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Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

STATEMENT ON THE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

ON VISIT TO SRI LANKA (A/HRC/40/48/Add.2)

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

2 MARCH, 2020

Madame Chair, Distinguished Delegates and Friends,

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka expresses its deep appreciation to the Special Rapporteur on his perceptive report based on his visit to Sri Lanka in 2019. The Commission shares many of his observations and conclusions.

The recent emergence of deep religious fragmentation in the country, in addition to the existing ethnic divide is of deep concern to all peace loving citizens and must be addressed urgently.

We agree with the contributing factors to religious divisions identified in the report. Politicization of religion is a primary contributing factor. The Commission is of the view that political campaigning by registered political parties based on, *inter alia*, religious exclusivity, superiority and division must be prohibited under election laws.

The current segregation of schools along ethnic/linguistic and religious lines has compelled our children to grow up in ethno-religious isolation, laying a strong foundation for communal suspicion and divisions. We recommend an integrated school system which exposes all children to the rich heritage of religious, linguistic and cultural diversity of Sri Lanka. Children must be taught the philosophical foundations of all major religions. School curricula must be designed to impart a cosmopolitan education that prepares all children to live in a diverse society that celebrates pluralism.

Further, the implementation of laws prohibiting hate crimes and hate speech must be strictly enforced without discrimination so that all religious communities are equally protected. Our Commission issued guidelines to the Police Department and the Attorney-General's Department on the implementation of section 3 of the ICCPR Act that incorporates into the domestic legal system of Sri Lanka Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on hate speech.

Finally, Madame Chair, that freedom of religion is an entrenched principle in the Constitution must be a constant reminder to us all.

Thank you.

Dr. N. D. Udagama
Chairperson

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