



பிரித்தானிய தமிழர் பேரவை  
British Tamils Forum



*For immediate release:*

## **ATC, BTF & USTPAC Call for Strong Action to End Anti-Muslim Attacks in Sri Lanka & Address Root Causes**

**March 09, 2018 London, Washington DC, Canberra:** The US Tamil Political Action Council (**USTPAC**), the British Tamils Forum (**BTF**) and the Australian Tamil Congress (**ATC**) express our deepest sympathies to the victims of the recent anti-Muslim pogrom in the Kandy and Amparai districts in Sri Lanka. We are deeply frustrated that ethnic violence continues, reinforcing the profound insecurity, which citizens who are neither Sinhalese and nor Buddhist feel on this multi-ethnic island. In the past two weeks Muslim homes, businesses and mosques have been destroyed in targeted attacks, with loss of lives, scores injured and substantial damage to personal property.

“The Government must take strong, decisive and immediate action for any of those affected by such violence to believe that this is not a deliberate attack on them personally and on the strength of their community as a whole,” said BTF General Secretary Ravi Kumar. “Impunity for these crimes must not join the inaction on crimes committed against Muslims, Tamils, Christians, and others in the past.”

“We strongly endorse the [comments of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein in which he also condemns the recent violence against Muslims and places it fairly in the context of the Government of Sri Lanka’s repeated failure to make progress on the transitional justice agenda, despite the Government’s commitment to do so. The Tamil community has also suffered chronic cycles of violence and discrimination driven by Buddhist extremism in Sri Lanka. We stand in solidarity with the Muslim community and call upon the Government to deliver on its promises of a political solution that ensures respect and protection for all communities in Sri Lanka,” said USTPAC President Seetharam Sivam.

All these pogroms were led by Sinhalese Buddhist extremists, including some monks, who object to other communities exercising their rights, giving voice to the aspirations of their communities, and progressing economically on the island that they consider theirs and theirs alone. These ultra-nationalists appear to have support within the majority community and sections of the Government. Tacit government support for violence against non-Buddhist communities is a key ingredient in Sri Lanka’s cycles of violence. The Sirisena Government must demonstrate its commitment to a plural society by forcefully speaking out, condemning hate speech, and holding the perpetrators accountable.

The recent anti-Muslim incidents mirror the first large-scale violence by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists, the 1915 anti-Muslim pogrom, which began in Kandy, also the scene of some of the recent violence. This 1915 pogrom was followed by a steady drumbeat of anti-Tamil pogroms after independence that destroyed the Tamils’ sense of security and their commercial base on the island, leading eventually to the long civil war.

“Impunity for serious crimes against communities and property is almost total and the security forces react selectively and only after the damage is done,” said ATC President Reginald Jeganathan. “A video of the members of the Special Task Force aiding in attacks in Kandy that surfaced yesterday is of particular concern.”

In the Sri Lankan state structure, where Sinhala Buddhist supremacy is institutionalised, attacks on non-Sinhala Buddhists will continue with impunity. Those who commit such violence against the non-Sinhala Buddhist communities are confident of no legal consequences under the present state structure. In fact, they are celebrated as "heroes and patriots". This needs to change to ensure non-recurrence.

We call upon the international community to closely monitor the Government's imposed State of Emergency which should end promptly when the violence subsides. The Government has a pattern of extending these emergency powers indefinitely. We appeal to the International Community to ensure non-recurrence of violence against the Tamil and Muslim communities as called for by UNHRC resolution 30/1.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22772&LangID=E>

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**About USTPAC:** USTPAC is a US-based Tamil advocacy group advocating for cessation of ongoing human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, accountability for crimes committed during and after the civil war, and a political settlement to address root causes of the conflict. Since 2009, it has worked for these goals with the US Government and UN Human Rights Council.

**About BTF:** British Tamils Forum exists to harness skills and the knowledge of members of the forum, and significant others including mainstream decision makers in the UK with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamils community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self-determination within a democratic framework underpinned by international law, its covenants and conventions.

**About ATC:** The Australian Tamil Congress encourages positive participation of Tamils in Australian society, highlights issues of importance to Tamils, engages other communities, governments and organisations in addressing the socio-cultural and political concerns of Tamils. Educating people on Tamils' right to survival and self-determination, and teaching the lessons of Tamil Genocide in Sri Lanka for future generations.

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