

Congress of Religions

Mahabodhi Headquarters, Maligakande, Colombo 10, Sri Lanka

22nd April 2019

MEDIA RELEASE

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE NEED OF THE HOUR IN SRI LANKA

The Congress of Religions, is heartbroken at the attacks on churches and other public areas in Colombo and other parts of the country on 21st April 2019, during the Holy Day of Easter. Such attacks on Places of Worship during a time of prayer doesn't speak to the dialogical nature of faith and spirituality that represents our country and that has existed between communities for centuries.

We strongly condemn this cowardly act that has seen so many of our country men, women and children and guests pay with their lives, and which threatens to damage the relationships between our faith and ethnic communities.

As a country that has seen enough bloodshed during the war and violence that plagued our beloved country for nearly three decades, we have witnessed the consequences of a fragility in relationships.

Immaterial of which background the terrorists responsible for the violence are from, it is clear that we will not allow ourselves to be divided. To do so means that those terrorists will have won and to suggest that communities who share the same faith as the terrorists are to blame will also feed into the narrative. There will be those spoilers who will use this attack to incite violence against communities and to perpetrate hate speech. To this effect the Congress calls for the Government of Sri Lanka to immediately halt the incitement to violence and those perpetrating hate speeches.

We collectively have to be strong in our spirituality to stand against the violence, fear and hate that terrorism looks to instil in us. Our collective will to live by the core values of our faith alone will defeat the aim of the perpetrators. All sites of worship and spiritual heritage need to be recognised and preserved. Places of worship remain sacred and peaceful and need to be protected.

The Congress calls on people of all faith and none to come together to show your solidarity with those who have been affected. We call on communities to be resilient

to all waves of attack and the incitement to violence and revenge attacks. We collectively appeal to all Sri Lankans not be driven by rumours and look deep into their hearts to recognise the other and to not allow hate to divide us.

We also call on everyone to observe, Saturday 24th April, as a day of remembrance, prayer, meditation and reflection, in solidarity with all people and communities affected.

On behalf of the Congress of Religions

- Most Ven Dr Ittapane Dhamalankara Mahanayaka Thero
Chairperson – Congress of Religions
- His Eminence Malcom Cardinal Ranjith
- Sivasri K. Vytheeswara Kurukkal – President, Hindu Priest's Association
- Moulavi M. S. M. Thassim – Asst. Secretary All Ceylon Jaimaithul Ullama
- Rev. W. P. Ebenezer Joseph – Secretary, Congress of Religions