffisante aux menaces persistantes et à la violence physique exercées par les groupes militants cingalo-bouddhistes à l'encontre des membres des minorités chrétiennes et musulmanes. Le *UK Home Office* (2018) et l'*OSAR* (2015) soulignent également, sur la base de nombreuses sources, que la police et la justice ne protègent pas suffisamment les musulman-e-s contre les actes de violence. Les responsables de ces actes feraient très rarement l'objet de poursuites pénales. Le soutien apporté par les chefs religieux ou les politiciens fait en effet souvent entrave aux poursuites pénales de tels crimes et contribue activement à un climat d'impunité.

Selon ICG (mars 2018), le gouvernement actuel a certes promis en janvier 2015 de mettre fin à l'impunité concernant les attaques contre les musulmans. Toutefois, le gouvernement n'a pas ouvert jusqu'à présent d'enquête sérieuse sur les actes de violence commis à l'encontre des musulman-e-s, ni poursuivi pénalement les chefs des groupes impliqués dans ces violences. Lors des dernières attaques de mars 2018 aussi, le Président, le Premier ministre et d'autres représentants du gouvernement ont soutenu, selon ICG, que la loi serait strictement

appliquée et que les auteurs de violences seraient arrêtés. En outre, quelque 300 personnes ont été arrêtées en lien avec les violences et des enquêtes ont été ouvertes contre les forces de police et les hommes politiques impliqués (*Reuters*, mars 2018). Néanmoins, selon ICG, les personnes clés qui ont organisé les violences sont toujours en liberté. Diverses sources (ICG, *Reuters*, *Sri Lanka Brief* ; mars 2018) soulignent concernant les récents événements violents de mars 2018 que les forces de police ont non seulement offert une protection parfois insuffisante, mais qu'elles ont même été activement impliquées dans les violences en divers endroits. Selon des informations fournies le 7 avril 2018 par e-mail par *Ruki Fernando*, activiste sri-lankais des droits humains, non seulement les événements de Digana en mars 2018 confirment-ils les actes de violence physique commis par les forces de police, mais ils soulignent également l'attitude antimusulmane de nombreux agents de police. Selon cette même source, cette attitude peut également être observée chez le personnel militaire et les fonctionnaires du gouvernement.

Selon les estimations d'ICG de mars 2018, on ne peut conclure que les membres actuels du gouvernement soutiennent activement la violence contre les musulmans. Toutefois, il apparaît qu'ils craignent de prendre des mesures contre les auteurs de ces actes afin de ne pas contrarier l'électorat cingalo-bouddhiste. Ces craintes expliquent en particulier la passivité des autorités face aux moines bouddhistes impliqués dans la violence contre les musulmans.

AI, 2018:

«Police failed to take action in response to continued threats and physical violence against Christians and Muslims by members of the public and supporters of a hardline Sinhala Buddhist political group.» Source: Amnesty International (AI), Amnesty International Report 2017/18 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Sri Lanka, 22 février 2018: www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/sri-lanka/report-sri-lanka/.

ICG, mars 2018:

*«There are many factors behind the recent upsurge of violence against Sri Lankan Muslims. **The events of the last ten days have not been local “clashes” between Buddhists and Muslims, but organised and targeted attacks by national-level militant groups who are well known and have made their intentions clear through traditional and social media.** The immediate cycle of violence began with the death on 3 March of a Sinhala Buddhist man in the central hill town of Teldeniya. He had been attacked ten days earlier by four local Muslim men, who were promptly arrested and detained. His death sparked anger and limited violence the next day by local Buddhists, 24 of whom were arrested and held by the police. Demanding the release of these men, **leaders of radical Buddhist groups converged on the town with hundreds of their supporters from other districts, who later began attacking mosques and Muslim businesses and homes.** Even after yesterday's declaration of a state of emergency, violence continues against Muslims in the hills around the town of Kandy.*

*The violence this week came just days after a mosque and Muslim businesses were attacked in the south-eastern town of Ampara. **There are indications the attack was planned and carried out mostly by Buddhist militants brought in from outside Ampara town, supported through rumours spread on social media. Government officials have acknowledged that the damage was aggravated by the slow response of the local police.***

The ongoing violence marks the resurgence of militant Buddhist groups that first emerged in 2012-2014 with the support of Mahinda Rajapaksa's government. Having ceased during the first two years of the current coalition government, attacks on Muslims began again over a six-week period in April and May 2017 and for two days in November 2017, with militants apparently emboldened by the government's failure to prosecute those responsible for violence and hate speech under the Rajapaksa regime.
(...)How vulnerable are Sri Lankan Muslims to being drawn to violence?

*Sri Lankan Muslims have been admirably restrained, disciplined and non-violent in their response to what is now five years of severe, sustained and often violent pressure. One can only hope that this continues to be the case, **though continued violent provocations – and the failure of the police to protect Muslims** – appears to be testing the patience of some, with reports of the first retaliatory violence against Sinhala businesses. **Many in Sri Lanka now fear the current wave of militant Buddhist attacks may be designed in part to provoke a violent response from Muslims, which would then be used to justify wider-scale attacks on the community.***

How has the Sri Lankan government tried to quell the tensions between Buddhists and Muslims and promote communal harmony?

The government has done very little to address either the underlying mistrust and misunderstandings between the two communities, or to rein in the small number of Buddhists who promote or use violence. Despite coming to power in January 2015 promising to end impunity for attacks on Muslims, the government has launched no proper investigations of past violence, and prosecuted no leaders of groups known to be involved in attacks on Muslims. Despite recent statements from the president, prime minister and other officials that the law will be strictly enforced and those engaging in violence will be arrested, key organisers of the ongoing violence remain free. Some of these have posted on social media information to help target Muslims for attack. Police, in a number of locations, have been credibly accused of siding with the mobs.

While government leaders are not believed to be supporting the violence against Muslims, they appear to be afraid of taking action against the perpetrators, especially those Buddhist monks thought to be involved, for fear of alienating Sinhala Buddhist voters by appearing to favour Muslims. This fear has grown since the poor showing of government candidates in the 10 February local elections, in which former President Rajapaksa led a successful campaign rooted in a strongly Sinhala Buddhist nationalist platform. The increasingly deep divide between the president and the prime minister, who is battling to hold on to his job, appears to have further paralysed the government. » Source: International Crisis Group (ICG), Buddhist Militancy Rises Again in Sri Lanka, 7 mars 2018: www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/buddhist-militancy-rises-again-sri-lanka.

BBC, mars 2018:

*«Sri Lanka has lifted a state of emergency imposed on 6 March in response to an outbreak of violence against Muslim communities. **Two people were killed, nearly 450 Muslim-owned homes and shops damaged and 60 vehicles burnt in attacks in the central district of Kandy.** Curfews and social media bans were brought in to try and quell tension. Violence has*

risen in the Buddhist-majority country since 2012, said to be fuelled by hard-line Buddhist groups. They have accused Muslims of forcing people to convert to Islam and vandalising Buddhist archaeological sites. Dozens of Muslim religious sites have also been damaged.

(...) Hundreds of troops were deployed to the Kandy area, and tear gas was used after some groups continued to defy government curfews. President Maithripala Sirisena announced he was lifting the measure on Sunday on his Twitter feed, having assessed public safety. Nationwide bans on social media websites including Facebook were also lifted earlier this week. It was the first time in seven years Sri Lanka had imposed a state of emergency.» Source: BBC News: Sri Lanka violence: Nationwide state of emergency lifted, 18. mars 2018: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-43446239.

HRC, 2018:

«**The High Commissioner is especially concerned with regard to multiple incidents of intercommunal violence, attacks and hate speech against minorities during the course of 2017. They included a series of petrol-bomb attacks against mosques and businesses owned by Muslims across the country around May (more than 30 registered incidents, with a peak of nearly daily attacks during the two first weeks of the month). The attacks were accompanied by anti-Muslim rhetoric from Sinhala - Buddhist ultranationalist groups and came at around the time the leader of one of these groups (Gnanasara Thero, of Bodu Bala Sena) was awaiting sentencing on a contempt of court charge. On 13 June, the Cabinet issued a statement condemning violence against minorities, noting that “inciting violence against fellow citizens of various ethnic [and] religious backgrounds has no place in Sri Lankan society” . 46. On 26 September 2017, a mob led by Buddhist monks reportedly belonging to the organization Sinhalese National Force demonstrated against the presence of Rohingya refugees in Sri Lanka in front of a house in Mount Lavinia, Colombo, where 31 Rohingyas (mostly women and children) from Myanmar were being sheltered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its partner organization, Muslim Aid. Despite police presence, the house was stormed by the crowd and the group of Rohingyas had to be relocated for their protection. In a separate incident, tensions between the Tamil and Muslim communities in Batticaloa led to a temporary local boycott of Muslim businesses in November. In the worst incident of the year, in Gintota (Southern Province), on the evening of 18 to 19 November, more than 70 Muslim homes and businesses were damaged by a mob that formed after an incident arising from a traffic accident involving Sinhalese and Muslim youths. Hate speech over social media, possibly politically motivated, seemed to play a role in the incident. Unlike during the incidents in May, in Gintota, the Government’s response was swift, including deployment of special police units and temporary curfews. The Prime Minister visited the site of the crimes and stated that such acts of violence, and incitement to such crimes, had no place in Sri Lanka and would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Nineteen alleged perpetrators were arrested and detained.**

Meanwhile, attacks on Evangelical Christians continued to be recorded. **A prominent lawyer and human rights activist who had provided figures on the number of such attacks in a television debate in May 2017 was publicly threatened by the then Minister of Justice with disbarment for making such claims**» Source: HRC, UN Human Rights Council, Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka; Report of the Office of the

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/37/23], 25 janvier 2018, p. 9:
www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1425603/1930_1519812518_q1801853.pdf.

HRW, mars 2018:

«Violence By Anti-Muslim Mobs Highlights Inter-Ethnic Strife

*Nine years after the end of its three-decade civil war, Sri Lanka is stalled on delivering its pledges of justice and reconciliation. While the absence of justice and political reforms may rankle Sri Lanka's minority Tamil and Muslim communities, **the government's inaction has also sent a message to the majority Sinhalese that they need not worry about being reined in by the authorities.***

On March 6, after local altercations burst into anti-Muslim riots, the government announced a ten-day nationwide state of emergency, later shutting down social media access across the country. The last state of emergency was lifted in 2011.

*In recent years Sri Lanka has witnessed a spate of anti-Muslim violence linked to ultra-nationalist Sinhalese Buddhist groups. **The current wave began late February in the eastern district of Ampara. On March 3, anti-Muslim riots broke out in the central Kandy district, which resulted in at least two deaths. Observers reported that two mosques and dozens of homes, small businesses, and vehicles were destroyed. And the violence may be spreading.***

***Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said the violence in Kandy "appeared to be systemic and organized" and pledged to take stern action.** The government doubtlessly hopes that declaring an emergency – which will permit security forces to be deployed in restive areas and conduct searches and arrests without warrant – will send a message of resolve to contain the violence. But the government also needs to address the systemic cause of these inter-ethnic riots and attacks. This means delivering on the promises made including at the United Nations Human Rights Council to address enforced disappearances, expedite land returns, and bring justice and redress to victims on all sides, including the often-forgotten Muslim minority» Source: Human Rights Watch (HRW), State of Emergency Declared in Sri Lanka, 7 mars 2018: www.ecoi.net/en/document/1426227.html.*

HRW, janvier 2018:

***«Religious minorities remained at risk. In June 2017, then Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakse publicly threatened a lawyer who criticized the government's failure to protect minorities. In September, authorities took 31 Rohingya Muslim refugees into protective custody following threats by Buddhist extremists. There were further flares of violence in Galle and Vavuniya in November between Muslim and other communities, with allegations of mobs attacking Muslim homes and businesses.»** Source: Human Rights Watch (HRW), World Report 2018 - Sri Lanka, 18 janvier 2018: www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/sri-lanka.*

Reuters, mars 2018:

«Police and politicians backed by the country's former strongman President Mahinda Rajapaksa joined anti-Muslim riots that rocked Sri Lanka's Kandy district this month, according to witnesses, officials and CCTV footage reviewed by Reuters. Scores of Muslim mosques, homes and businesses were destroyed as mobs ran amok for three days in Kandy, the central highlands district previously known for its diversity and tolerance. The government declared a state of emergency and blocked social media platforms for a week to control the unrest.

The role of police and some local Buddhist politicians suggests the Sri Lankan government lost control of elements of its security forces, and that the violence was more than a spontaneous outbreak fuelled by fringe Buddhist extremists and hate-speech spread on social media. Rajapaksa has denied that he or other leaders of his party were involved. Police said the allegations against officers and politicians were being investigated. Victims and witnesses, whose accounts were partly backed by CCTV footage seen by Reuters, described members of an elite paramilitary police unit, the Special Task Force (STF), assaulting Muslim cleric and leaders. Local STF commanders declined to comment. "They came to attack," said A.H Ramees, a cleric at a mosque where worshippers say they were beaten by police who were supposed to be protecting them. "They were shouting. There was filthy language. They said all the problems were because of us, that we were like terrorists." Ruwan Gunasekera, a spokesman for the national police force, including the STF, said a special investigation unit was "probing the deficiencies of the police in the incident". A second unit was examining the role of political actors, he said. The riots were the latest example of rising Buddhist nationalism and anti-Muslim sentiment in the region and have unnerved Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic coalition government, which ousted Rajapaksa in an election in 2015, according to analysts and two sources familiar with the government's deliberations. Buddhists make up about 70 percent of Sri Lanka's 21 million people. Tamils, most of whom are Hindu, account for 13 percent while Muslims make up about 9 per cent of the population. **Sri Lanka's Law and Order Minister Ranjith Madduma Bandara has said the violence in Kandy was "well organised" and pointed the finger at members of Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), a political party backed by Rajapaksa that scored a huge victory in local elections last month. At a press conference flanked by senior leaders earlier this month, Rajapaksa said the accusations were politically motivated. In fact, the government fomented the violence to "get the Muslim vote" and to distract from its inadequacies, he said.**

TRIGGER FOR VIOLENCE

The violence in Kandy was triggered by an attack on a Buddhist truck driver, H.G Kumarasinghe, by four Muslim men after a traffic dispute on Feb. 22. As Kumarasinghe lay in a coma, calls for retribution and anti-Islam polemics flooded social media and the government ordered the deployment of 1,000 members of the STF. Rioting erupted after his funeral 11 days later. An excerpt of CCTV footage from the first day of attacks reviewed by Reuters showed police letting a large group of men through the cordon protecting the Noor Jummah mosque in Digana, a Kandy township. The men rush into a multi-story building opposite the mosque. A local SLPP politician, Samantha Perera, can be seen pointing at the higher floors of the building. Perera confirmed he was the person shown in the footage. He said he was trying to calm the rioters and only found out later the mosque had been attacked. "I am a good Buddhist. I am not instigating violence against anybody," he told Reuters. Cabinet spokesman Rajitha Senaratne said Perera was under investigation for "attacking Muslim-owned shops and mosques with stones". **At least three other SLPP politicians, including a**

national politician, were being investigated and another SLPP councillor has been arrested for setting fire to a mosque, he said. All deny any involvement in the violence. "There's a political motive to discredit me, Mahinda Rajapaksa and the party," Perera said.

"MONSTER BEYOND CONTROL"

Anti-Muslim sentiment has surged in Sri Lanka since 2009, when a long civil war against Tamil insurgents was brutally ended by Rajapaksa amid charges by a United Nations panel of experts of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings by the military and STF. As in Myanmar, from where 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled an army crackdown in recent months, Buddhist hardliners in Sri Lanka have argued that Islam is a threat to the Buddhist way of life. Though the level of violence is not comparable, the Sri Lankan Secretariat for Muslims, a civil society group, logged more than 600 attacks and threats to Muslims in the past five years, according to director Hilmy Ahamed, who added the rate of anti-Muslim violence had accelerated in the recent years. "The fear that Muslims are going to take over, are going to deprive you of your welfare, is so widespread," he said. Veteran political analyst Jayadeva Uyangoda said Buddhist chauvinism in Sri Lanka was a "monster beyond control", as local activists draw inspiration from the Buddhist extremists in Myanmar and Hindu radicals in India hostile to Muslims.

"CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?"

About 10 minutes after the incident near the Noor Jummah mosque shown in the CCTV footage, the mob returned via a back road, out of the line of sight of the mosque's exterior cameras, and threw a petrol bomb into the mosque's first floor office, according to witnesses Mohamed Niyaskhan, who said he was beaten and left bloodied, and the mosque secretary M.I.M Shukry. The men burned Korans during 45 minutes of looting and destruction, they said. Niyaskhan said earlier that day he had prepared food and drinks for STF members protecting the mosque, but they had left shortly before the attack. "No STF, no police were there," he said. "They had gone around the corner. Can you believe it?" Later that day, eight to 10 members of the STF rushed the Hijrapura mosque, also in Digana, according to clerics and worshippers. The police assaulted worshippers with batons, according to Ramees, the cleric. CCTV footage shows police in riot gear striking Ramees and another cleric, M.S.M Nizam, four times with batons. A local Buddhist monk, Gerendigala Chanda Wimala, told Reuters he saw the men being manhandled by police and successfully demanded their release. At about the same time, a local Muslim politician, Abdul Saleem Mohamad Fazil, and a friend Mohamad Faizal, were also attacked by members of the elite police unit, according to the victims and a witness, Father Christy Paul, the prelate at Digana's Catholic church. "Three STFs came through the back entrance of the house and started beating us," said Fazil, who suffered a deep head wound and said he spent in a night in prison after being refused medical treatment. "They grabbed some bottles from the landing and put them in a bag and said we were making petrol bombs." Father Christy said he heard the men's screams and saw the police hitting them with batons. The men were cowering on the ground and not offering any resistance to the police, he said. A local STF commander, asked about the incidents described to Reuters, declined to comment, citing restrictions on talking to the media. The law and order ministry referred to the police special investigation into alleged abuses. Police say they have arrested more than 300 people involved in the riots.»
Source: Reuters, Police, politicians accused of joining Sri Lanka's anti-Muslim riots, 25 mars 2018: www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-clashes-insight/police-politicians-accused-of-joining-sri-lankas-anti-muslim-riots-idUSKBN1H102Q.

OSAR, 2015:

«*Bodu Bala Sena. Ein Artikel im Indian Express vom 20. Januar 2015 erläutert, dass Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) durch eine Gruppe von buddhistischen Hardlinern gegründet wurde, die sich im Jahr 2012 von der Partei Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) abgetrennt hatten. Die BBS hat ihr Hauptquartier im Buddhist Cultural Centre in Colombo, welches 2011 durch den früheren Präsidenten Rajapaksa eröffnet wurde. Die BBS wird in Sri Lanka als extreme Randgruppe (fringe element), aber teilweise auch als eine Art religiöse Polizei, wahrgenommen, welche unter anderem Angriffe gegen Kirchen und Moscheen organisiert habe. Laut des Berichts des Secretariat for Muslims vom September 2014 handelt es sich bei BBS um eine extremistische buddhistische Organisation, welche von einem internationalen Think Tank als terroristische Organisation eingestuft worden sei.*

In den letzten Jahren zahlreiche Übergriffe gegen muslimische und christliche Personen, Straflosigkeit und Nähe des BBS zu hochrangigen Regierungsmitgliedern. Die BBS war in den letzten Jahren aktiv an Übergriffen gegen Muslime in ganz Sri Lanka beteiligt und hat diese unter anderem aktiv geschürt. Auch werden sie nach Angaben des Berichts des UNO-Menschenrechtsrats vom 16. September 2015 für die massiven Unruhen in Aluthagama im Juni 2014 verantwortlich gemacht. Die Ausschreitungen waren gegen muslimische Personen gerichtet und hatten vier Tote und über achtzig Verletzte zur Folge. Auch moderate Buddhisten wurden laut eines Artikels der BBC vom Mai 2015 Ziel von Attacken und Entführungen durch die BBS. Es wurde in der Vergangenheit von verschiedenen Quellen (Interviews mit Kontaktpersonen vor Ort im Oktober 2014, Secretariat for Muslims, 9. September 2014) berichtet, dass hochrangige Regierungsmitglieder eine grosse Nähe zur BBS aufwiesen. Das Secretariat for Muslims hat in einem Bericht vom 9. September 2014 detailliert verschiedene Übergriffe im Jahr 2013 und 2014 gegen Muslime und Christen in ganz Sri Lanka dokumentiert. Aus der Zusammenstellung ist ersichtlich, dass im ganzen Land Übergriffe gegen Muslime und Christen stattfanden. So wurden Aktivitäten und Übergriffe der BBS in den Distrikten Anuradhapura, Colombo, Kurunegala, Kalutara, Hambantota, Ratnapura, Galle, Gampaha, Kegalle, Matara, Kandy, Ampara und Badulla dokumentiert. Weiter wurden Übergriffe gegen Muslime auch in den Distrikten Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, Moneragala dokumentiert.

Auch im Jahr 2015 Übergriffe gegen muslimische und christliche Personen. Auch im Jahr 2015 ist es nach einer Einschätzung des Menschenrechtsaktivisten Ruki Fernando vom 2. März 2015 weiterhin zu Attacken, Todesdrohungen und Übergriffen auf Muslime und Christen gekommen. Ein Artikel im Colombo Telegraph vom 19. Juni 2015 weist auf rund 37 zwischen Januar und April 2015 vom Secretariat for Muslims dokumentierte anti-muslimische Ereignisse hin. Eine Kontaktperson vor Ort bestätigte am 2. Oktober 2015, dass es im Jahr 2015 weitere Übergriffe auf Muslime und Christen gegeben habe, wovon viele der letzteren auch durch Behördenvertreter erfolgt seien.

Bodu Bala Sena weiterhin aktiv. Ein Artikel im Colombo Telegraph vom 19. Juni 2015 weist auf weitere Aktivitäten des BBS im Jahr 2015 hin. Laut des Artikels sind 13 der rund 37 zwischen Januar und April 2015 vom Secretariat for Muslims dokumentierten anti-muslimischen Ereignisse auf Aktivitäten des BBS zurückzuführen. Dies sei ein klarer Hinweis, dass die Gruppierung weiterhin eine Bedrohung darstelle. **Nach Angaben des Menschenrechtsaktivisten Ruki Fernando vom 2. März 2015 ist die BBS auch nach der Wahl des neuen Präsidenten weiterhin sehr aktiv und an Übergriffen und Drohungen beteiligt.** Nach am 2. Oktober 2015

gemachten Angaben eines Menschenrechtsaktivisten in Sri Lanka beschränke sich die BBS zurzeit vor allem darauf, von Zeit zu Zeit eine Pressekonferenz zu geben. Nach Einschätzung des Aktivisten sei es sehr wahrscheinlich, dass die BBS zusammen mit anderen singhalesisch-nationalistischen Kräften versuchen werde, wieder verstärkt aktiv zu werden. (...)

Unklare Haltung der aktuellen Regierung und Behörden gegenüber BBS. Zwar habe die neue Regierung laut des Berichts der International Crisis Group weitere Gewalt durch militante Buddhisten verhindert. Dies wird auch im Artikel des Colombo Telegraph vom 19. Juni 2015 bestätigt. Gegenüber BBC gab Karu Jayasuriya, der aktuelle Minister for Buddhist Affairs, im Mai 2015 an, man werde die BBS «im Zaum halten». Allerdings sei auch in der neuen Regierung eine starke buddhistische nationalistische Partei vertreten und die Regierung zeige sich nach Einschätzung der BBC bisher sehr zurückhaltend, gegen BBS vorzugehen. Im Bericht der International Crisis Group vom 12. August 2015 weisen Aktivisten darauf hin, dass die Regierung weiterhin Tätigkeiten durchführe, welche eine Nähe zur BBS aufzeigen. So werden Entschiede der Regierung kritisiert, wonach Moscheen von Gebieten entfernt werden sollen, welche die BBS als heilig betrachte. Nach Angaben eines Aktivisten, welcher im Bericht zitiert wird, habe die BBS in wenigen Monaten Entgegenkommen der Regierung erhalten, welche sie unter dem früheren Präsidenten Rajapaksa nicht erhalten habe.

Keine Strafverfolgungen im Zusammenhang mit massiven Übergriffen. Nach Angaben des Berichts des UNO-Menschenrechtsrats vom 16. September 2015 und des Berichts der International Crisis Group vom 12. August 2015 hatte bis August 2015 keine Strafverfolgung der BBS wegen der massiven Angriffe vom Juni 2014 in Aluthgama stattgefunden. Ein kontaktierter Menschenrechtsaktivist in Sri Lanka gab am 2. Oktober 2015 ebenfalls an, dass Gerichte trotz einer grossen Zahl vorhandener Berichte über gewalttätige Aktionen des BBS bisher nicht gegen den Führer und die Mitglieder des BBS vorgegangen sind. Zwar sei laut International Crisis Group der Anführer der BBS wegen Übertretungen und Verleumdung aus dem Jahr 2014 angeklagt worden. Laut des BBC-Artikels vom Mai 2015 sei der Anführer des BBS im Mai 2015 wegen Teilnahme an einer unerlaubten Demonstration verhaftet und wenig später freigelassen worden.

Ungenügende Reaktion der Polizei bei Übergriffen und Übergriffe durch Polizei. Das Dokument des UNO-Menschenrechtsrats vom 7. September 2015 mit der Eingabe der World Evangelical Alliance weist darauf hin, dass die Polizei bei vielen gewaltsamen Übergriffen gegen religiöse Minderheiten ungenügend reagiert hat. Die ungenügende Reaktion erfolge auch, weil sie durch lokale bud-dhistische Mönche, lokale Regierungsvertreter und Politiker unter Druck gesetzt werde. Christen seien zudem Opfer von willkürlichen Verhaftungen geworden. Polizeibeamte hätten christliche Geistliche genötigt, religiösen Handlungen ein-zustellen. Des Weiteren seien Fälle dokumentiert worden, nach denen die Polizei verweigert habe, Anzeigen gegen Täter entgegenzunehmen, welche Gewalt gegen christliche Geistliche und Kirchen verübt hätten. Eine Vielzahl weiterer Quellen (US Department of States (USDOS), 25. Juni 2015, Amnesty International 25. Februar 2015, Secretariat for Muslims 9. September 2014, Minority Rights Group International 3. Juli 2014, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 2. Juli 2014) belegen ebenfalls, dass Polizei und staatliche Sicherheitskräfte bei Übergriffen nur ungenügenden Schutz gegen Übergriffe und Drohungen durch die BBS geboten hatten.

Teilweise Zusammenarbeit des BBS mit Polizeivertretern weiterhin möglich. Nach der am 2. Oktober 2015 geäusserten Ansicht eines kontaktierten Menschenrechtsaktivisten vor Ort sei

nicht mehr davon auszugehen, dass die Polizei und Behörden mit BBS im gleichen Masse zusammenarbeiten, wie dies noch im Jahr 2014 Tatsache gewesen sei. Ein weiterer Menschenrechtsaktivist vor Ort gab am 2. Oktober 2015 an, dass BBS zurzeit nicht mehr mit völliger Straflosigkeit operieren könne. Nach Einschätzung derselben Quelle sei es aber sehr gut möglich, dass es weiterhin zu teilweiser Zusammenarbeit zwischen BBS und Polizei komme. Insbesondere könne dies der Fall sein bei der Verschleppungen oder Nicht-Durchführungen von polizeilichen Untersuchungen mit Bezug zu BBS.» Source: Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés (OSAR), Sri Lanka, Bodu Bala Sena, 2 octobre 2015, p. 1-3; 7-8: www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/assets/herkunftslaender/asien-pazifik/sri-lanka/151002-lka-bbs.pdf.

Sri Lanka Brief, mars 2018:

*«As Sinhalese – Buddhist mobs were escalating violence against Muslims around Digana on March 5, the Hijrapura mosque in Digana had just finished afternoon prayers around 4 pm that day. As usual, devotees were talking to each other outside the mosque, after the prayers. A few had continued to pray inside the mosque. **Suddenly, a jeep full of uniformed, heavily armed men had arrived in a jeep and a couple of motorbikes and surrounded the mosque. Thanks to the camouflage uniform, the devotees had identified them as being from the Special Task Force (STF) of the Police. The STF had brutally beaten up the devotees and chased them as they started to run away. Numerous eyewitnesses and survivors described the brutalities unleashed by the STF in vivid detail. When I met them on March 9, one man couldn't walk at all, and several others were limping. At least one was reported to have been in hospital. Many showed me scars and wounds, on their back, arms and legs. Some had been injured through falls, as they were running to escape the assault and were also being chased by STF men. The devout Muslims were horrified that the STF had rampaged through the mosque with their weapons and boots. "We can't describe the filthy and abusive language the STF used," said one eyewitness. Two Moulavis were beaten up, even as they shouted identifying themselves as Moulavis. They were forced to hold a knife and iron pole (They later said they believed it was to implicate them in false charges). They were beaten when they refused. The Buddhist Monk in the nearby Temple had seen the incident on the roadside and had intervened to save the two Moulavis from the STF's grip.***

In a separate incident around 5pm also on March 5 in nearby Ambagahalanda, A. F. M. Fazil, a member of the Meda Dumbara Pradeshiya Sabawa (Local Council) was at a friend's house. Suddenly the STF had entered the house and beaten up Fazil and his friend, and also an 18 year old boy who was there. Children, including two who were 2 and 9 years old, had witnessed the assault and had been terrified. Neighbors who had gathered and saw the incident, heard STF men saying "let's say he tried throw a petrol bomb at us". The politician's friend's hands had been tied behind his back. His feet and that of the 18-year-old boy had been tied together. They were then taken to a Police station, and the 18 year old boy was released, but the politician and his friend were detained overnight. A Deputy Inspector General (DIG) who had been at the Police station had suggested them to be taken to the hospital, but despite head wounds, the Sinhalese doctor on duty at the Teldeniya hospital that night had refused treatment, saying those who are responsible for killing "our people" should be in prison and not hospital[1]. Both men had been produced before a Magistrate on the morning of March 6 and released on bail. Four days after the assault, on March 9, scars on their body were clearly visible. Fazil's head was till in bandages as of March 11 and he complained of headaches and body pains. He said he had 5 cuts on his head and had suffered injuries to one leg, an arm and his back.

Since the death of a Sinhalese person on March 3, after being severely beaten by some Muslim men on February 22, Fazil was part of a team of Muslim leaders who had been discussing with senior police officers and Buddhist monks about ensuring justice for the Sinhalese man and his family, and defusing potential tensions. Government Ministers also had been updated. According to Fazil, such discussions were held from February 24, long before the death of the Sinhalese man, and had continued until March 3, the day he had died. Discussions had been held in Digana as well as in the deceased man's village. **Fazil suspects STF may have targeted him for his role in trying (and failing) to prevent violence against Muslims by the Sinhalese – Buddhist mobs.**

In both incidents, based on actions and words of the STF, the survivors believe the STF was attempting to frame them on false charges about possession of weapons, and by extension, shift the blame towards Muslims for some of the violence that happened around Digana last week. The words of the STF had also indicated a deeply anti-Muslim, racist mindset. The attack on the Moulavis and desecration of the Mosque by entering with boots and weapons, reminded me of attacks on churches, mosques and Buddhist temples during the war by Sri Lankan military and the LTTE.

It was not clear whether the STF personnel allegedly responsible for both incidents were the same. But some of the survivors claimed they were from Kegalle.

Some of the survivors I spoke to were scared to disclose their identities, have their injuries photographed, make a formal complaint or even seek medical treatment at government hospitals, fearing reprisals. However, many were keen to have the truth exposed and justice for perpetrators in order to prevent such incidents in the future. This note is written at their request, with the hope relevant authorities will take speedy action.» Source: Sri Lanka Brief, Ruki Fernando, The Unashamed Role of Special Task Force of Sri Lanka Police in recent Anti-Muslim Riots, 18 mars 2018: www.srilankabrief.org/2018/03/the-unashamed-role-of-special-task-force-of-sri-lanka-police-in-recent-anti-muslim-riots/.

UK Home Office, mars 2018:

*«The USSD 2016 international religious freedom report stated(...)...**According to some Muslim and Christian groups, harassment from police and government officials sometimes appeared to be in concert with Buddhist monks and Buddhist nationalist organizations.**» (...)*

7.2 Intimidation and harassment

7.2.1 The Amnesty International 2016/17 report stated: **'Christians and Muslims reported incidents of harassment [and] threats...by members of the public and supporters of hard-line Sinhala Buddhist political groups.'** The MRGI commented that many incidents 'pivot on the issue of recognition, enabled by a contentious 2008 government circular, which is repeatedly misapplied to justify harassment of worshippers, particularly evangelical Christians.'⁵⁴

7.2.3 The MRGI report commented that Muslims **'...continue to face a climate of fear and hostility that is actively orchestrated by Buddhist nationalist outfits, including more recent movements such as Sinha Le which was very active during the early months of 2016. The incidents illustrate the daily reality of propaganda targeting the Muslim community as**

a whole, as well as frequent hate speech, threats, and intimidation... 'Since 2012, Buddhist nationalists have become increasingly active in their dissemination of anti-Muslim propaganda through a range of public platforms, including social media. This wave of Buddhist nationalism was impelled by groups such as the BBS, Sinhala Ravaya, Ravana Balaya and others.' 55 7.2.4 The report also noted: *'Outside the time period of this study [November 2015 – September 2016], troublingly, November 2016 has seen a concentration of threats, protest marches, hate speech and suspected attacks involving such groups, including Buddhist clergy.'* 56 7.2.5 The DFAT 2017 Country Report on Sri Lanka stated: *'Although most Muslims sided with the Government (Sinhalese) forces during the civil conflict, there has been a recent rise in religious tensions between Muslims and the Sinhala Buddhist majority. Nationalist Buddhist groups such as Sinhala Ravaya (English: Sinhalese Roar) and Bodu Bala Sena continue to stoke religious and ethnic tensions and are known to post religiously-motivated attacks on social media...'* 57 7.2.6 The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in a report dated January 2017, noted that *'civil society groups continue to report incidents of...harassment of religious leaders.'* 5 7.2.7 Freedom House, in their 2017 world report, noted: *'In recent years, the minority Ahmadiyya Muslim sect has faced increased threats and attacks from Sunni Muslims, who accuse Ahmadiyya of apostasy.'* 59 7.2.8 The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in a report dated January 2017, noted that *'construction of Buddhist temples, shrines and statues in areas that were traditionally non-Buddhist is met with animosity.'*

7.3 Targeting of property

7.3.1 The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in a report dated January 2017, noted that Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist groups such as the BBS *'carried out attacks on places of worship as well as businesses and the properties of religious minorities, including Muslims and Christians'*. The Special Rapporteur continued that *'civil society groups 'continue to report incidents of destruction of religious property'*.⁶¹ 7.3.2 The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in a report dated October 2016, were *'concerned by reported cases of desecration of places of worship'*. (It was not clear from the source whether these acts were perpetrated by state or non-state actors)⁶² . 7.3.3 The MRGI report commented: *'Sporadic acts of violence...targeting Islamic places of worship have been recorded from 2009 onwards by various sources, the most notable being the 2012 attack on the Masjidul Kairiya mosque in Dambulla by a large mob who claimed it had been illegally constructed on sacred Buddhist land. Following the violence, the then Prime Minister and Minister of Religious Affairs D.M. Jayarathne ordered the 50-year-old mosque to be relocated. However, the worst incidents of violence targeting the Muslim community in recent years were the mob attack on the Masjid Deenul Islam mosque in Grandpass in 2013 and [the 2014 Aluthgama riots – see below].'*⁶³ 7.3.4 The USSD 2016 international religious freedom report stated: *'Vandals damaged the Muslim prayer room at Jaffna University three times during the year and in November individuals attacked the grand mosque in the Nikaweratiya area of Kurunegala District with gasoline bombs.'* 64 7.3.5 The MRGI report stated: *'There have also been reports by activists, politicians, and other violations affecting Hindu places of worship. However, since these have not been systematically quantified, it was not possible to include a full analysis [in their report].'*

7.4 Violence

7.4.1 Freedom House stated that religious minorities face *'occasional violence'* and that: *'Tensions between the Buddhist majority and the Christian and Muslim minorities—par-*

ticularly evangelical Christian groups, which are accused of forced conversions—sporadically flare into attacks by Buddhist extremists.’⁶⁶ The Amnesty International 2016/17 report stated: ‘Christians and Muslims reported incidents of...physical violence by members of the public and supporters of hardline Sinhala Buddhist political groups.’⁶⁷ 7.4.2 The MRGI report noted that ‘rioting centred around Aluthgama in 2014 – widely attributed to BBS instigation, through inflammatory anti-Muslim rhetoric uttered at a public rally just before violence erupted’ was one of ‘the worst incidents of targeting the Muslim community in recent years’. Four people died and ‘many’ were injured. 7.4.3 This incident was also described by the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in a report dated January 2017: ‘Many expressed grave concern about Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and extremism, which gained particular force under the previous Government. Groups such as the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force) incited violence and hatred against religious and other minorities while proclaiming the racial superiority of Sinhala Buddhists...The most notable of such incidents [of violence] was the Aluthgama riots in June 2014 when mobs were said to have been mobilized by the Bodu Bala Sena to attack Muslim homes and properties following a minor traffic incident, leaving 4 Muslims dead and 80 injured. For more than six days, more than 6,000 people were reportedly trapped and left to starve in mosques. (...)

7.4.4 The MRGI also noted that the BBS have ‘threaten[ed] to repeat’ the violence. This was also reported by the USSD 2016 international religious freedom report: ‘On the second anniversary of the 2014 Aluthgama MuslimBuddhist riots in June, BBS General Secretary Gnanasara publicly threatened to initiate “phase two” of the violent confrontation if the government did not keep the Muslim community under control.’⁷¹ 7.4.5 The DFAT 2017 Country Report on Sri Lanka stated that ‘there has not been a large-scale incident since June 2014 when Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, General Secretary of Bodu Bala Sena, delivered a speech that was blamed by many for inciting violent riots between Buddhists and Muslims in Aluthgama...Gnanasara continues to assert anti-Muslim sentiment publicly...’⁷² 7.4.6 The MRGI report commented that ‘the change in government in 2015 appears to have led to a decrease in organized violence against religious minorities’ and that the ‘operation of groups such as the BBS has visibly reduced under the Sirisena–Wickramasinghe government, indicating less space for impunity and organized violence.’⁷³ The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in a report dated January 2017 noted that: ‘[The Special Rapporteur] was informed that the incidence of violent crimes motivated by religious intolerance has significantly decreased since the new Government took office’.⁷⁴

8.2 Police and judicial inaction

8.2.1 The Amnesty International 2016/17 report noted: ‘Police failed to take action against attackers or in some cases blamed religious minorities for inciting opponents.’⁸² 8.2.2 The USSD 2016 international religious freedom report stated: ‘According to the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, in multiple instances police reportedly failed to respond to, or were reluctant to arrest or pursue, criminal cases against individuals instigating attacks on religious minority sites. Legal experts with experience representing minorities with discrimination claims also noted the prosecution of perpetrators was rare.’⁸³ 8.2.3 For example, the report stated that police made no arrests in connection with incidents of vandalism of the Muslim prayer room at Jaffna University and the gasoline bomb attack on the grand mosque in the Nikawratiya area of Kurunegala District. 8.2.4 The MRGI report stated that, while organised violence has decreased, ‘in many instances, those responsible for acts of incitement or previous incidents of violence have not been held accountable’ and that civil society actors have called upon the Sri

Lankan government to address the ‘inaction or slow response on the part of the police’.⁸⁵ 8.2.5 The MRGI also observed ‘**There remain substantial gaps in terms of legal action against perpetrators of religious violence and discrimination.** This is despite the fact that the Sri Lankan Constitution guarantees the right to equality, non-discrimination, and freedom of religion and religious worship, highlighting a persistent culture of impunity when it comes to such acts.’⁸⁶ Amnesty International, in a statement dated May 2017, claimed that police ‘failed to prevent’ attacks against Muslims in April-May 2017, although noted that the President ordered the Law and Order Ministry to act. 8.2.7 The USSD 2016 international religious freedom report noted: ‘The cases against monks accused in 2014 attacks on Muslims and Christians progressed slowly.’⁸⁸ **The UN Special Rapporteur in minority issues, in a report dated January 2017, noted that ‘there has yet to be a credible investigation and effective prosecution’ following the Aluthgama riots of June 2014.**⁸⁹ However, the DFAT 2017 Country Report on Sri Lanka stated that Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, the General Secretary of BBS, ‘is under ongoing judicial investigations.’⁹⁰ 8.2.8 The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in a report dated January 2017, ‘...was told by Christian as well as Muslim groups that in dealing with these cases [violence, harassment and destruction of religious property], the police as well as the courts continue to ignore the motives — religious intolerance or hatred — behind such attacks and refuse to consider them as aggravating circumstances, thus failing to send a clear signal that they will not be tolerated. Many also reported that political patronage of religious leaders or politicians are often in the way of prosecution for these crimes, effectively contributing to a climate of impunity. Lack of accountability increases the likelihood for further violations.’ Source: United Kingdom, Home Office (UK Home Office), Sri Lanka, Minority religious groups, mars 2018, Version 1.0, p. 20; 21-28: www.refworld.org/docid/5ac485c44.html.