

**REPORTED
INCEDENTS OF VIOLENCE &
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS
2012**

Compiled by

**NATIONAL CHRISTIAN
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
OF
SRI LANKA**

2012



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Incident Reports – 2012

**Compiled by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka
(NCEASL)**

NOTE:

- All incidents contained in this report are based on information received by NCEASL from member Churches and affiliates.

- As far as possible, all information has been verified through interviews with victims, Church leaders, eye witnesses and Police and through site visits by NCEASL staff.

- NCEASL has monitored and documented incidents since 1987.

- It is generally accepted that approximately 40% of incidents are never reported.

Buddhist monks threaten and assault pastor
Assembly of God Church of Sri Lanka
Ambalangoda (Galle District)

20th February 2012

During the afternoon the pastor saw three Buddhist monks standing at his pastor's doorstep and invited them in. Within minutes, a large group of about 30 monks followed them inside his house. One of the Buddhist monks spoke out against the pastor conducting Christian religious activities and threatened him not to convert Buddhists. While the pastor was responding to this utterance, the same Buddhist monk slapped the pastor's face and continued to hit him until the pastor's wife and mother intervened. The monks issued an ultimatum for the pastor and his family to leave the village or face death. He was threatened that their house will be bombed or set on fire. The pastor was given time until the 26th of February 2012 to confirm the date on which he will leave the village. The monks took several photographs of the pastor and his family members, using mobile phones.

A complaint was filed at the Ambalangoda Police station, complaint number CIP2/329/379. A police inquiry was fixed for the 24th February 2012.

People from the village did not participate in this act of thuggery. The pastor has been serving as a clergyman in this village for over 10 years.

Gate vandalized during the night

22nd February 2012

During the night, some unidentified persons vandalized the gate of the pastor's residence writing a warning message 'not to incite the village' and drawn a skull and cross bones. This incident too was reported to the Police.

The Police inquiry was been re-scheduled for the 27th February 2012.

26th February 2012

Villagers were summoned by the Buddhist monks using loud speakers and urged to be present at the Police inquiry to be held the next day (27th).

Man assaulted by protesting Monk in front of Police Station, church ordered to close down

Date of Police Inquiry - 27th February 2012

A large crowd together with Buddhist monks gathered at the entrance to the Police station and engaged in a public protest against the church. In the midst of the protest, a Buddhist villager condemned the protest and spoke up in favour of the pastor. He was physically assaulted by the same Buddhist monk who assaulted the pastor On the 20th February (see report above). The Police promptly arrested the injured man and kept

him in remand custody until evening. No action was taken against the perpetrator. Due to the commotion caused by the protesters, the inquiry was postponed.

Later that evening the pastor was called for the inquiry. The Head Quarters Inspector (HQI) informed the pastor of a complaint filed against him by the Buddhist clergy accusing him of unethical conversion of the Buddhist. He was asked to make a statement in response. In his statement, the pastor categorically denied that he was engaged in any unethical activity. He stated that as per the rights enshrined in the Constitution of Sri Lanka, he has a right to observe and practice his religion without harassment. Further, the pastor was questioned on the legality and registration of the church - which is duly incorporated under Act of Parliament.

However, the HQI dismissed the pastors reasoning and ordered him to stop Christian worship service and leave the village. Under duress, the pastor agreed to stop worship services but refused to leave his village.

**Stones hurled at Church roof causing damaged
Assemblies of God
Kotiyakumbura (Kegalle District)**

11th March 2012

The church was stoned by unidentified assailants at approximately mid night, causing damage to nine Asbestos roofing sheets. Police entry number CIB 11/142154.

**Christian Sister prohibited from conducting Bible studies
Assemblies of God
Habarana (Anuradhapura District)**

18th March 2012

The Sister was visited by a Buddhist monk who told her to stop having Bible lessons in her home as it is against the law unless she had permission from the government. She was told that if she failed to comply, other means can be used to stop her (inferring violence). On Monday 19th March she went to the Police station, seeking clarification and the 2011 Circular issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs was read to her. She was advised by the Police to stop any religious activity and warned not to hold worship activities even in secret. They also took down the names and addresses of the persons who attended her Bible study sessions.

Her landlord was threatened by the same monk to evict her by Tuesday (following day) or face the consequences of having his house damaged. In the face of mounting pressure and not wanting to endanger the landlord and his property, the Sister has since moved from the house.

Buddhist monk threatens Christian child in school

Church of the Foursquare Gospel

Kalutara (Kalutara District)

21st March 2012

The Buddhist monk of a temple in the area visited the Kalutara Nagoda Vidyalaya school and with the principal's consent gathered the Christian children and questioned the children as to which church they attended. A 14 year old girl who is from the above mentioned church was singled out and taken to the principal's office for questioning. She was told by the monk to stop attending church and to attend the temple *Daham Pasala*. She was also pressed to divulge where they meet for prayer. The frightened child related this incident to her parents and refused to return to school. The parents were apprehensive about complaining to the principal for fear that the child will be penalized. But they have subsequently complained to the principal and the principal has assured that he will not allow such incidents to happen again. The child has now returned to school.

Name board of 30 year old church vandalised

Assemblies of God

Kurunegala (Kurunegala District)

3rd April 2012

The name board of the 30 year old church was found damaged and broken during the night.

Mob led by Buddhist monk attacks Christians

Holy Prayer Chapel

Kaniya (Trincomalee District)

29th April 2012

The Sunday worship service was disrupted at about 9 a.m. by a group of about 10 youth a news reporter and 4 Buddhist monks. They forcibly entered the church premises and one of the monks who heads a prominent Buddhist temple scolded the pastor in abusive language and attempted to physically assault him. The cross at the front of the church was vandalised and removed by the attackers. The pastor was threatened with arson if he continues the service. The monks threatened the church members and said if they wished to worship, they could attend the services of the Catholic Church.

Conspiracy to attack Christian families
Assemblies of God
Dabagoda, (Kandy District)

1st May 2012

A conspiracy by a member of the *Pradeshiya Sabhawa* and the Dabagoda Buddhist society to attack the 6 Christian families in the village has come to light. It is reported that the attack planned for the 1st of May did not proceed as planned since one of the ring leaders had fallen ill and another had met with an accident. The group has alerted the villagers to be vigilant about anyone converting to Christianity.

Conspiracy to attack Christian families
Calvary Pamula Namaskara Sabhawa
Madampe (Putlam District)

13th May 2012

While the church members were engaged in Sunday worship, a few persons entered the premises and threatened the pastor to stop the worship service. However, the devotees continued to worship. A short while later, a large mob of about 100 persons and a Buddhist monk stormed in and assaulted several church members causing injury and caused damage to furniture and the building.

The Police arrived on the scene later and advised the worship services to be discontinued. The pastor under pressure signed a document agreeing to stop the services.

No arrests have been made and the victims have not received any compensation for injuries or losses suffered.

Threat to stop worship service
Prayer Tower Church
Mahawewa, (Puttlam District)

26th May 2012

The church members attended a religious meeting held in Colombo in the evening. They traveled to Colombo from Mahawewa in a bus organized for this purpose by the church. Some of them parked their motorbikes and three-wheelers at the church premises to board the bus. On their return to Mahawewa after the meeting that night they proceeded home in their own motorbikes and three-wheelers. A person residing in the neighbourhood who has previously caused many problems to Christians was woken up by the noise of the vehicles. He awoke some others too and proceeded to the home of a Christian family living next to the church and scolded them in derogatory language, threatening them not to have the worship service the following day.

NOTE: The church does not use sound amplification during worship services except for the Scripture message and has a Court order permitting them to do so. (See report of 5th June 2011).

The church has been in existence for 15 years and has a congregation of about 300 members.

Access road to church obstructed and church stoned

27th May 2012

In the morning, the road leading to the church was obstructed with rocks and ropes tied across to prevent worshippers from coming to the church. Church members were threatened and verbally abused by a mob that began throwing stones at the church during the service. One church member alerted the Police who arrived and asked both parties to come to the Police station.

On the way to the Police station, one church member was beaten with an umbrella by a female member of the mob. Both the incident of the road being blocked and the assault were reported to the Police. The attackers did not come to the Police station for the inquiry. The Police re-scheduled the inquiry and requested the pastor and church members to come again on the 28th of May.

28th May 2012 – the Police advised both parties to maintain peace. However, the attackers continued to obstruct the roadway and prevent anyone from coming to the church. The church members were compelled to use an alternate road which falls through the property of another person. This situation was conveyed to the Police and the pastor urged them to take action. The Police advised him to continue using the alternate road. However, the pastor explained that it would be wrong for the church to use the alternate road long-term since it was a private road that did not belong to them. The unlawful obstruction of the road to the church continued.

Congregation prevented from attending Sunday service

3rd June 2012

The road way was obstructed by about 25 persons shouting threats and preventing the church members from attending the Sunday worship service. The Police was called in and dispersed the crowd.

5th June 2012

Two officers from the Mahawewa Divisional Secretariat, the *Grama Niladhari* and a member of the *Naththandiya Pradeshiya Sabhava* arrived at the church with some persons from a neighbouring village and requested to examine the church. After examining the premises the officials from the Divisional Secretariat advised the following Sunday's service to be cancelled.

The pastor met the relevant Divisional Secretary (D. S.) and inquired as to the purpose of the above examination. He was informed by the D.S. that he has received a petition

against the church. It contained various ludicrous accusations. It has been forwarded to the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The D. S. further requested the pastor to hand over a copy of the judgment delivered by the Magistrate's Court in 2011 and proof of legality of the church.

Christian families attacked while returning from church

8th June 2012

Members from 3 families who attended a prayer meeting at the church using the alternate road were accosted by a mob on their way back home at approximately 7 p.m. Their vehicle was attacked by about 10 persons armed with clubs and knives. The window of the car was broken. The owner of the vehicle who was driving the vehicle was beaten severely and his wife who was traveling in the front passenger seat was also dragged out of the vehicle and her gold necklace was snatched. A 2 year old child sitting in the back seat with his mother was hit on the head with a stone and sustained a head injury. The victims were threatened at knife point not to return to the church.

The damages caused to the vehicle are estimated to be approximately Rs. 100,000.

The police were alerted and they took the victims to the Police station and obtained a statement. It is reported that the Police visited some of the suspects and obtained statements from them. No arrests were made.

Church attacked by mob

During the above violent attack, a larger mob of about 30 persons entered the church premises and caused damage to the building, breaking all the glass windows, estimated loss Rs. 50,000. The pastor cancelled the worship service the following day (Sunday)

NOTE: Both parties were summoned to the Police station on the following day. Several members from the *Pradeshiya Sabhawa* and some Reverends from the Catholic clergy were also present. They appealed to the pastor to resolve the matter peacefully and not file charges in the courts against the attackers. The pastor and the victims agreed to forgive the attackers and settle the matter out of court, in the presence of the Police, subject to the condition that they be allowed to continue their religious worship without further attack or hindrance. The suspects did not reach a consensus among them and hence the Police placed the matter before the Courts. Two cases were filed against 7 suspects in regard to the assault on the families, damage caused to their vehicle and theft.

The next hearing is scheduled for 2nd July 2012.

Pastor and congregation members assaulted

Four Square Church

Raththota (Matale District)

01st July 2012

While the pastor and some church members were engaged in a prayer meeting at the residence of one member at approximately 4.30 p.m., a mob of about 15 persons led by 2 Buddhist monks forcibly entered the premises disrupting the prayer meeting. One church member was physically assaulted by one of the monks. The others present were verbally abused and threatened, after which the mob dispersed.

The meeting was discontinued and the pastor and some of the church members boarded a bus to return to their respective homes. Some members of the mob followed the bus on motor cycles, stopped and boarded the bus and assaulted the pastor and another church member. They were threatened to discontinue their prayer meetings.

Approximately two weeks prior to this incident, the pastor was accosted by some unknown persons and asked if he is a Christian and what church he belongs to.

Building belonging to church demolished Bridge of Hope Centre – Believers’ Church Aralaganwila (Polonnaruwa District)

9th July 2012

At approximately 1.30 a.m., unidentified persons entered the premises of the Centre constructed by the church which has been functioning as a tuition centre providing free tuition classes for school children in the area, as a social service. The building was demolished by the attackers by cutting down the wooden pillars that supported the structure. The incident was reported to the Aralaganwila Police.

Two female church workers attacked by mob Assembly of God Darga town, Aluthgama (Galle District)

22nd July 2012

Two young female church workers aged 21 years and 24 years respectively were visiting the home of a church member living in Warapitiya. At approximately 6 p.m., a mob of over 20 men arrived at the home they were visiting and dragged the two ladies out of the house, pulling them by their clothes. They were scolded and insulted in a derogatory manner. At around 7 p.m., they were forcibly taken to the Buddhist temple in the village which is located about 1 ½ K.M away, forced to walk in the midst of this large number of aggressive and hostile men in the dark (as there was a power cut on during that time). They were mentally and physically harassed and humiliated during this ordeal. Their captors discussed various punishments that they will impose on them, including forcing them to kneel at the temple and recant their faith.

At the temple, they were questioned by Buddhist monks and accused of being attempting to convert Buddhists. The men even suggested that the two ladies be stripped of their upper garments and tied to a tree. In the meantime, the pastor was alerted of this situation by a Christian. Since the pastor was away at that time, his wife immediately set out to the temple to save the two young ladies. On arrival at the church she appealed to the monks to let them go. At the same time the Police arrived at the temple – after being alerted, and asked that they come to the Police station to resolve the matter. Even then, the men tried to attack the two ladies and the Police took them in their jeep and instructed the pastor's wife to ride her scooter in front of the jeep, for her safety.

At the police station both parties were advised to maintain peace and sent away.

Christian families threatened to recant their faith

23rd July 2012

It is reported that about 30 Christian families were visited by Buddhist monks and instructed to stop going to church and to return to the Buddhist temple for worship.

Pastor and worshippers attacked during worship service

29th July 2012

The pastor, his family and other devotees were engaged in Sunday morning worship when at approximately 9 a.m. 15 Buddhist monks and a crowd of over 50 persons forcibly entered the premises. They dragged the pastor out and demanded that he sends out all the worshippers. The attackers beat the pastors as well as the worshippers, slapping them and hitting them. They were dragged, pushed and shoved out of the church while being verbally abused and threatened not to return. Small children in the congregation began crying in fear. Some attackers kicked the chairs and furniture, causing damage. A doctor who was among the worshippers was scolded in derogatory language as were the pastor's wife and other ladies in the congregation. The pastor was caught by his neck and threatened to say that he would stop worship activities, or face serious consequences. However, he refused to speak.

Money belonging to the victims amounting to about Rs. 9000 as well as Bibles and books were snatched by the attackers. The pastor's mobile phone was also snatched. They also searched through every room in the building, pulling and throwing belongings and furniture.

The pastor observed that the mob had brought cans of petrol to the premises suggesting they intended setting fire to the building. However, the arrival of the Police stopped further acts of violence. The attackers demanded from the Police that they arrest the pastor, his family and workers.

The Police arrived about 1 ½ hours after the attack asked the victims to come to the Police station. No arrests were made.

The pastor who was beaten up and his traumatized wife and daughters as well as a few other church members arrived at the Police station at around 11 a.m. but their

complaint was not recorded. They remained at the station in their disheveled state until about 4 p.m. At approximately 3.30 p.m. the Buddhist monks who arrived with the attackers arrived at the Police station and immediately their statement accusing the pastor of carrying on a place of worship without permission was recorded. Thereafter, the police informed the pastor that he is in breach of the Circulars issued by the Prime Minister (Ministry of Religious Affairs). The pastor was instructed by the Police and the monks to supply a letter of authorization from the Ministry within 14 days. His complaint about the violent attack that morning was not recorded. The pastor was further instructed to stop holding worship services.

On the 30th of July 2012, the pastor again went to the Police station and his complaint was finally recorded. The two young ladies who were harassed on 22nd July 2012 also lodged an entry, for future reference.

Christian students assaulted by the School Deputy Principal
Karukkuwa College
Madampe (Puttalam District)

24th July 2012

At approximately 8 a.m., during the morning prayers at this Roman Catholic school, the Deputy Principal of the school asked the Protestant Christian students to line up. About 20 Protestant Christian students were subjected to corporal punishment by the School Deputy Principal who scolded them for being non-Roman Catholic and accused them of being fundamentalists.

Night attack on pastor's home
Prasansa Nivasa
Pokunawita, Horana
Kaluthara District

1st August 2012

Earlier in the year, the pastor received information that there was a plot by a Buddhist monk and others to attack him when he visits church members in the village of Sidurangalawatte and he avoided going there. In the early hours of the 1st August, the pastor, his wife, four sons aged 14 years, 10 years, and 8 years, and their new born baby of 2 1/2 months were asleep in their house when the house was attacked. The assailants broke all the windows in the house, smashing them with clubs. Some of the broken glass fell on the bed where the baby was asleep, but thankfully did not fall on the child. The pastor noticed that the street lights were switched off during the attack. He called the emergency police number but they did not arrive. The family spent the rest of the night

in fear. A complaint was made at the Horana Police station in the morning (Entry no: 385/01).

The three older children are traumatized by the attack and are afraid to be in their home.

Pastor and wife accosted
Assemblies of God
Divulapitiya (Gampaha District)

First week of August 2012

The pastor and his wife were on their way home after visiting a church member when they were accosted by a man who asked if he is a pastor. The man began to verbally abuse the couple, threatened them not to leave the area and attempted to beat the pastor. His wife who stepped in front to protect him from the blows was hit, but did not sustain any serious injury.

Mob verbally abuses pastor and congregation members to stop services.
Jeevandiya Church
Moragahahena (Kalutara District)

05th August 2012

At approximately 9.30 a.m., 2 Buddhist monks and about 8 others from the village questioned two members of the congregation as to whether the church lures persons to convert to Christianity using material gifts and also the time schedule of worship activities.

Further, the pastor received information that there is agitation by Buddhist monks from the temples in the village to close down all the churches in the vicinity.

Worship service disrupted and worshippers ordered to disperse
19th August 2012

At approximately 9.50 a.m. during the scheduled Sunday worship, a mob of about 30 men led by 4 Buddhist monks forcibly entered the premises and disrupted the worship service. One of the Buddhist monks grabbed the microphone from the pulpit and threatened the pastor and the congregation members that the place will be set on fire if they continued Christian worship activities. The worshippers were forced to leave the premises.

Pastor and wife accosted and beaten up by mob
Assembly of God (AoG) Sri Lanka
Deniyaya (Matara District)

9th August 2012

The Senior Pastor of the church who is also the Regional Presbyter for the AoG and his wife visited a church member and her daughter at approximately 1 in the afternoon. While they were on their way back home on their motorbike, they found the road obstructed by logs. The pastor moved the logs and they proceeded on their way. A little further on at a junction, their motorbike was cut off by a powerful pajero vehicle, throwing the pastors wife on to the ground. They were then set upon by a large mob of about 40 men, accompanied by 5 Buddhist monks and a prominent member of the Pradeshiya *Sabhva* who arrived in a truck and 3 trishaws. The advancing mob was armed with rocks and shouting threats 'attack them', 'kill them'. They were joined by a man who was riding in the pajero vehicle. The pastor was dragged along the ground and beaten by the men who shouted at him, asking who gave him permission to live in this area. The pastor had replied that he had resided in Deniyaya for many years and did not need anyone's permission to be there. They accused him of spreading Christianity and threatened to kill him if he did not stop his Christian ministry. The pastor's wife was scolded in very abusive language.

The mob then forcibly dragged the pastor and his wife to the house which the couple visited earlier. They shouted at the lady of the house and her daughter asking how much they were paid by the pastor to convert to Christianity. They replied that they have been Christians long before they moved to Deniyaya and no one paid them to become Christians. The mob beat the pastor again. The pastor and his wife managed to escape from the mob and made their way home, with the pajero following them up to their home.

The pastor suffered injuries to his legs and body, but did not want to go to the hospital as they feared they would be followed and harmed further. A complaint was made to the Police regarding the assault.

Later in the night, the same pajero was seen driving around the vicinity of their house. The called the Police and the Police responded with a mobile unit.

The Pastor's and his wife's ID cards, his mobile phone, Bible and other documents were stolen during the assault. On 10th August, several persons including church members who's numbers were stored on the pastor's phone received bogus calls from a person pretending to be the pastor, asking them to come and meet him at various locations. The ID cards have been returned to the Police but the phone and the Bible are still missing.

Christian worker threatened
Methodist Church
Deniyaya (Matara District)

9th August 2012

Soon after the above incident of assault, the same persons made their way to the home of a lady Christian worker. She was threatened by them to leave the house before Monday. They scolded her in abusive language. Another church worker who arrived at the scene was also threatened and his ID card was taken. When the victims attempted to file a complaint with the Police, they were refused, but succeeded in making an official complaint. The Police later recovered and returned the ID card.

A tense situation prevails in the area with the minority Christian community of about 500 persons fearing further attacks led by persons who are clearly acting above the law.

Pastor and family threatened by mob
Assembly of God (AoG) Sri Lanka
Deniyaya (Matara District)

18th August 2012

The same persons who attacked the pastor and his wife on 9th August 2012 arrived with a large mob at his house at around 7 p.m., threatening the pastor and verbally abusing him and his wife. Their two children were shouting in fear and after a while the mob left without causing any physical harm to the family.

It is reported that there are serious threats issued against the Pastor. He and his family have been compelled move away from their home.

Church threatened
Calvary Church
Deniyaya (Matara District)

Mid August

It is reported that the church too has been threatened not to have worship services.

Mob forcibly occupies church premises
Seventh Day Adventist Church
Deniyaya (Matara District)

19th August 2012

At approximately 3.30 p.m., a group of about 30 persons with 2 Buddhist monks forcibly entered the premises of the church, tore down the church banner and replaced it with a Buddhist banner. They also raised Buddhist flags around the premises. The pulpit and benches belonging to the church were removed and the monks declared the premises to be a place of Buddhist worship. They refused to hand over the premises back to the church and continued occupying the premises illegally. The same group involved in the other attacks on churches in Deniyaya is believed to be behind this incident as well. A police complaint had been lodged, holding number 285/200/CIB 3. The usurpers continued to occupy the premises.

Mob assaults clergymen outside Police station

27th August 2012

Five clergymen from the Seventh Day Adventists church traveled to the Deniyaya Police station to discuss an amicable settlement with the Officer in Charge and reclaim their premises which was being illegally occupied for more than a week. The discussion proved futile. While they were leaving the Police station and approaching their vehicle which was parked nearby, a large mob of about 100 persons including persons involved in the attack on the Assemblies of God pastor on 9th August approached the group and assaulted two of the pastors. Both sustained injuries. One was injured in the face. During the attack one of the clergymen who is the head of the denomination in Sri Lanka and a foreign national was inside the Police station and escaped injury. The assault took place almost opposite the Police station at around 1.30 in the afternoon. A camera and other belongings which were in the car were stolen.

Threats on congregation member

28th August 2012

At approximately 10am a Buddhist monk forcibly entered the garden of a congregation member of the above church and threatened him with death if he attends Sunday services in the future.

During the afternoon, it was reported that the premises of the Seventh Day Adventist church which was forcibly seized by a mob on 19th August was being divided and handed over to various persons.

Several church members also reported receiving letters asking them to come to a meeting at a Buddhist temple.

Pastor, his wife and church workers accosted and beaten by mob

Assemblies of God

Bonthupitiya (Kaluthara District)

10th October 2012

The pastor, his spouse and two church workers were accosted by a mob while returning home after attending a prayer meeting. The incident occurred at approximately 10.45 p.m. They were beaten by 6 attackers armed with rods and clubs. The assailants shouted threats to stop Christian worship services and not to return to the village of Bothupitiya. They further threatened the pastor with death if he returned to the village. The pastor was severely beaten while attempting to shield his wife from being beaten up by the attackers.

The 4 victims were later admitted to the Kalutara hospital for treatment of injuries suffered. The pastor who was badly required surgery. The 2 motorbikes on which they rode were also damaged by the attackers.

Mob threatens pastor with death

**Assemblies of God
Naula (Matale District)**

14th October 2012

At approximately 6p.m., a mob of about 40 persons led by 4 Buddhist monks forcibly entered the pastor's residence. The pastor was questioned on the legality of the church and threatened with death if he did not stop worship services. Some members of the mob took photographs of the pastor, his family and the premises forcibly, intimidating the pastor and his family.

The pastor filed police complaint, holding no. **CID 2170/112-2012/10/16**

A congregation of 100 persons attend the worship service he conducts.

On the 17th of October police officers visited the pastor's residence to investigate his complaint. He was informed by the police that they would discuss an amicable settlement with the Buddhist monks and inform the pastor. He has since not received any communication from the police.

Ministry deems church an illegal when constructing a wall to sound-proof church in accordance with a court order

**Prayer Tower Church
Mahaweva (Puttalam District)**

18th October 2012

The church received a letter from the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs, dated 15th October 2012 claiming the church to be an unauthorized building and ordering its closure. The letter was based on a petition dated 19th July 2011 sent to the Ministry by a local association which claims to protect Buddhist and Catholics in the area; alleging the Prayer Tower church to be a secretive fundamentalist group operating under the guise of a place of religious worship.

The letter from the Ministry specifically referred to a wall which was constructed by the church within its premises in order sound proof the church, in accordance with a judgment delivered by the Courts, permitting the church to continue worship services while taking necessary steps to sound proof the building (case no. 56/189/c-81).

The church has been in existence for the past 18 years. There have been several attacks and attempts to close down this church which has a congregation of about 300 persons.

On the 25th of October, an elder of the church who donated the land for the church received a similar letter from the Divisional Secretariat.

Pastor questioned by 3 men on the legality of the church

Living voice of Life

Morakottanchenai (Batticaloa District)

19th October 2012

At approximately 11 a.m., a member of the Rural Development Society, the President of the Sports Association and the President of the Hindu Temple Association visited the pastors' residence, questioning him on the legality of the church. The pastor showed the church registration certificate in his possession. However 3 men rejected it and threatened the pastor with violence in the event he does not stop conducting worship services.

Subsequently, the pastor proceeded to the police station to lodge a complaint. On checking his statement recorded by a police officer, the pastor found it to contain false statements – which he did not make - portraying the pastor as guilty of unethical conversions. He refused to sign the complaint with false statements and was threatened by the police officer. However, he refused to sign the statement and left with his wife, after being subjected to further verbal abuse by the said policeman.

20th October

A meeting against the pastor was held in close proximity to the church premises at about 6 p.m. by a group of about forty villagers.

21st October

At approximately 7.30 a.m., the pastor noticed 2 motorbike riders continuously circling the premises. He informed the police of this suspicious behaviour. After the police arrived, a group of about 10 villagers forcibly entered the premises, shouting that the church is an illegal entity.

23rd October

The police in order to settle the dispute informed both parties to be present at the police station. A case was filed against the pastor in the Magistrates Court querying the

legality of the church and was heard on the 23rd October. The parties opposing the church were not present in court and the case was postponed to 7th November 2012.

Complaint filed against prayer meeting

**Siloam Evangelical Mission
Balangoda (Ratnapura District)**

26th October

At approximately 10.30 a.m., whilst a prayer meeting was in progress, 2 police officers arrived and inquired into a complaint that the meeting was causing noise pollution. On the advice of the police, the pastor reduced the sound of the meeting. Later he visited the police station to inquire about the complaint received against him. The Officer in Charge cautioned the pastor to be careful, as there was information of a group including some Buddhist monks awaiting an opportunity to attack him.

The prayer meetings have been held since 1995 and there have been no previous complaints.

Mob forcibly enters premises seeking to attack the pastor

27th October 2012

At approximately 4.30 p.m., a mob of about fifteen persons led by Buddhist monks forcibly entered the premises. They destroyed the name board and searched the premises for the pastor, shouting threats that they will kill him if he continued his ministry. The pastor was not present as he was on his way to a meeting. Neighbours alerted him of the incident by telephone and the pastor proceeded to the police station and sought protection. The police informed him that he can continue with the worship services since he has not violated any laws.

Pastor threatened, worship service disrupted

**Jesus with us Prayer Ministry
Ethangama, Kalutara South (Kalutara District)**

28th October 2012

At approximately 9.30 a.m., just before the Sunday worship commenced a mob of men led by 5 Buddhist monks entered the premises and objected to the conducting of Christian worship. Chairs were dashed on the ground and 2 church members were assaulted.

A complaint has been made to the police with regard to the incident. The pastor has stopped holding worship services and has been compelled to leave the premises due to pressure exerted on the landlord by the attackers.

Christian worker threatened

(early November)

Independent Church

Sevanapitiya, (Polonnaruwa District)

A Christian worker and his family were threatened by Buddhist monks to leave the village.

Brutal assault of pastor

Praise Prayer Lanka Church

Aluwihara (Matale District)

2nd November 2012

At approximately 6 p.m., while the pastor was on his way to visit some congregation members, he was accosted and assaulted by 5 persons. The assailants shouted at the pastor falsely accusing him of luring villagers to convert for economic gains. Among the assailants were individuals who yielded influence with local authorities and law enforcement agencies. The pastor refused to report the assault to the police, despite legal advice to do so, for fear of retaliation by the assailants.

The pastor received a further warning message from the assailants threatening to set his house of fire or kill him.

Church stormed by mob, contradictory orders to continue and to close down church by Ministry of Religious Affairs

Baptist Church

Habarana (Anuradhapura District)

11th November 2012

The church received a letter from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, through the Department of Christian Affairs (dated 8th October 2012) requesting them to celebrate the 2nd year Anniversary of H.E. the President's 2nd term of office and also his Birthday on the 19th of November 2012. Accordingly they organized a special service for the 19th of November and displayed a banner to this effect. On the 11th November, they were engaged in a usual prayer meeting when at approximately 7.30 p.m., a large mob of about 100 persons with 2 Buddhist monks entered and disrupted the prayer meeting. They shouted threats that the church was illegal and the pastor was threatened with death if he did not stop worship activity. *(The Baptist Mission had no name board displayed in their premises. It seems the banner that was put up announcing the worship service and identifying the location as a Christian place of worship led to the attack).*

12th November

A complaint was made to the police MCR 1028/12/2012/11/12 CIB II 47/65.

When the pastor returned home from the police station, an officer from the Divisional Secretariat and the *Grama Sevaka* visited him and stated that the church was an unauthorized construction and required registration in order for it to be legally valid. Subsequently, the pastor was asked to be present at the police station at 3.30 pm for an inquiry. However, the Buddhist monks involved in the incident did not arrive at the said time. Once again, the pastor was informed to be present at 5pm for the investigation.

At 5pm one of the 2 Buddhist monks who led the protest against the church arrived at the police station. Consequent to mediation by the Police, the parties left in agreement that the church's activities would not be obstructed.

15th November 2012

The pastor met with the Divisional Secretary and presented him an invitation for the special service to be held on 19th November 2012, along with the letter received from the Director of the Christian Affairs Department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs Ministry requesting the Divisional Secretary to facilitate and ensure the safety of the church to hold the service on 19th November 2012.

The Divisional Secretary informed the pastor that he could not help since he has already sent letters to relevant authorities informing them that the church is illegal.

Subsequent to the meeting, the pastor received a letter, dated 15th November 2012 from the Divisional Secretariat stating that the church was an unauthorized place of worship according to the 2008 Circular issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The church was also ordered to stop services.

16th November 2012

Police officers informed the pastor that according to a letter received by them (dated, 14th November, 2012) from the Divisional Secretary, the church is illegal.

26th November 2012

The Divisional Secretary, through another letter dated 26th November 2012, informed the pastor that the Ministry of Religious Affairs has prohibited the commencement or continuation of the church through a letter dated, 16th November 2012, in order to prevent conflict among residents in the area.

The pastor was contacted by the police and informed of the letter dated 16th November 2012, received from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and asked to be present at the Police station. At the Police station, the Pastor was requested to make a detailed statement, (CIB II 196/177/2012.11.29) and was informed that holding services at the church had been prohibited by the Ministry.

Note – The Baptist church is one of the oldest Protestant Denominations in Sri Lanka and a member of the National Christian Council (affiliated with the World Council of Churches).

The 2008 Circular refers to the construction of new places of worship and the need for such constructions to be approved by the Ministry. However, it is routinely misapplied (as in this case) to close down existing churches.

Damage caused to church premises

Living voice of Life

Morakottanchenai (Batticaloa District)

25th November 2012

The temporary shelter used by the church members for worship was damaged by unidentified persons during the night. In the morning, the pastor found the building had been broken in to by breaking the door locks and damaging the door which was made of tin sheets. A congregation of about 100 persons attend the church.

Windows damaged and pastor threatened by mob

Assembly of God

Middenniya (Hambanthota District)

05th December 2012

At approximately 11.15 p.m., two unidentified men wearing helmets to cover their faces forcibly entered the premises of the pastor. They shouted threats to discontinue worship services or face death. The men proceeded to break the glass windows with rods and left a while later. The pastor called the police for assistance and two officers arrived about half an hour after the attackers left. They advised him to make a formal complaint.

There have been several previous incidents of violence and intimidation against this ministry.

Mob attack on worship service

Jeevanalokaya Sabhawa

Weeraketiya (Hambanthota District)

9th December 2012

A large mob including many Buddhist monks stormed the premises where the worshippers were gathered together for worship this morning. 8 police officers who were present in the vicinity to monitor a demonstration organized by the monks against the church were overpowered by the unruly mob who caused serious damage to furniture and equipment within the building as well as to vehicles belonging to church members which were parked outside. The pastor was hit with a rock and was suffering from severe pain in his lower abdomen. It is reported that the mob also assaulted 2 of

the police officers when they attempted to stop the attack. Police re-enforcements as well as army soldiers were deployed to control the mob.

Please note that this report is based on preliminary information received when this report was filed (at 2 p.m.) while police were still at the site, conducting investigations.

On 8th December (the day before) a group of Buddhist monks and lay persons visited the pastor and told him that he cannot conduct Christian worship in Weeraketiya without permission from the Buddhist clergy. When the pastor informed him that he was simply exercising his Constitutional right to practice his religion, the monks told him that the Constitution has now changed. (the fundamental rights chapter of the Constitution dealing with the freedom of religion has not changed since the drafting of the Constitution in 1978). The monks issued an ultimatum to the pastor to stop the church or else they will destroy the church.

Since this incident, the pastor was provided police protection during the month of December 2012. On several occasions monks who led the attack came in front of his house and threatened him in the presence of the police. No arrests have been made to date.

In the meantime, it is reported that 2 police officers who acted impartially (including one who was injured by the attackers) have been transferred with immediate effect.

Due to the seriousness of the threats issued against him, the pastor was unable to leave his home to consult with his lawyers and police protection was provided for him to travel for a consultation with his lawyers.

Brutal assault on pastor and Christians engaged in prayer

Church of Grace

Mahena, Warakapola, (Kegalle District)

16th December 2012

While the pastor, his wife and several others were engaged in a time of prayer at his residence, a large mob of about fifty persons with about 20 Buddhist monks entered the house at approximately 10 a.m. They shouted that this is a Buddhist country and hence there is no room for Christian worship or prayer. The mob began to physically assault the pastor, his wife and others who were present. The pastor received the worst beating. The assailants proceeded to smash furniture and equipment within the house. The pastor and his wife were admitted to the Warakaopla hospital for treatment. The following day the pastor was transferred to the Kegalle Hospital for further treatment of severe injuries caused to his left ear.

Police arrested one Buddhist monk and three other attackers. They were presented before the Thulhiriya District Court on 19th December 2012 and enlarged on bail. The next date of hearing is 8th February 2013. Case number B923/12.

Financial losses caused by the attack amount to about Rs. 400,000. Further the attackers destroyed education certificates and other documents.

Prayer meeting celebrating Birthday attacked, one lady sustains serious head injuries

**Independent Church
Sevanapitiya, (Polonnaruwa District)**

23rd December 2012

A prayer meeting held in the residence of a Christian worker to celebrate his Birthday was disrupted by a violent attack carried out by a group of people including two Buddhist monks. The assailants beat up the few gathered for the prayer meeting, including a lady who was pushed and fell against a wall and hit her head. She fell unconscious and was rushed to the Welikanda hospital with a head injury. She was to be transferred to the larger and better equipped Polonnaruwa hospital, but the heavy rain and flooding made it impossible for an ambulance to take her there as the roads were inundated with flood water. The family considered transporting her by train, but doctors ruled that this was ruled too dangerous for the patient.

Thankfully she regained consciousness and is in the process of recovery.

A complaint was made to the Welikanda Police. No arrests made. The injured lady's husband who is serving in the Sri Lanka Army has also lodged a complaint.

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