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**From the European Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses**

**Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee**

**Prior to the Adoption of the List of Issues**

**128th Session (2–27 March 2020)**

**Sri Lanka**

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| SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION This submission to the Human Rights Committee (CCPR) on Sri Lanka highlights violations of the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (The Covenant) prior to the adoptionof the *List of Issues* to be taken up in connection with the consideration of the 6th report of Sri Lanka.  Jehovah’s Witnesses in Sri Lanka, and as a worldwide organisation, respectfully request the government of Sri Lanka to:   1. Ensure that police officials provide protection and promptly investigate physical assaults against Jehovah’s Witnesses 2. Prevent the vandalism of the places of worship of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the interruption of their religious meetings 3. Prosecute perpetrators of criminal acts against Jehovah’s Witnesses or their places of worship 4. Withdraw the non-statutory 2008 circular used arbitrarily to restrict the construction of places of worship 5. Issue construction permits to Jehovah’s Witnesses and allow them to build places of worship peacefully and without hindrance 6. Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Sri Lanka and the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah’s Witnesses |

# INTRODUCTION

* 1. The European Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses is a charity registered in the United Kingdom. It provides support to Jehovah’s Witnesses facing fundamental human rights violations in various parts of the world.
  2. Jehovah’s Witnesses have been in Sri Lanka for more than 100 years. Their first recorded activity in Sri Lanka was in 1910, when they arranged for religious meetings. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Lanka was registered on 5 August 1981. Jehovah’s Witnesses enjoy a measure of religious freedom in Sri Lanka, but in recent years they have experienced an increase in acts of opposition, intimidation and physical violence, along with police inaction.
  3. **Legal process:** Problems are often compounded by the slow legal process in Sri Lanka—one criminal trial has continued for more than 12 years. Recently, two court cases concluded with a settlement after many years of litigation. In another long-running case, three of Jehovah’s Witnesses were ultimately acquitted of all charges against them.
  4. **Places of worship:**  It is difficult for Jehovah’s Witnesses in Sri Lanka to obtain approval for building places of worship (Kingdom Halls). Local government officials refer to a non-statutory 2008 government circular issued by the then Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs, and they forward all new Kingdom Hall construction applications to the Ministry of Tourism Development, Wildlife and Christian Religious Affairs (the Ministry). Similarly, regional authorities suspend construction of new Kingdom Halls by claiming that the Ministry’s approval is required. The Ministry asserts that its approval is not required and that the local authorities may grant the necessary approvals. The Ministry has declined further involvement, and local authorities are unwilling to take responsibility for approving the construction of places of worship, leading to an impasse. In these areas, Jehovah’s Witnesses continue to meet for worship in private homes or endeavour to build rudimentary, low-cost, temporary meeting facilities, which do not require approval, to meet their needs.

# Violations of the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (THE COVENANT)

## Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion and Right to Hold Opinions Without Interference (Articles 18, 19, 26 and 27)

### *Physical Assaults, Harassment and Police Inaction*

* 1. Yatiyantota, 11 November 2017: Two Jehovah’s Witness families — Mr Rajasingham, his wife, Syamalee, and daughter, Salome; and Mr Nelson and his wife, Ranjalee Premathilake — had finished their voluntary religious activities when they stopped to have lunch. When they left the restaurant, a mob led by Buddhist monk Seelarathne Himi began shouting abusively at them. One of the members of the mob assaulted Mr Rajasingham with a club. Mr Nelson was also severely attacked, causing him to lose his eyesight temporarily.
  2. A police investigation took place, and the matter was referred to the Mediation Board. The first and second hearings were held on 6 and 20 January 2018, and the matter was referred to the Ruwanwella Magistrate’s Court on 2 March 2018. The Medico-Legal Report was produced by the police at the third hearing, on 4 January 2019, and the trial was listed to begin on 15 March 2019. At the defence counsel’s request, the trial was postponed until 19 July 2019, and then because the accused monk was hospitalized, it was postponed until 22 November 2019. On 22 November 2019, the defence counsel was sick, and therefore the judge decided to adjourn the case until 22 May 2020 (case number 73303).
  3. Subsequently, the monk, Mr Seelarathne Himi, lodged a counter-complaint alleging that Mr Rajasingham and the others were “converting” villagers to their religion. This case has also been filed in the same court. Because Mr Rajasingham is charged under Section 291B of the Penal Code, the counter-complaint cannot proceed without the sanction of the Attorney General’s Department (AG). On 15 March 2019, at the second hearing, the judge ordered the police to prepare the required documents for referral to the AG. These documents were to be produced on 19 July 2019. However, as the accused monk was sick on this day and the defence counsel was sick on 22 November 2019, these documents will be presented at court on 22 May 2020 (case number 74256).
  4. Polonnaruwa, 5 December 2017: A group of Jehovah’s Witnesses — Mr Attanayake, Miss Dilki Kanchana, Mrs Nilmini Grigg and Mrs Nilanka Sanjeewani — had been engaging in their religious activity and were returning to their homes. They were stopped by two Buddhist monks, one of whom, Gunarathnaramaye Nuwan Premarathne, threatened Mr Attanayake, who is 61 years of age and suffers from a severe heart ailment, with a beating and demanded that he hand over his bag and all of his religious literature. The monk made the same demand of the female Jehovah’s Witnesses and tried to take their bags and literature by force.
  5. The monks followed Mr Attanayake home, forcibly entered his property and continued to shout and verbally abuse him. The same evening, Mr Attanayake and Miss Dilki Kanchana lodged a police complaint against the monk. Gunarathnaramaye Nuwan Premarathne also lodged a complaint, falsely alleging that he had been assaulted by Mr Attanayake. The police took immediate action on the monk’s complaint and, without conducting any investigation, arrested Mr Attanayake and kept him in a cell overnight. The next day, he appeared at the Polonnaruwa Magistrate’s Court (case number 29662). The counter-complaints were filed at the same court (case numbers 28319 and 28320), and the trial of these three cases was scheduled to commence on 31 July 2019. Because the police had not previously provided the defence with a copy of Mr Attanayake’s original statement, which he had provided to the police, the case was postponed and rescheduled to commence on 18 December 2019. On this date the counter-complaint lodged by Mr. Attanayake was provided by the police to the court, and Mr Attanayake’s evidence commenced. The other two related cases were postponed because of the time constraint of the court. The next hearing date for all three cases has been set for 26 February 2020.
  6. Nikaweratiya, 28 February 2018: A Buddhist monk, Thibiriwela Sumana Wansha, accompanied by another (unidentified) Buddhist monk, approached two female Jehovah’s Witnesses, Ms Liliyan Sovis and Mrs Dilini Nisansala, at a bus stop in the Kobeigane area. The monks demanded to examine the women’s identity cards and took photographs of them. The monks then forcibly took literature from Ms Sovis’ bag and threatened to strip the two women naked and evict them from the village.
  7. Ms Sovis filed a complaint with the police on 1 March 2018. At the police inquiry on 5 March, the monks arrived with a mob of more than 100 people. The mob frightened the victims so much that they did not feel safe, and they fled from their homes. A few days later, false allegations were made against the women, claiming that they had offered unlawful allurements in order to force people to convert from Buddhism to Christianity. On 30 March 2018, the women filed counter-complaints.
  8. Later, the police summoned the wife of the landlord, a Buddhist who leases premises to Jehovah’s Witnesses to hold their religious meetings, and threatened that if she continued to allow the Witnesses to meet on her property, the villagers would make trouble for her. Despite the threats, the landlord spoke favourably about the Witnesses.
  9. After a number of police visits, Ms Sovis’ lawyer wrote to the senior superintendent of police on 21 June 2019 and requested a report on the current status of the matter. On 26 June 2019, the officer replied, stating that he will direct the officer in charge of the Kobeigane police station to refer the matter to the Mediation Board. The matter was referred for mediation on August 4 2019, but no settlement was reached. The police have not taken action on this matter to this day.
  10. Gampaha, 6 October 2018: Ms Hansani Perera and Mrs Mord Kahandawala (80 years old) were engaged in sharing their religious beliefs. Two Buddhist monks, accompanied by a mob, came to the house they were in and unlawfully detained them for about 20 minutes. When Mr Thushara Fernando arrived to help the women, the mob forcibly took his mobile phone and detained him too. When the police arrived, his mobile phone was returned, and the Witnesses managed to leave.
  11. Shortly thereafter, the same mob approached another Witness, Mr Ralph Jayathilake, and began to intimidate him.
  12. Ms Perera, Mr Fernando and Mr Jayathilake filed complaints at the Weerangula police station and reported the abuse and harassment and the theft of the mobile phone. This case was subsequently referred to the Attanagalla Magistrate’s Court on 25 March 2019. At the first hearing, held on 1 July 2019, the charges were read and the pleadings were recorded. Now the case has been set for trial, and it will commence on 13 January 2020 (case numbers 766/19, 762/19 and 761/19).
  13. Miriswatta, 23 February 2019: A group of Jehovah’s Witnesses — Mr Chandima Wijeyabandara, Mr Palitha Dharmarathne, Mr Manjula Silva, Mr Ruwan Sandamal and Mr Sajith Niroshan — were speaking to people about their religious beliefs when two men arrived on a motorcycle. The two men, named Sameera and Nadeera (a member of the Sri Lankan army), walked over to the group of Witnesses and began to assault them. One of the men beat the Witnesses with his motorcycle helmet while the other beat and kicked Mr Manjula Silva. Both men hit Mr Wijeyabandara on the head with their helmets. Mr Dharmarathne’s wife, Mrs Sachitha Dharmarathne, arrived. The men saw her, grabbed hold of her arm and twisted it around. While she was immobilised, they pummelled her back.
  14. Mr Silva, Mr Wijeyabandara and Mrs Dharmarathne required hospitalisation. Part of this incident was videorecorded by Mrs Dharmarathne, and it was reported to the Divulapitiya police the same day. On 5 March 2019 the two men were arrested, and an inquiry was held.
  15. During the inquiry, a mob of villagers arrived at the police station with a member of the local council (the Pradeshiya Sabha). They presented a petition for Jehovah’s Witnesses to cease speaking to people of the area about religious beliefs. The accused denied assaulting the Witnesses.
  16. At the end of the inquiry, the police downgraded the assault charges from grievous bodily harm to “simple hurt” and released on bail. The police sent this matter for mediation, and the Mediation Board hearing was scheduled without informing the complainants. On 15 March 2019, the video evidence and an affidavit were submitted to the police.The case is yet to be referred to court.
  17. Polonnaruwa, 27 February 2019: Mrs Chathurika Madhushani of Swarnapaligama, Polonnaruwa, had been studying the Bible with two Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mr Edward Lionel Costa and his sister, Mrs Janet Francisca, for some months. The Witnesses were about to leave Mrs Chathurika’s house when Higuruwalle Kusalagnana, the chief Buddhist monk of the Swarnapaligama Raja Maha temple, approached them. He began by berating the Witnesses with abusive language and profanity. He then threatened them and ordered them not to return to the area. The monk assaulted Mr Costa, punching him in the shoulder until his arm went completely numb. The monk then berated Mrs Chathurika for discussing religious beliefs with Jehovah’s Witnesses. A police complaint was lodged on the same day, and court filing is awaited.
  18. Rakwana, 17 March 2019: Four female Jehovah’s Witnesses — Mrs Damayanthi Bulupitiya, her daughter, Ms Amenda Bulupitiya, Ms Loreta Shiromini, and Ms Rebekah Camillus — were returning home after sharing their religious beliefs in Weralugahamulla, Rakwana. They were approached by Angmaduwe Vimala Himi, the chief monk of the Weralugahamulla temple, and he and his mob verbally abused all four women and attacked them with a cane.
  19. Mrs Damayanthi Bulupitiya, Ms Amenda Bulupitiya and Ms Loreta Shiromini escaped and managed to board a bus. The monk began shouting to the passengers that the three who had just got on the bus were “religious propagators” and that he had assaulted them for it.
  20. When Ms Rebekah Camillus returned to her motorcycle, a man from the mob caught up with her, forcibly took her religious literature and burnt it. He threatened that she would have to face the same or worse if she returned. Owing to her injuries, Ms Rebekah Camillus was hospitalised at the Rakwana Hospital for two days.
  21. After this incident, the monk discovered another group of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the area: Mr Sivalingam Chandrala, Mr Ajan Sandun, Mr Christopher Sivakeerthi and Mr Hirosh Bulupitiya. The monk and his mob stopped them, forcibly took the literature from their bags and attacked all four of them. As a result, Mr Sivalingam Chandralal and Mr Ajan Sandun were taken to the Rakwana Hospital and then transferred to the Ratnapura Hospital. The Rakwana and Ratnapura police officers met the hospitalised victims and recorded their statements.
  22. A complaint was lodged the next day, and this case was filed in the Pelmadulla Magistrate’s Court on 27 March 2019. The police were ordered to produce a further report on their investigation at the next hearing, which was set for 11 September 2019. On that date, the accused was released on bail and the case was set for trial on 8 January 2020. (Case number B270/19)
  23. Ganemulla, 22 March 2019: Mr Sudara Silva and his wife, Mrs Madhushani Silva, were engaged in sharing their religious beliefs in Bollatha, Ganemulla. One of the people they spoke with, Mr S. S. Gallage, asked them to wait, as he wanted to report them to the police. The couple replied that they would not leave the area and would be happy to explain their activity to the police. Mr Gallage became enraged and tried to assault the Witnesses with a box purlin (a pre-galvanised mild steel or glass box used in roof or ceiling ventilation). Mr Silva managed to dodge the attack, but the purlin struck him on the hand, injuring his ring finger. A complaint was lodged the same day, and the police inquiry was held on 24 March 2019. This case has been referred to the Mediation Board, but no summons to attend the Mediation Board hearing has been received.
  24. Maeliya, 9 January 2019: Two female Jehovah’s Witnesses — Mrs Lily Jayawardena and Mrs. Reeta Fonseka — were engaged in public witnessing.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Witnesses had been engaged in this activity in the area for more than three months without any interruption. However, on this day, a university student named Isuru approached them in a vehicle and enquired as to what they were doing. The Witnesses explained the nature of their publications to him. After about half an hour, he returned with a Buddhist monk named Sumedha from the Araliya Maluwa temple. The monk verbally abused the two female Witnesses. The Witnesses tried to explain that their activity was legal and that it could benefit the community. Nevertheless, the monk continued to abuse them verbally, which attracted a large crowd of people. The women were then threatened with serious repercussions if they did not leave quickly. A police complaint was lodged the same day, and the matter was referred to the Mahawa Magistrate’s Court on 20 March 2019. On 4 December 2019 the accused was absent. Therefore, the judge issued a warrant for his arrest. As this offence is of a religious nature, (s291A of the Penal Code), sanction by the AG’s must be received before the police can prosecute. Therefore, the judge ordered that the case be referred to the AG for a recommendation and scheduled the next hearing for 25 March 2020 at which time the police are to provide this update. (case number 10230/MT).
  25. Minuwangoda, 9 March 2019: While they were engaged in sharing their religious beliefs, a group of four female Jehovah’s Witnesses— Mrs Buddhini Mallawarachchi, who was accompanied by her six-year-old daughter, Mrs Chandani, Mrs Harshani Abrew and Mrs Hansika Cooray — were stopped by a Buddhist monk named Dayananda from the Dematagolla temple. The Witnesses tried to explain their activity, but the monk started shouting and verbally abusing them. He then began to shout at passers-by, demanding that they come out and join him in berating the Witnesses for discussing religion.
  26. With the support of a mob, the monk then forcibly took the Witnesses to the main street, deriding them and demanding that others come out of their homes and join him. Mrs Mallawarachchi’s six-year-old daughter began crying in fear.
  27. In the meantime, Mr Roshan Mallawarachchi, Mr Hasitha Abrew and Mr Tharaka Cooray (husbands of three of the female Witnesses) were also engaged in sharing their religious beliefs. They heard that their wives were in trouble and went to help them leave the area. The monk and his mob now surrounded the entire group of Witnesses. The monk claimed that his consent was required in order to talk to the people in that area, and he tried to forcibly take the literature from the Witnesses’ bags. Eventually the group of Witnesses managed to make their way out of the area. The mob followed them for some distance.
  28. A police complaint was lodged by Mrs Mallawarachchi on the same day, and a police inquiry was held on 22 March 2019. The matter was referred to the Mediation Board, and a second Mediation Board hearing took place on 4 May 2019. As the matter was not settled, the police are now obliged to take the matter to the courts.
  29. Polonnaruwa, 19 March 2019: Two Buddhist monks, named Upathissa (from the Weerapura temple) and Ariyadhamma (from the Gallalla temple), approached five female Jehovah’s Witnesses — Mrs Nilanka Sanjeewani, Mrs Nilmini Grigg, Mrs Tishini Ruwanshini, Mrs Dona Karunawathi and Mrs Claudia Hendrick — who were engaged in sharing their religious beliefs in the Weerapura area. The monks proceeded to call the Pulathisipura police station and force the group of Jehovah’s Witnesses to remain as they abused the group verbally.
  30. The Witnesses were detained for nearly an hour until police officers arrived. They were then taken to the police station. Mrs Grigg had videorecorded the incident, and the police officers insisted that this evidence be deleted. Mrs Grigg refused to do so. An officer forcibly took her mobile device and deleted the video. A complaint was lodged the next day. The matter was referred to the Mediation Board, and no settlement was reached. The matter remains with the police.

## Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association (Articles 21, 22, 26 and 27)

### *Obstacles to Obtaining Construction Permits for Places of Worship*

* 1. A non-statutory government circular issued by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs in 2008 remains the chief obstacle to obtaining permits to build Kingdom Halls (places of worship). Local government officials claim that the circular prevents them from issuing permits without the approval of the Ministry of Tourism Development and Christian Religious Affairs (the Ministry). Local authorities are expected to provide recommendations to the Ministry. Frequently, these are based on the opinions of Buddhist and Catholic religious leaders in the areas concerned. Inevitably, religious leaders from the two main religions object to Jehovah’s Witnesses building a place of worship. Consequently, the local authorities provide negative recommendations, blocking permits. On other occasions, applications for building permits lie dormant for years. In these areas, Jehovah’s Witnesses continue to meet in private homes to worship or, at times, try to meet their needs by building temporary meeting facilities that do not require a permit.
  2. Hendala: An application to build a Kingdom Hall was approved by the Wattala Local Authority in 2014. A few months later, while the Kingdom Hall was under construction, the congregation received a letter instructing them to stop building. The local authorities told them that they must secure Ministry approval before continuing to build. The Minister furnished them with a letter stating that he had no objection to the construction. The local authority did not accept that. The Minister was approached again, and he advised getting a court order. After the local Witnesses made an application to the court of appeal for three writs in respect of the application to continue with construction, the application was dismissed with costs on 12 March 2019 (case number CA/WRIT/418/2015).
  3. Madampe: The Chilaw Local Council (Chilaw Pradeshiya Sabha) rejected an application to build a Kingdom Hall, stating that “the approval cannot be granted as this can cause religious disharmony in the area.” Making use of the recently passed Right to Information Act, the local Witnesses submitted a request to the Ministry asking for the specific reasons of the Ministry’s determination that this place of worship might cause “religious disharmony.”
  4. Jehovah’s Witnesses had received a negative recommendation from a local authority, which stated, in part: “The proposed building will be used for worship related matters of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. . . . As this religion is not a part of the Catholic church, as the Parish priest and the [Divisional Secretariat] have not given their consent I do not recommend approving this worship centre construction.” Buddhist and Catholic religious leaders had been asked for their opinions about Jehovah’s Witnesses.
  5. A complaint has been filed with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, arguing that this is a clear violation of human rights. The complainants were summoned to an inquiry at the commission on 9 August 2018. The local authority argued that they had no misgivings about Jehovah’s Witnesses and their place of worship but that the proposed building location was in an area that had experienced many violent, religiously motivated clashes between Christians and Buddhists. They offered to approve a building application for a different piece of land. The Witnesses respectfully maintained that the matter before the commission was not the practicality of the location of the proposed building but that of the exercise of power by the local authorities. The Human Rights Commission official concluded the hearing and requested a written submission within 14 days. A director of the Commission will review the case and call another meeting between the parties, but the complainants have heard nothing since the meeting on 9 August 2018.
  6. Pesalai, 5 March 2018: As workers were preparing to begin construction of a temporary Kingdom Hall, two policemen arrived and told them to stop the work. The policemen said that the people in the area had complained to the priest and that the priest wanted the police to take action. They requested that the Witnesses go to the police station. The Witnesses respectfully made the following points: (1) they had held meetings for worship in that area for 15 years (and showed photographs demonstrating this), and (2) no building permit had been applied for from the provincial council because they intended to build only a temporary structure and, as such, not even a boundary wall had been erected, only a temporary fence. The police admitted that it is not necessary to obtain a permit for temporary buildings. However, they advised that it is better to have a permit for a place of worship. They then explained that on an earlier occasion, a Pentecostal group had tried to have a church in this area, and Catholics had protested and demolished the building. The police explained that with a permit, or even a letter from the provincial council allowing for the building of a temporary structure, the police could speak up in the Witnesses’ behalf. Since then, local Witnesses have requested permission from the local authority, which has asked the congregation to seek approval from the Ministry of Buddha Sasana.

### *Vandalism and Property Damage to Places of Worship*

* 1. Madampella: Throughout 2016, Jehovah’s Witnesses in Madampella were the victims of repeated vandalism of their Kingdom Hall. In the most recent incident, damage in the amount of LKR 300,000 (approximately USD 1,680) was caused. A case was finally brought against the vandal on 14 February 2019. The defence proposed a settlement in the amount of LKR 50,000 (approximately USD 280), and the judge ordered that the promised compensation be brought to court on 11 July 2019 so that a settlement could be reached (case number L/21898). The case was settled in court on 11 July 2019, with the accused agreeing not to interfere with the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses and paying LKR 50,000 in compensation for the damage to the place of worship.

### *Interruptions of Religious Meetings*

* 1. Buttala: On 29 May 2016 a Buddhist monk named Dhamma Jothi went to a meeting of Jehovah’s Witnesses that was being held in a private home. His entrance disturbed the meeting, but he was made welcome and invited to stay. The monk interrupted the meeting by taking photographs of the congregation with his mobile phone, and then he left. Soon afterward, two police officers arrived and asked the homeowner to stop holding meetings in her house. A complaint was lodged against the monk on the same day. Since the day the complaint was lodged, the police have changed their stance on the issue a number of times. The lawyer representing Jehovah’s Witnesses took signed witness statements from many of those who were in attendance at the meeting on 29 May 2016 and lodged them with the police. The police then chose to apply the law and to support the Witnesses’ complaint against the monk. Subsequently, the matter was filed in the Wellawaya Magistrate’s Court. According to criminal law procedure, the matter was referred to the Attorney General for approval to proceed late in 2017. The AG did not approve this case to be prosecuted, though no reasons were given for the refusal. Therefore, the court dismissed the case on 17 July 2019.
  2. Digana: On 22 May 2016, a Buddhist monk named Halpotha Dammajothi, along with approximately ten villagers, disrupted and forcibly stopped a religious meeting at a rented home. The 40 Jehovah’s Witnesses present, including women and children, were intimidated by threats of “dangerous consequences” if they did not stop the meeting. The same afternoon, a complaint was lodged with the local police, and a case was subsequently filed at the Kandy Magistrate’s Court. The trial commenced on 12 March 2018, but only the first prosecution witness’ evidence in chief was completed. On 1 October 2019, during the cross-examination of the second prosecution witness, the defence counsel objected to the procedure used to lodge the video evidence submitted on behalf of the complainant which was recorded by this second witness. The judge ordered that written submissions from both parties concerning admissibility of contemporaneous recordings be submitted on 14 October 2019. These were submitted as ordered, and the case was postponed to 14 January 2020 (case number 98591).
  3. Bingiriya, 31 December 2017: Two Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mr Nishantha and Mr Arul Fernando, went to speak to the man living next door to their place of worship, Mr Dharmarathne. They asked him to lower the volume of his recorded religious sermons on Sunday morning, as it was disturbing their religious meeting.
  4. Mr Dharmarathne yelled abusively at them. He then followed them back to where the religious meeting was taking place, exposed his genitals to the attendees, including children, and left.
  5. This matter was referred to the Chilaw Magistrate’s Court on 27 March 2018, and the first hearing was held on 22 May 2018. As the crime concerns religious offences (s291A of the Penal Code), the judge ordered the police to prepare the necessary documents for the case to be referred to the Attorney General for sanction to prosecute. The next hearing is scheduled for 19 May 2020 for the police to provide an update on how they will proceed (case number 890/2018).

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

* 1. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Sri Lanka, and as a worldwide organisation, respectfully request the government of Sri Lanka to:

1. Ensure that police officials provide protection and promptly investigate physical assaults against Jehovah’s Witnesses
2. Prevent the vandalism of the places of worship of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the interruption of their religious meetings
3. Prosecute perpetrators of criminal acts against Jehovah’s Witnesses or their places of worship
4. Withdraw the non-statutory 2008 circular used arbitrarily to restrict the construction of places of worship
5. Issue construction permits to Jehovah’s Witnesses and allow them to build places of worship peacefully and without hindrance; and
6. Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Sri Lanka and the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah’s Witnesses

1. Public witnessing is a voluntary activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Two or three Jehovah’s Witnesses stand in a public place with a portable rack displaying various publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses. If they wish, passers-by may walk up to the rack and will be given any of the publications on display without cost. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)