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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Franciscans International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 May 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka: Accountability, Truth and Justice with regard to the 2019 Easter Sunday Attacks

1. On the 21st of April 2019, coordinated bomb blasts occurred across the island in 3 churches, 3 hotels and later in a guest house and a residence, on Easter Sunday morning, mainly targeting Christians, which made a huge impact on the religious freedom in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka had not experienced such a brutal terror attack since the civil war ended. This targeted attack raised many questions on why this occurred, the people behind it and the security measures in the country.

2. Although it has been nearly 6 years since the attacks occurred, the number of people who have died due to the attacks is still uncertain. The Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) with the support of Franciscans International noted that there are different figures for the number of deaths in the 2019 Easter Sunday Attacks in High Court cases, a Presidential Commission of Inquiry report, a Presidential Committee report, information obtained through the Sri Lanka police, memorials and a private plaint before a Magistrate Court. It is very concerning that there is a difference of 56 deaths across the documents. The large number of differences impacts societal justice in many ways.

I. There is no accurate record of the impact of the attacks on society.

II. It is disturbing that the state does not recognise or has made adequate efforts to recognise everyone who lost their lives in this terrible incident.

III. The impact on the victims' families is devastating. If their loved one's names are not mentioned in the reports, they will not be eligible to receive compensation and financial aid that the other victims have received.

3. Several committees were appointed to investigate the bombings, and multiple reports were commissioned; however, some reports were not fully released, and most of the recommendations made have not been executed. Only the first volume of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry's (headed by Janak De Silva) report was released, and only the executive summary and recommendations of the Presidential Committee's (headed by Mr. Vijith Malalgoda) report were released. We previously highlighted the importance of releasing the entire reports as the evidence in the reports could unravel the conspiracy behind the attack. The Parliamentary Select Committee Report was published, but the recommendations and suggestions have not been implemented to deliver justice for the victims. These reports are crucial as they reveal the authorities had sufficient time and enough intelligence to act on the suspicions and prevent the incident from occurring. It is very important that the government makes the full reports available to the public.

4. CSR submitted a proposal with short-term and long-term measures to ensure justice for the victims by the end of 2022. The proposal emphasised the need for a thorough investigation into the Channel 4 documentary and the claims it made. It also called for the immediate removal of Mr. Suresh Sallay from the position of Director of the State Intelligence Service till his involvement in the attacks is cleared and the re-appointment of the teams that conducted the preliminary investigations into the Easter Sunday Attacks so that they can restart their investigations. We are pleased to state that some aspects of this proposal have been taken seriously, and relevant facts have been reported to the Colombo Magistrate Court under case number B 35882/24, in relation to the claims made in the Channel 4 documentary. The investigations into a state minister's possible link to the Easter Sunday Attack have begun (1) and Mr. Suresh Sallay has been replaced (2) while Mr. Shani Abeysekara and others have been reinstated (3). We are hopeful that international pressure will expedite the investigations so that the victims of the Easter Attacks will be able to receive justice and closure.

5. In terms of the legal cases, although there are more than 40 criminal cases filed with regard to the incidents related to the Easter Sunday Attacks, the majority of the cases are still ongoing, and the progress is quite slow. The trial for the main criminal case against 25 accused for carrying out the Easter Sunday Attacks, with indictments containing 23,270 charges, which include conspiracy, aiding and abetting the attack, has been on trial for more than 100 days and is currently on hold due to a petition filed to the Supreme Court related to a confession. Regarding the case against the former Inspector General of Police and the former Defence Secretary, the High Court's decision to acquit the two individuals was appealed to the Supreme Court, which directed the trial to proceed. The importance of these cases in meting out justice is clear, and therefore we urge the Government to expedite these cases.

6. CSR filed two cases in relation to the Easter Sunday Attack. The first was against Mr. Nilantha Jayawardene, the former director of the State Intelligence Service (SIS), for being directly responsible for serious dereliction of duty that led to the Easter Sunday Attacks. Due to the pressure of this case, an inquiry by the National Police Commission is ongoing, and he has been interdicted. Currently, the CSR, the petitioner in the case, is calling for a criminal investigation against Nilantha Jayawardene. The second case is against a decision by the Right to Information (RTI) Commission for not providing the requested information on the disciplinary actions taken against certain police officers who are responsible for not preventing the Easter Sunday Attacks. The current status of the case is that it is pending an inquiry related to the RTI Commission's intervention in the case.

7. A brief report (4) on matters that require attention and should be further investigated in future investigations regarding the Easter Sunday Attacks was prepared and submitted to the investigating authorities by CSR recently. This report included the following points,

(a) Mr. Abdul Latif Mohammed Jameel, involved in the Easter Sunday Attacks, was under surveillance since 2015. Despite investigations, intelligence agencies failed to prevent the attacks. Several suspicious activities surrounding Jameel, including his hotel stay, phone calls, and missing CCTV footage, require further investigation. An investigation is requested into the disappearance of Jameel's mobile phone from the Ebenezer Mosque. The authenticity of Jameel's statements regarding his stay at the mosque and the individuals he was expecting should also be investigated. Additionally, the whereabouts of the T-56 rifle seen in footage with Mr. Jameel and Mr. Zahran, as well as the footage itself, should be investigated.

(b) Mr. Abu Hind, possibly a pseudonym for a foreign intelligence agent, was involved in the attack, as revealed by the Presidential Commission. Mr. Abu Hind's identity remains unknown and requires further investigation.

(c) The Sainthamaruthu explosion in 2019, involving Ms. Pulasthini Mahendran (Sarah Jesmine), raises numerous unanswered questions. Contradictory statements, unexplained deaths, and uninvestigated leads, including Sarah's alleged presence and a fleeing individual, warrant further investigation. Additionally, the circumstances surrounding the death of a woman in a three-wheeler and the presence of tracer bullets at the scene require further scrutiny.

(d) An investigation is needed into the failure to act on intelligence about a planned attack on Christian churches on 21st of April 2019. Despite instructions to provide security, the Archbishop's official residence was not informed.

Recommendations

8. The Human Rights Council must urge the Government of Sri Lanka to:

8.1 Release the accurate number of deaths caused by the Easter Sunday Attacks immediately.

8.2 Ensure that adequate compensation for the Easter Sunday Attacks reaches all victims in a speedy, fair, and transparent manner.

- I. Implement a sustainable financial assistance program for victims of the Easter Sunday Attacks who are unable to work or have lost the breadwinner in their family.
 - II. Re-evaluate and identify groups that require further treatment, surgery, or other medical requirements, and provide prompt treatment as needed.
 - III. Recognize those who suffered violence following the attacks, those who were unjustly detained, and investigators and witnesses who faced significant prejudice as victims.
- 8.3 Make the full reports submitted by committees investigating the Easter Sunday Attacks publicly available.
 - 8.4 Implement the recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry report and the Parliamentary Select Committee report.
 - 8.5 Expedite investigations regarding the claims made in the Channel 4 documentary.
 - 8.6 Expedite all legal cases related to the Easter Sunday Attacks so that criminals are held accountable and responsible for their actions.
 - 8.7 Issue a detailed announcement on the progress of all the investigations presently conducted related to the Easter Sunday Attacks.
 - 8.8 Appoint a commission comprising local and foreign experts with absolute powers to look into the Easter Sunday Attack as promised by the current government.
 - 8.9 Allocate funds for the operation of the Commission, Bureau of Investigation and Special Prosecutor's Office when preparing the budget related to the year 2025.

The Centre for Society and Religion (CSR), NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

- (1) Pillayan Summoned by CID Over Easter Attack Inquiry - Pillayan Defies Summons” Lanka E news, 13 November 2024. <https://www.lankaenews.com/news/3964/en>
- (2) “State Intelligence Service : Suresh Sallay replaced” Newswire, 5 October 2024. <https://www.newswire.lk/2024/10/05/state-intelligence-service-suresh-sallay-replaced/>
- (3) “Shani Abeysekara Reinstated on Contract Basis” Newsfirst, 11 October 2024. <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2024/10/11/shani-abeysekara-reinstated-on-contract-basis>
- (4) “Letter to secretary of the ministry of public security”, 18 May 2025. <https://easterattack.info/letter-to-secretary-of-the-ministry-of-public-security-english-translation/>