

In Solidarity with those affected by recent events

May 4, 2019

We the undersigned Tamil civil society organizations unequivocally condemn the horrific Easter Sunday attacks which took more than two hundred and fifty lives, and also express our wholehearted solidarity and support to our Christian communities, targeted in this cowardly act of violence by extremists. We stand with the Christian people, as members, as allies, as friends and family, as we work towards the long healing process.

We also want to express our support to the Muslim communities of Sri Lanka in this tragic time. As they face serious persecution and threat, we call on the Tamil community as a whole to extend a hand and open our homes and hearts. The violence, surveillance, oppression and fear they are facing could be precursors to an onslaught that we Tamils know far too well. As this last week has demonstrated, we must not forget that it is still the State that the Tamil and Muslim communities are most vulnerable to.

We are deeply disappointed by reports that seem to indicate that some Tamil politicians and community organizations are rejecting proposals to house refugees, Christian and Muslim, of Pakistani and Afghan origin in the Northern province. As a community, which has experienced first-hand persecution, discrimination and violence at the hands of the Sri Lankan state and its institutions, it is imperative we show empathy and solidarity and welcome those now facing similar conditions.

At various points in Sri Lanka's history, Tamils have been forced to flee this island in the thousands and seek refuge elsewhere to avoid persecution. It is now our turn to offer that refuge to those fleeing the same State structures and conditions. While we continue to stand against State-sponsored land grabs and colonisation, militarisation, forced disappearances and the discrimination of displaced Tamil persons, we should not negate the hospitality to those at risk of discrimination we are historically familiar with.

The Muslim and Tamil communities on the island have seen ever increasing tension in their relationship both during the armed conflict and in the post-war context. Both Tamil and Muslim communities harbour mutual mistrust, despite the fact that we live side by side in the North-East. There is certainly a need to have a comprehensive truth and accountability process to address these deep-rooted grievances and have genuine reconciliation between the two communities. However, in this moment of urgency and tragedy, drawing upon historic grievances and prejudicial stereotypes in order to demonize a community at risk jeopardizes the lives of those vulnerable to violence. We are very concerned that those who harbour both implicitly and explicitly Islamophobic agendas are monopolizing this moment to propagate their false stereotypes and incite violence against the Muslim community.

As we mourn the victims of devastating attacks on Easter Sunday, let us centre our humanity and stand in solidarity with all those affected by the violence.

Signatories:

Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research

Maatram Foundation

Mannar Women's Development Federation (MWDF)

People for Equality and Relief in Lanka (PEARL)

SEED (Vavuniya)

Vallamai (Movement for Social Justice)

Viluthu Centre for Human Resource Development

Women's Action Network (WAN)