

briefing

Sri Lanka

Visit to Sri Lanka

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Table of contents:

CSW visit to Sri Lanka	1
1. Summary	3
2. Meetings.....	4
3. Religious and ethnic background	4
4. Background to the current persecution	5
5. Unethical conversions and cultural insensitivity: the Buddhist and Hindu grievances.....	6
6. “Unethical” conversions: the Christian perspective	8
7. Anti-Christian Violence	9
8. Anti-Conversion Law	11
9. Constitutional Amendment	12
10. Hate Campaigns.....	12
11. Alternatives to legislation.....	13
12. International Advocacy	13
13. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	14
14. Appendix: Interviews with persecuted pastors.....	14
14.1. Pastor John Dickson, Covenant Life Ministries, Ambakota (40km from Kandy).....	14
14.2. Pastor Nagarajah Solomon, 38, The Good News Church, Kundasale, 8km east of Kandy, central Sri Lanka.....	16
14.3. Pastor Niranjan, General Supervisor and Vice President of the Four Square Gospel Church, Sri Lanka.....	17
14.4. Pastor Kumara, Assemblies of God Church, Kesbewa	19
14.5. Pastor A.G. Chandrapala, Assemblies of God Church, Yakkala (Gampaha District)	20
15. Abbreviations	20

I. Summary

For many years, Sri Lanka's religious groups – Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims – have lived in relative harmony, with only the occasional outbreak of religious tension or violence. A civil war between Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups has plagued the country for over two decades, but this has been an ethnic and political, more than a religious, conflict. However, within the last decade, with the development of evangelical Christian activity in Sri Lanka, tensions have grown and, in the past two years, intensified severely. In 2003 a total of 91 attacks on churches and Christians were reported. This year alone 66 such incidents have taken place¹. The anti-Christian violence was at its worst at the end of 2003 and the first few months of 2004. It decreased during the time of the Supreme Court hearing regarding the Anti-Conversion Bill, but there are indications that the violence is increasing again. Incidents of violence continue, and this report documents some recent examples. (See Section 7: Anti-Christian Violence and Appendix: Interviews with Persecuted Pastors).

In addition to the anti-Christian violence, combined with harassment and hate literature, Buddhist extremists are trying to introduce anti-conversion legislation (see Section 8: Anti-Conversion Law). While the Supreme Court ruled in August that two clauses of the proposed bill were unconstitutional, the party proposing the bill, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) party of Buddhist monks, has, according to press reports, announced that it will make the necessary amendments to the draft and expects to table the new bill within six months². However, it is still unclear whether they will make all the necessary amendments required for the legislation to pass with a simple majority, or whether the amendments made will be insufficient and require a two-thirds majority and a referendum to pass. Furthermore, CSW discovered during the visit that a proposal is being developed to amend the Constitution, which will make Buddhism the state religion rather than, as it currently is, the “foremost” religion. This proposed constitutional amendment would also seek to make it illegal for Buddhists to convert. (See Section 9: Constitutional Amendment).

As a human rights organization specialising in religious liberty, CSW regards the proposed legislation as an infringement of religious freedom and a violation of Sri Lanka's own Constitution and its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We also express our deep concern at the acts of violence, harassment, discrimination and religious hatred directed at Christians. We were pleased to note that the US State Department Annual Report on International Religious Freedom included a substantial section on Sri Lanka, which was reported in the local press during our visit.³

However, we also note with equal concern the widespread anger and sense of grievance on the part of many Buddhists and Hindus towards the activities of evangelical Christians. While CSW has not been presented with substantial first-hand evidence of insensitive behaviour or “unethical” conversion tactics, we have been given numerous anecdotal examples. If evangelical groups have used underhand or duplicitous means to convert people, or engaged in the desecration or insult of other religions, or through their actions created the perception of “unethical” conversion and cultural insensitivity, CSW condemns such behaviour. This does not in any way justify anti-Christian violence or anti-conversion legislation, but in the interests of protecting and promoting religious freedom and harmony, we encourage evangelicals to re-evaluate their methods of mission, and present their faith in ways that are respectful and sensitive to others. We also encourage efforts already underway by Christians to engage in seeking an adequate alternative to legislation, to address the concerns of the Buddhists and Hindus. We call on all groups to engage in dialogue and seek reconciliation and forgiveness.

¹ For a copy of the full list of recorded attacks on churches, compiled by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, contact CSW

² “JHU to table anti-conversion bill in 6 months,” *Daily Mirror*, September 23, 2004, Sri Lanka

³ “Extremists hurt religious freedom in Lanka: US”, *Sunday Island*, September 19, 2004

2. Meetings

Balance and accuracy are essential to CSW's work, and so our primary aim in this visit was to meet as broad a range of people as possible, across religious divides, to hear all perspectives on the rise of anti-Christian activities in Sri Lanka. While CSW is a Christian human rights organisation with a particular concern for persecuted Christians, we promote for religious liberty for all. During our visit to Sri Lanka we were able to interview representatives of Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, Evangelical, Buddhist and Hindu groups, as well as a senior Government official, a constitutional lawyer, a civil rights group, a newspaper reporter, foreign missionaries and NGO workers, and the British High Commission. These include:

Roman Catholic: the Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops Conference, Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo Bishop Marius Peiris; the Bishop of Chilaw, the Rt. Rev. Dr Frank Marcus Fernando; the Director, the Centre for Society and Religion, Father Anselm Silva.

Mainline Protestant: the General Secretary of the National Christian Council (NCC), Rev. Ebenezer Joseph; the President of the Methodist Conference, Rev. Noel Fernando; representatives of the Church of Ceylon (Anglican).

Evangelical: the General-Secretary of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), Godfrey Yogarajah; the Vice President of the Foursquare Gospel Church, Pastor S.G Niranjan; and several pastors from evangelical and Pentecostal churches who have experienced persecution.

Buddhist: Mr. Tilak Karumaratne, founder of the Sihala Urumaya (National Heritage) party, which became the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU); Mr. Olcot Gunasakera, Dharma Vijaya Foundation; Gamini Perera, Past President of SUCCESS Colombo (member of drafting committee for anti-conversion legislation); Ramani Wickramaratne, former Secretary, The Centre for Buddhist Action; Jayantha Wickramasinghe, Convenor, Buddhist-Hindu Committee; Manohara De Silva, Lawyer; Dr. Anula Wijesundera, former member, Presidential Commission on Buddha Sasana; Professor Asanga Tilakaratne, Director, Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya.

Hindu: Sivanandini Duraiswamy, President, Hindu Council of Sri Lanka.

Civil Rights: Rohan Edirisinha and Dr. Devanesan Nesiah, Centre for Policy Alternatives

While we were mainly in the capital, Colombo, we also visited churches in Kandy, and a burned-out church in Kesbewa, a suburb of Colombo.

3. Religious and ethnic background

Of Sri Lanka's population of 20 million, at least 70 per cent are Buddhist, while just 8 per cent are Christian. The majority of Christians are Roman Catholic, amounting to approximately 6.5 per cent. Less than one per cent are Protestants, including mainline Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, Salvation Army and Presbyterian churches, and newer evangelical and Pentecostal churches such as the Assemblies of God, as well as sects such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. An estimated 7 per cent are Muslims.

It is important to note that almost all Buddhists are Sinhalese; almost all Hindus are Tamil; and Christians are the only group that crosses ethnic differences. Approximately 74 per cent of Sri Lanka's population is Sinhalese (69 per cent of which is Buddhist), while 18 per cent is Tamil (14 per cent of which is Hindu).

The Roman Catholic diocese of Colombo is the second largest in Asia after Manila, with 600,000 Catholics, 125 parishes, 312 priests and 42 religious congregations of men and women, according to the Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo, Bishop Marius Peiris. Mother Theresa of Calcutta's Missionaries of Charity have been granted 50 visas by the Government to work in Sri Lanka, which has not pleased the Buddhist groups.

4. Background to the current persecution

Sri Lankan Buddhists believe that when Buddha was on his deathbed, he said that Buddhism may not survive in India, but that he wanted the island of Sri Lanka to be set aside to protect Buddhism. Although there is no proof that he said this, this widely-held belief provides the first backdrop to the development of Buddhist nationalism and anti-Christian sentiment.

The second important backdrop is colonialism. Sri Lanka was ruled by three colonial powers for almost 450 years, and each successive colonising nation brought a brand of Christianity combined with the suppression of Buddhism. In 1505 the Portuguese invaded Sri Lanka; they were followed in 1658 by the Dutch; and then in 1795 by the British. All three undermined Buddhist culture in the name of Christendom, and as a result Christians are perceived as enemies. "We can't erase this from history. It is in people's minds. It is the ugly background through which Buddhists look at Christians," said the President of the Methodist Conference, Rev. Noel Fernando. Under colonial rule, the best schools were Christian schools, and they received more government funding, better staff, better equipment.

The third factor to note is the growth of the church. Although statistically there has been no growth in Christianity as a percentage of the population in the past 15 years, the Church, which had been declining, has grown in some areas. This growth has mainly been with the newer, freer, evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The growth of the evangelical churches challenged the mainline churches, which had become "administrative" according to Rev. Fernando, and as a result the mainline churches developed evangelical wings. The Methodist Church opened 60 new churches in the last 15-20 years.

In 1971 the Marxist grouping, the JVP, launched an armed insurrection, which resulted in much suffering. Those who were displaced, injured or suffering in other ways from the conflict looked for comfort. Buddhist priests never visited homes or offered counselling – but Christian priests went to people, prayed for them, comforted them, provided charitable assistance, and as a result many people were attracted to Christianity.

Ethnic and political tensions have plagued Sri Lanka since independence in 1948. The primary example of this has been the 20-year war between the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups, which resulted in 80,000 deaths and 800,000 internally displaced people. While the conflict has primarily been on ethnic and political lines, it should not be discounted as a factor in the recent anti-Christian activities. There is suspicion among some Buddhists and Hindus that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE), otherwise known as the "Tamil Tigers", were supported by the Roman Catholic Church. Some Buddhists even suspect that the LTTE's attack on the Dalada Maligawa or "Temple of the Tooth" in Kandy, Buddhism's holiest shrine in Sri Lanka, in 1998 was a Christian plot. While these allegations are completely without foundation, it is true that the Church has spoken up for the ethnic minorities and has been more active in Tamil communities. It is important to note, however, that while the Church has advocated devolution of power, it has never spoken in support of Tamil separatism.

In the 1950s, soon after independence, there was a re-awakening of Buddhist nationalism which translated into anti-Christian sentiments. According to Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, General Secretary of the National Christian Council (NCC), this has resurfaced in recent years due to the introduction of open-market-oriented policies which have exposed the country to Western culture – put simply, "CNN, BBC and Coca-Cola" – which has eroded traditional culture. Christianity is associated with the West, and therefore with this erosion of traditional values. The arrival of many foreign Christian groups, some of whom

work within the mainline churches and others who work outside, has contributed to this perception. Some Christian groups have been insensitive to local culture and shown an “aggressive urgency for evangelism”. There is a minority of Buddhists who believe that the missionaries are part of a “political agenda” by the West to “Christianize” Sri Lanka and destroy Buddhist culture.

In 1991 a Presidential Commission to enquire into the activities of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) provided another backdrop to today’s persecution of Christians. According to Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, this was a “very clear sign” of what was to come. Some members of the Presidential Commission, including the head, were anti-Christian. The Commission categorised churches as NGOs and conducted enquiries into their activities as a result. The Commission concluded that churches were involved in “unethical” conversions, defining any social projects conducted by a Christian group as “unethical”. A senior judge ruled that a social project carried out by the Church puts an undue obligation on recipients of humanitarian assistance to convert. Christians were denied the opportunity to defend themselves against these charges, and the allegations were published in the press. Following the Commission’s hearing in 1991, some churches were attacked and burned, although not on the same scale and intensity as today.

In 1992, a strongly anti-Christian Buddhist organisation called “Success” was established. The founders were intellectuals and lawyers, and they systematically studied Christian methods of mission, and began a movement to discredit the church with – in the words of one lay Christian businessman – “unfounded accusations of ‘unethical’ conversions”. The allegations were widely believed, although “they were not forthcoming with evidence to substantiate the allegations”.

A catalyst for the recent wave of anti-Christian violence was the death of the Venerable Gangodawila Soma Thero, a champion of Buddhist nationalism, who died in December 2003 in Russia. Although his autopsy confirmed he had died of natural causes, Sri Lankan Buddhist militants, and the media, pursued rumours of a Christian conspiracy, which resulted in a rally of Buddhist monks on December 29, 2003 calling for an end to “unethical” conversions and the immediate enactment of anti-conversion laws. Christian charities such as World Vision were attacked, and anti-Christian posters were displayed on the streets of Colombo. Mr. Olcot Gunasakera, Director of the Dharma Vijaya Foundation and Past President of Venerable Gangodawila Soma Thero’s temple, believes the monk was deliberately denied the medical treatment he would normally have received, implying a suspected Christian plot.

5. Unethical conversions and cultural insensitivity: the Buddhist and Hindu grievances

The main charge against Christians today in Sri Lanka is that they are involved in carrying out “unethical” conversions and are insensitive to the Buddhist and Hindu cultures. The term “unethical” appears to cover any social action carried out by an overtly Christian group, and ranges from accusations of blatant bribery to gain converts, to more subtle forms of humanitarian aid and development carried out as a normal part of the Church’s mission. Anecdotal reports presented by Buddhists and Hindus claim that some evangelical groups offer money, housing, clothing and medical care to people on the condition that they convert, and that such assistance is withdrawn if a person does not follow the church or group’s teachings. CSW has not been able to verify any of these reports. Evidence is mainly anecdotal, although the Buddhist and Hindu extremists are adamant that they have substantial evidence, including research papers and reports from the Presidential Commission on Buddha Sasana. A report in the *Ravaya* newspaper, which is claimed to be a non-Buddhist, non-Hindu newspaper, published on March 18, 2001 documenting evidence of unethical conversions was reportedly not disputed by the Church. CSW has not seen this report.

Much of the criticism of Christians by Buddhists and Hindus is directed at groups registered as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). According to Dr. Anula Wijesundera, a member of the Presidential Commission on Buddha Sasana in 2002/3 which investigated Christian activities, there are over 200 Christian NGOs in Sri Lanka. Many of these NGOs are explicitly evangelistic⁴. Dr. Wijesundera claims these groups have a planned strategy, with the stated aim of planting a church in every village. "They go to remote villages, buy or rent a small house, and start a church group. They start pre-schools where they indoctrinate little children under five years old. They visit the sick in houses, pray for them, then when the sick get better the Christians claim it was due to their prayers," she said. World Vision, an NGO regularly cited by Buddhist groups as an example of development work being used for conversion purposes, has founded 100 pre-school projects, Dr. Wijesundera claims.⁵ "My message is, if you want to help, don't come with ulterior motives." She supports the move to make Buddhism the state religion, and to introduce anti-conversion laws. She also calls on the Government to stop issuing visas to missionaries, to enquire into the finances of NGOs and to cancel licenses for NGOs which go beyond pure relief and development work.

According to Mr Tilak Karumaratne, founder of the Sihala Urumaya (National Heritage) party, which became the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), the main problem is that there is no control over the activities of NGOs, the majority of which are Christian. He also cites World Vision, accusing it of carrying out development work with strings attached. "They go into one hundred per cent Buddhist and Hindu areas, and do almost nothing in Christian areas," said Mr Karumaratne. "They are using poverty as a weapon. Poverty and unemployment should not be used as tools to convert." He called on the Government to introduce controls on NGOs, following the example of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and publish guidelines for NGOs.

Some Buddhists claim that Christians running day-care centres and nurseries use "the most unethical techniques to convert children". One anecdotal example, which we were not able to verify, is that nursery school teachers present children with two boxes, one with a picture of Buddha and one with a picture of Christ. They open the box with Buddha on it, and the box is empty. Then they encourage the children to open the box with Christ's picture on it, and the box is full of sweets. "The message this is intended to convey is that believing in Buddha is useless."

Buddhists also object to the noise levels of evangelical and Pentecostal Christian groups, and the unconventional nature of their churches. "They do not use church buildings. They use any old building – a private home in a residential area, sometimes even just a shed on some vacant land," claimed one Buddhist group. "They have prayer meetings which are vociferous, with loud music which does not fit into the culture of the local community."

Most Buddhists direct their allegations at the evangelical churches, not the Roman Catholic or mainline Protestant denominations. However, the President of the Hindu Council believes that in the north and eastern parts of Sri Lanka, where thousands are displaced as a result of the conflict between the Government and the LTTE, it is the Roman Catholic church that is most active in providing relief and, she argues, this is directly linked to conversions. "The LTTE is indebted to the Catholic Church. I have heard that [an LTTE commander] goes to a Catholic priest for a blessing before he launches an attack," she said. "In the north and east, Hindus are not permitted access to the refugee camps. Only Catholics are allowed in to help the refugees. Then many convert to Catholicism as a result." Many Buddhist and Hindu temples have been damaged or destroyed by the LTTE, and the President of the Hindu Council claims that in the north and east, out of 250 Hindu temples, half have been destroyed. "The popular belief is that the fundamentalist Christians are behind this," she said.

⁴ According to the US State Department Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, churches and temples are allowed to register as charitable organisations. There is no category for "religious group" and so such groups must register either as a corporation or a charity.

⁵ See article by Dr. Anula Wijesundera, "An Overview of Unethical Conversions", *The Buddhist Times*, September 2003.

The case of a Hindu man whose mother-in-law died sums up the Buddhist and Hindu perception of Christian activities in Sri Lanka, even when those activities are well-intentioned. After his mother-in-law's death, this man reportedly received a letter from a Christian group offering grievance counselling, and he reacted with fury: "They are vultures preying on vulnerability," he is reported to have exclaimed.⁶

In addition, Buddhists and Hindus claim that some evangelical groups have deliberately desecrated Buddhist and Hindu, and in some cases Roman Catholic, statues.

Some Buddhists increasingly felt that the Government was failing in its duty to protect Buddhism's "foremost" place in society, and a group of 3,000-4,000 Buddhist monks belonging to the JSS (National Buddhist Clergy organisation) resolved to form a political party, the JHU, to contest Parliamentary seats. The JHU presented candidates in all districts, and won nine seats.

While some Buddhist and Hindu groups are responding to the activities of evangelical Christians with extreme measures, other Buddhists are more tolerant. At least one Buddhist filed a petition in the Supreme Court as a private citizen, challenging the anti-conversion law on constitutional and human rights grounds. Professor Asanga Tilakaratne, Director of the Postgraduate Institute for Pali and Buddhist Studies, said he could "understand the desire, and the right, of evangelical groups to offer religious teachings, print and publish literature – but they should do so in a manner that is respectful."

6. "Unethical" conversions: the Christian perspective

The three major Christian groups, the Catholic Bishops Conference, the NCC and the NCEASL, admit that there may be some truth in the allegations made by the Buddhists and Hindus, but they argue that many of the allegations are wildly exaggerated, unsubstantiated and based on rumour. They also argue that legislation is not the way to address these concerns, and they are working on developing a proposal for alternative measures.

One allegation sometimes made but never proven is that foreign missionaries are paid a salary based on the number of conversions they make. Another unproven claim is that money is directly offered to people to convert. While these allegations sound exaggerated, what is more likely is that some missionary groups do link church growth to funding, and that as the church grows, they appeal to foreign donors for more funds.

The General Secretary of the NCC, Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, said that the term "unethical" conversions is more usually applied by Buddhists to situations where the Church is engaged in social action to improve the material lives of people through education, health care and other social action, and then people are attracted to the Church and convert as a result. The Church's intention may well be simply service to the community, rather than conversion, and the social action may be offered without conditions, but the Buddhists perceive it as "unethical" conduct.

According to the General Secretary of the NCEASL, Godfrey Yogarajah, the Church in Sri Lanka has "made mistakes" in the past and behaved in some cases in a way which is "insensitive to the culture", but many of the claims of unethical behaviour are wildly exaggerated. He has asked those who make these allegations to bring the cases of unethical conversions to the churches, with evidence, so that an investigation can be conducted, but so far there has been no response. For the past five years he has proposed that NCEASL representatives and Buddhists, Hindus or Muslims making these allegations conduct an enquiry into these alleged cases together, but there has also been no response to this offer.

Extreme evangelical and Pentecostal groups have contributed to the spread of these allegations, but so too has the presence of groups such as the Mormons, Moonies and Jehovah's Witnesses which go door-to-door. According to Godfrey Yogarajah, a few of the evangelical churches operate independently of the NCEASL or any other grouping, and

⁶ This anecdote was told second-hand to CSW.

therefore lack proper accountability and governance. Rev. Noel Fernando believes some ultra-evangelical groups are very aggressive in their methods. “We Christians do have a mandate to share the Gospel, but God has also given us a head to think about whether we will offend people when we present the Gospel. Understanding cross-cultural ministry is very important. We need to build a bridge of friendship with others – but some Christians simply barge in and want to force their faith upon others,” he said.

The NCC General Secretary said he had personally seen Buddhist and Hindu idols smashed up in temples. However, he said he has good relations with moderate Buddhists. The NCC was invited to attend the opening ceremony of a new temple, and in a speech the Buddhist monks referred to the tensions between Christians and Buddhists but emphasised that they could work together to resolve the issues. The monks welcomed the NCC leaders, but then issued a challenge to them, asking the Christian community to speak up against actions which insult Buddhism, including the recent production of merchandise, such as CDs, underwear and cookies, with images of the Buddha on them, and the new film *Hollywood Buddha*, which have caused a furore in Sri Lanka.

According to a Sri Lankan evangelical pastor, some of his fellow evangelicals have engaged in insensitive conduct. For example, each month Buddhists celebrate the full moon, or ‘Poya’, which is a sacred festival. This is a public holiday for all. While most churches will quietly use the day for a time of prayer and fasting, individually or collectively, some ultra-evangelicals have deliberately staged public open-air evangelistic events, on this important Buddhist day. This same evangelical pastor told us of a report, provided by another pastor, that a group of Koreans in Ragala offered T-shirts and clothing to people if they got baptised, and as a result 300 were baptised. For this Korean group, baptism itself was the condition, not simply conversion. CSW made several attempts to verify this report directly, but due to a poor telephone line we have so far been unsuccessful.

Another pastor admits that some evangelical and Pentecostal churches have adopted too much of a Western image. They play loud, Western music, the pastors wear suits and ties, and as a result the Church is perceived as a foreign religion, “not rooted in local soil”. The Church, he added, “is more Westernised than the rest of society.”

The Roman Catholic Church agrees with the Buddhist and Hindu groups that there is a problem related to conversion, although clergy differ on whether it should be termed “unethical”. The Catholic Church claims to have suffered from this phenomenon itself, with over 80,000 Catholics leaving the church to join evangelical groups. But the Catholic Church argues that legislation is not the solution. “The problem exists, although I would not go to the extent of calling it ‘unethical’. There is evidence that inducements are used to encourage people to convert,” said Bishop Frank Fernando, Bishop of Chilaw. “But that does not justify legislation. That is totally unacceptable. The Constitution says very clearly that we have a right to change, and practice, the religion of our choice. It is part of our religion to be able to proclaim it. Conversion should not be criminalised. If a person wants to change religion, he should have the complete freedom to do so.” Bishop Fernando said the JHU’s bill, even if amended, would still be unacceptable. He supports the proposal for an inter-religious council to hear claims of unethical conversions, and believes such a council should not even have litigation as an option. “Simply naming and shaming would be deterrent enough,” he argued.

The NCC has developed a Code of Ethics for Mission and the NCEASL has developed a document entitled “Good Practices in Ministry”, in response to the situation.⁷

7. Anti-Christian Violence

In 2003-2004 the NCEASL recorded 146 acts of violence against Christian churches and communities. In 2004 alone, 66 acts of violence have so far been reported⁸. This is a significant increase on previous years – in 2000 just 14 incidents were reported; in both

⁷ Copies available from CSW

⁸ For a full list of incidents documented by NCEASL, please contact the CSW office

2001 and 2002, 13 attacks were reported; but in 2003, the number of attacks on Christian gatherings rose to 91, and in the past year over 140 churches have been forced to close due to attack, intimidation and threats. The violence intensified significantly from November 2003-February 2004, and on Christmas Eve 2003, 20 churches were attacked in one night. Many churches celebrated Christmas with police and army protection. No Christians have been killed in recent years, but many have been badly beaten and harassed (see Appendix). However, in 1987 a Buddhist monk who converted to Christianity and became a Christian pastor was killed in Tissamaharama.

The attacks have mainly affected evangelical and Pentecostal churches, although Roman Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran and other mainline denominations have also been targeted. A building that formed part of a Christian children's home was completely burned down on December 30, 2003 in Madampe, and all the children's books and clothes were destroyed. In February this year, mobs wrote the words "the Church is finished" on the walls of Boraluwewa Apostolic Church. As recently as August 19th, the Foursquare Gospel Church's national convention was attacked with firecrackers which contained nails and pins, and one man was injured.

Methodist Churches in Attidiya (near Mount Lavinia), Neboda (southern Sri Lanka), Bibile and Buttala (central province) and Rathgama (southern Sri Lanka) have been attacked. In Neboda, a bomb was thrown into the Methodist Church on January 8, 2004 which caused damage to the Communion railing, windows, tiles, pews, roof and walls. No one was inside at the time. Methodist workers in each of these locations have been threatened, intimidated and beaten by Buddhist monks and mobs.⁹ In Minneriya, near the eastern province, a 40-year old Methodist church has grown significantly and now has 200-300 members. As a result of this growth, local Buddhists began to campaign against the church, and prevented it from purchasing new land to build a new building. The church also started to construct a house for the church worker, and three times the foundations for the new house were built, and then destroyed.

In early January, three Roman Catholic churches were attacked in Homagama, and one church was attacked in Embilibitiya, Ratnapura diocese. In one church the tabernacle was completely destroyed and the sacraments were scattered over the floor; in another, the pews were burned.

There has however been a significant decrease in violence since February this year, although there are signs that it may be increasing once again. The NCEASL believes that the anti-Christian groups were using the violence to "set the stage of religious disharmony" and provide an excuse for the introduction of anti-conversion legislation. While the violence was not officially sanctioned by the Government (and indeed the President of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, spoke out against anti-Christian violence in January¹⁰), some government ministers have appeared sympathetic to the Buddhist militants and police and local officials have failed to take measures to prevent the violence or bring the perpetrators to justice. With one exception – a minor case involving stone-throwing – no one has been charged or convicted of violence against Christians.

None of the Buddhist organisations we met condoned the attacks on churches, but they also suggested that many of the reports are exaggerated. The Buddhist groups we met with even claim that some churches have been destroyed by the evangelicals, in order to frame the Buddhists. "There is a suspicion that the church in Kesbewa was burned by the church members themselves," they claimed. Mr. Olcot Gunasakera, Director of the Dharma Vijaya Foundation, said: "Attacks have been orchestrated and filmed, to create the opinion that we are intolerant." There is absolutely no evidence to support this claim.

⁹ For further information about attacks on Methodist churches in Sri Lanka, contact CSW

¹⁰ CSW Press Release, *Sri Lankan President warns against anti-Christian violence*, January 19, 2004 – www.csw.org.uk

8. Anti-Conversion Law

The proposal for anti-conversion legislation was first made by the Hindu Cultural Affairs Minister Mr Maheshwaran after a visit to Tamil Nadu, India, in November 2002. Anti-conversion legislation had been introduced in five states in India, including Tamil Nadu, although after the elections in 2004, Tamil Nadu has repealed this law. This was the first time anti-conversion legislation was proposed by a Cabinet minister. Although most of the attacks on Christians have come from Buddhists, there have been some attacks by Hindus. However, the Tamil National Alliance, which is 80 per cent Hindu, opposes anti-conversion legislation proposed by Buddhists because they do not want to create a Buddhist hegemony.

While Buddhists are concerned also about the increase in the number of Islamic mosques in Sri Lanka, they are less eager to confront the Muslims, whose attitude is more aggressive than that of Christians. According to one Christian source, Muslims have adopted a position of inactive opposition to the legislation – they oppose it, but they have not campaigned against it, taking the view that if it is passed and anyone tries to enforce it, they will have to deal with it.

In 2003, a new political party consisting of Buddhist monks, called the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) was formed, and in the wake of the death of Venerable Gangodawila Soma Thero the JHU launched a campaign for the introduction of anti-conversion laws. In the General Election in April 2004, the JHU won nine seats in Parliament – the first time Buddhist monks have sat in Parliament – having contested the election on a platform of anti-conversion legislation. In June the JHU gazetted and then tabled a Private Member's Bill, called the Bill on Prohibition of Forcible Conversions of Religion, which makes it illegal to “convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by use of force or allurement or by any fraudulent means”. The definition of the term ‘force’ includes the “threat of religious displeasure or condemnation of any religion or religious faith”, and ‘allurement’ includes “any gift or gratification whether in cash or kind” and “grant of any material benefit, whether monetary or otherwise”.

Opponents of the legislation were given seven days from the time the bill was gazetted to challenge the legislation in the Supreme Court as violating Article 10 of the Constitution which protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion, “including the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of one's choice”. Over 20 organisations petitioned the Supreme Court, including the Catholic Bishops Conference, the NCC and the NCEASL, against the bill, and on August 10, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 3 and Section 4 (b) are in violation of the Constitution. Section 3 requires a person converting from one religion to another, and anyone involved in a conversion ceremony, to report to the Divisional Secretary of the area, while Section 4 (b) details the penalties for failure to report – imprisonment for up to five years and a fine of up to 150,000 Rupees. Minor amendments were also recommended by the Supreme Court to Sections 4 (a) and 5, relating to the institution of proceedings against an accused, and Sections 8 (a), 8 (c) and 8 (d) relating to the definitions of ‘allurement’, ‘force’ and ‘fraudulent means’, although the principles of these terms were accepted by the court¹¹.

The JHU was given two options: to redraft the bill in line with the Supreme Court ruling, or to proceed in its current form, which would require a two-thirds majority in Parliament and a referendum. According to a press report, the JHU has announced that they propose to redraft the legislation in line with the Supreme Court ruling, and introduce it again within six months. However, this news report has not been verified. The JHU have been actively lobbying the international community to support their action, meeting with foreign embassies in Sri Lanka and sending delegations to Canada, the USA, the UK, Australia and the United Nations in Geneva. It is widely believed that the JHU is funded by expatriate Sri Lankans, especially in Australia. “This determination is not the end of the whole enterprise,” said one lawyer. It would “not [have been] an impossibility” for the JHU

¹¹ See CSW Sri Lanka Briefing, September 2004 for more detail

to obtain a two-thirds majority in Parliament and a referendum, or to amend the legislation and win a simple majority.

The Government was also proposing a bill, but this appears to have been put on hold. On June 16, the Cabinet approved the 'Act of Safeguarding Religious Freedom', drafted by the Minister of Buddha Sasana, Mr Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, and the scope of this bill went further than the JHU's bill, banning conversions altogether. The bill is currently with the legal draftsman, but there have been no developments since the Cabinet meeting on June 16. It is unlikely to proceed. We have been told by reliable sources that the President of Sri Lanka, Mrs Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, is completely opposed to the legislation and has said that it will never be introduced while she is in office.

9. Constitutional Amendment

Sri Lanka's Constitution currently gives Buddhism the "foremost" place but it does not designate any religion as a 'state' or 'official' religion. During our visit it was confirmed that a proposal has been made to amend the Constitution, to make Buddhism the 'official' religion. A draft 'Act to Amend the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka', known as the 18th Amendment, has been prepared, and is believed to be with the Secretary-General of the Parliament. It could be placed on the order paper at any time. The draft includes the following clauses which are a cause for concern:

Article 9.1 – "The Official Religion of the Republic is Buddhism. Other forms of religions and worship may be practiced *in peace and harmony with Buddha Sasana*"

Article 9.2 – "All inhabitants of the Republic shall have the right to free exercise of their worship. *The exercise of worship shall not contravene public order or offend morals*"

Article 9.5 – "To convert Buddhists into other forms of worship or to spread other forms of worship among the Buddhists is prohibited"

Although the draft constitutional amendment protects "free exercise of worship", it grossly undermines religious liberty by prohibiting conversion for Buddhists. It contains no guarantee of freedom to adopt or practice a religion, and the qualifying words (in italics above) are ill-defined and therefore open to abuse.

10. Hate Campaigns

In addition to violence and legislation, extremist Buddhist groups have been actively using the media and street posters to distribute anti-Christian propaganda. Inflammatory stories in *The Buddhist Times*, under headlines such as "Buddhism and Hinduism under Assault" (September 2003), and "Conversion Under False Premises – World Vision" (November 2002) are regularly published. In the same article about World Vision, two sub-heads are especially provocative: "Kidnapping Children for 'God'?" and "Buddhist and Muslim Children on the Christian Auction Block?" In the *Lakbima Sinhala* newspaper, on October 27, 2003, a story was published under the headline: "Priest who claims to cure illnesses through prayer beats a woman to death". This story implied that the 'priest' in question was a Christian, but in fact the incident related to Muslims. The newspaper did not print a correction, despite appeals to do so. *Lankadeepa* newspaper, on December 17, 2003 published a story with the headline: "Soma Thero did not die; he was killed". Soma Thero was the Buddhist monk whose death caused a public outcry in December and resulted in an intensification of anti-Christian violence. Another article, in *Dhivayina*, on the same day also claimed there was a conspiracy to kill the monk. "He was admitted to hospital by a Christian pastor. It is a conspiracy." Another article in the same newspaper on the same day, by JHU

leader Ellawela Medhananda Thero, was headlined: “Secret plans to kill more [Buddhist] clergy and laymen.”¹²

One journalist said she did not regard the media as very balanced in its approach to this issue. Generally they have either failed to report the attacks, for fear of inciting more violence, or they have promoted the Buddhist point of view and justified the attacks.

Leaflets are distributed to the public with headlines such as: “Converting Buddhists to Christianity is a money making racket”, “Defeat the Christian invasion and defend the Buddha Sasana” and “Buddhists wake up! Protect Buddhism from the Christian invaders”. Anti-Christian posters also appear on street billboards, with slogans such as: “Buddhists, Sinhalese, stand up and protect Buddhism for future generations” (Kesbewa) and “Let us defeat the conspiracy to destroy pure Buddhism in Sri Lanka” (Kesbewa).

11. Alternatives to legislation

The NCC and the Catholic Bishops Conference have proposed an alternative means of addressing the grievances of others regarding alleged “unethical” conversions, and is working with non-Christians to develop an appropriate mechanism. The alternative measures are still being developed, but they consist of two ideas, an internal and an external. Internally, the NCC is proposing a self-regulatory mechanism for Christian denominations, a code of ethics for missions. Externally, the NCC is working with others to propose an inter-religious council which would be mandated to investigate and address religious tensions or complaints. The difficulty with this is that while the Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims are likely to accept Catholic and NCC representatives on such a body, they may refuse to accept representatives of newer, evangelical churches. If this is the case, it is proposed that when an allegation is made against a specific church or denomination, that denomination can nominate a member to the investigative group for that particular case.

An alternative to an “inter-religious council” would be a “Religious Harmony Commission” consisting of five eminent people, not active in any religious group, with perhaps a retired judge as Chairman. Impartiality would be the underlying guiding principle behind such a body, and it would have two terms of reference: that people have the freedom to continue in their religion, and that people have the freedom to change religion. While it would become an offence to conduct “unethical” conversions, “unethical prevention of conversion” should also be an offence. Frivolous and malicious false allegations should also be penalised.

12. International Advocacy

There is disagreement among Christians over the appropriateness of international advocacy. The NCC General-Secretary said that international advocacy can have “adverse effects” in the long-term, because it may further the image of Christians in Sri Lanka as “tools of the West”. He was optimistic that there was still some goodwill from Buddhists and that if it could be resolved internally, it would benefit the churches. However, he believes the international community should be kept informed of developments.

Others, however, disagree and believe international advocacy is important. The Secretary-General of the Catholic Bishops Conference, Bishop Marius Peiris, appealed to advocacy organisations to “make the world community, especially donor countries, know that there are violations of fundamental human rights in Sri Lanka, and that Sri Lanka is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights.” The Secretary of the Religious Liberty Commission of NCEASL said that international advocacy is necessary, but he emphasised it should be used “wisely”. Private conversations with Government leaders are preferable to public statements. He also emphasised that it is important to exhaust all local remedies to the situation before taking serious international action. If international

¹² Copies of newspaper articles, leaflets, and photographs of posters are available from CSW

action is taken now, the Government response would simply be that not all local remedies have been exhausted. Local legal measures to address the almost 150 incidents of violence against Christians which have not been addressed by the police would include asking Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission to take up the issue. The Penal Code should be applied, because under Article 82-89 of the Criminal Law the invasion of places of religious worship is an offence.

Advocacy has had good results already, according to several sources. When the Cabinet approved the Government's draft anti-conversion law, the Foreign Minister urged the Cabinet to be careful, noting that the international community had already expressed concern and that such a law would harm Sri Lanka's international reputation. As a result, the draft bill is still with the legal draftsman and appears to be on hold. We were told by a separate source that a copy of the British House of Commons Early Day Motion (EDM 210: Attacks on Christians in Sri Lanka), which has been signed by over 150 British MPs (initiated by CSW), was passed to the Foreign Minister, who passed it directly to the President.

13. Conclusions and Recommendations

In our approach to this visit, and in the preparation of this report, we have sought above all to be balanced, to hear and reflect as broad a range of views as possible, to meet all major groups involved in and concerned about the rising inter-religious tensions in Sri Lanka. We believe we have succeeded in doing this. Indeed, several of the Buddhist groups told us that we were the first international organisation to seek to hear their views. On this basis, we recognise that, even based on only anecdotal evidence, Buddhists and Hindus have been hurt by insensitive conduct on the part of some Christian groups. We urge all who are engaged in Christian activities in Sri Lanka to take guidance from the main Christian groups, the NCEASL, the NCC and the Catholic Bishops Conference, and to adopt an attitude of humility, servitude and cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, we urge all Buddhist, Hindu and Christian groups to develop meaningful dialogue regarding appropriate alternatives to legislation which would safeguard religious freedom whilst addressing the Buddhist and Hindu grievances.

However, whilst recognising the problem, we have to conclude that any legislation which restricts or prohibits the freedom for a person to choose, or change, their religion, or which restricts or prohibits the freedom for religious groups to propagate their faith, would be a serious infringement of religious liberty and human rights. Furthermore, any act of violence, vandalism, destruction, harassment or discrimination, false or malicious allegations or hate-based propaganda, directed against any religious group is unacceptable. We urge the Sri Lankan authorities to bring the perpetrators of attacks against Christian churches, homes and other buildings, and against Christian pastors and believers, to justice. Furthermore, we urge Buddhist and Hindu leaders to take action to discourage and prevent further violence or harassment of Christians. We call on the international community, including the British Government, the European Union, the United States and the United Nations, to continue to monitor the situation in Sri Lanka and, where necessary to continue to raise concerns with the Sri Lankan Government and with Buddhist and Hindu groups. Specifically, we hope that anti-conversion laws will not be introduced, that the constitutional amendment to make Buddhism the state religion will not be proposed, and that non-legislative measures can be agreed between the religious communities to address concerns.

14. Appendix: Interviews with persecuted pastors

14.1. *Pastor John Dickson, Covenant Life Ministries, Ambakota (40km from Kandy)*

Pastor John Dickson established the Covenant Life Ministries church in 1986, in Ambakota, 40km from Kandy. The church now has 80 members, and the church building was built on land owned by an elderly Christian woman who lived in the next-door house. The majority of the local population are Hindus, but there are also Buddhists.

In 2002, local people threatened to burn the church and chase him away, but nothing happened. In June this year, the woman who owned the land died, and her daughter-in-law, a Buddhist, moved into her house. Soon after moving in, according to Pastor Dickson, this lady started harassing the pastor, trying to provoke an argument. "She used bad language, and played loud music during our church services," he said. She also wanted the land for other purposes and so wanted the church to leave. On June 15, Pastor Dickson asked these neighbours to turn down the music volume, and as a result three people attempted to assault him, but he was protected by church members. Then villagers came and threw rocks at the church, and tried to force open the door. The church members were able to block the door and prevent the attackers from breaking in. Subsequently the attackers went to the police and filed a complaint against the pastor, accusing him of insulting Buddhism in his preaching. They also claimed he and his church members had dragged Buddhist villagers into his church and assaulted them. One Buddhist, they alleged, had been beaten so badly that he could not walk any more. The pastor then went to the police, and found them to be very fair. "The police did not believe the allegations made against me," Pastor Dickson said. However, soon after that, the police attitude changed completely, and Pastor Dickson suspects that the village Buddhist monk put pressure on the police. "The police said that the monk calls them often, and that they cannot go against the monk," he claims. The police told the pastor that the monk had called him to meet him at the temple, but Pastor Dickson knew many instances where pastors had been beaten up in temples, and so he proposed that they meet at the police station instead.

The church building is 20 ft by 30 ft, and adjoins the neighbouring house. When the elderly lady who owned the land lived in the house, the church was able to use the house during services, as a place for children and mothers to go if needed. However, now they are not able to use the house. The police advised Pastor Dickson that the remedy for the tension with the new neighbour was to erect a fence between the house and the church. "I thought this would be a good idea. I did not realise it was a trap," said the pastor. He built the fence, but the neighbours complained to the police that the fence obstructed the entrance to the house, and prepared to press charges. He told them he did not want to dispute this in court, and offered to discuss it and resolve the matter out of court. They requested that he open up the fence to provide an entrance between the church land and their house, which he duly did. However, they were still not satisfied. Pastor Dickson was called to the police station, and his neighbours said that what they really wanted was a wider road. So the pastor agreed to knock down one wall of the church building, and bring it back by 3 ft to give them more space. "Everyone seemed happy," he said.

This was not the end of the issue, however. Having taken 3 ft off the church and brought the fence in, the space available to accommodate the congregation for services was reduced by about 4 ft. The police suggested that the pastor extend the church on the other side, which would not intrude into anyone's property. Most church members have day jobs, so in the evening after work they would come and help with the extension. On August 25th, at night whilst building the extension, a mob armed with swords, clubs and rocks attacked the church members. Most of the church members were able to defend themselves and flee into the church building, which was then pelted with rocks. For three hours they stayed inside the building until the police arrived. When the police came, they identified damage to the roof and walls, and light bulbs broken. Although the pastor filed a complaint against the attackers, the police have taken no action. Instead, the police are pursuing charges against the pastor's brother. The police also asked the pastor and his brother to sign a blank sheet of paper, and threatened that if they did not sign, they would be thrown in prison. Pastor Dickson and his brother signed these blank sheets. "I still do not know what the charges are," the pastor said.

On August 30, the court was scheduled to hear the case against the pastor and his brother. They still did not know what the charges were – whether the case was still related strictly to the dispute over the boundaries, or whether a new allegation that the church presented a nuisance to the neighbourhood would be the focus of the hearing. But when the pastor arrived at court and asked court officials for details on the day of the hearing, a policeman told him that the case would be postponed and would not be heard that day. This was untrue. The hearing took place, but because the policeman told the pastor it would not take place, neither the pastor nor his lawyer were present. The court then issued proceedings against the pastor for contempt of court.

The case then took a new turn when one lawyer claimed that the land on which the church is built actually belongs to the Mahaweli authority, and was therefore government land. Three days before the next court hearing, two Mahaweli authority officials told the pastor to tear down the church building. They warned him that if he tears it down himself, he can take the building materials, but if he refused, the authority would tear it down and take the materials away. They said they would file a case against him for erecting an unauthorised structure. Pastor Dickson has a document which proves that the land was purchased legally, but he does not have any deeds to the property. No one in the area has deeds to their land, because much of the land was used by the Mahaweli authority to resettle displaced people.

Pastor Dickson said that a police officer had told his neighbours, in his presence, that if they wanted to get rid of the church, violence was not the way to do it, but they could pursue legal means and petition the government, the police and the 'Grama Sevaka' or local village official.

He has also purchased another plot of land in a nearby town, in case he is forced to move, but local people in that area have been stirred up to protest against this. The man who sold him the land is a Muslim, and once he realised that the pastor might build a church on this land, he offered to buy the land back at a higher price than he had sold it for.

"No one listens to my story – even my lawyer will not listen," said Pastor Dickson. "You are the first people to sit and listen, and it encourages me greatly."

[Note: Since this interview, the NCEASL was able to retain an experienced lawyer who was able to settle the matter with the neighbours peacefully. The case with the Mahaweli Authority is pending.]

14.2. Pastor Nagarajah Solomon, 38, The Good News Church, Kundasale, 8km east of Kandy, central Sri Lanka

Pastor Solomon was born into a Hindu family, and converted to Christianity at the age of 21. From 1993-96, he ran a church in Palle Kelle, near Kandy, which grew from 80 to 300 members, and they built a church building. Then, after attending a Discipleship Training School with Youth With a Mission (YWAM), he started his own church in 1998. They met in the YMCA building in Kandy. Initially he started with 12 baptised members, but over 15 months this grew to 40. The Buddhist group SUCCESS took over the YMCA building and Pastor Solomon's group had to move out. However, he received funding from a Korean Methodist minister, and started a church in Katugastota, a few kilometres from Palle Kelle. He and his team engaged in house to house evangelism in Katugastota and three other villages.

Pastor Solomon then began a church in Doragamuva, near Meegammana, 10km from Kandy, with 20 people from five families. The Buddhists in the area, however, did not like the presence of the church. On February 14, 2004 a Buddhist monk came with 15 people and took two church workers to the temple, where they locked them up and beat them with fists and sticks. Six monks in robes assaulted them inside the temple. Then the monks summoned more than 200 people from village and provoked them by saying these people were destroying their community and culture. The villagers assaulted the pastor and friend

when they arrived to sort the situation out and they too were taken into the temple where they were interrogated for one and a half hours. Five monks interrogated them while the mob was still outside. They were told they must ask the Christian converts to come to the temple, renounce Christianity and return to Buddhism. The pastor said that it was their decision whether to renounce their faith and return to Buddhism, not his – and the monks continued to beat him. He was told to tell the villagers that they would not return to the village to continue their ministry. Then the Buddhists took the pastor and his church workers out of the temple and told the crowd: “These are fundamentalists. You should not tolerate them but should immediately attack them.”

The police arrived, dispersed the crowd, arrested Pastor Solomon and the other three and took them to the police station. The monks followed. On the night of the arrest, Solomon said he forgave his attackers. He told one of the monks: “I have forgiven you and forgotten it all. I have nothing against you and no anger against you.” They spent the night at the police station.

On Sunday, February 15 the police released them but warned them not to return to the villages. Later that day, Pastor Solomon returned to Katugastota, where Christians continued to meet. On February 27, the church was attacked and the doors smashed down. In April, Pastor Solomon received threatening letters telling him to stop disturbing the peace¹³. In May, his church was told by a senior police officer that they could continue their ministry in the village. The police said that nobody should stop preaching because they were not breaking any laws. The police did not support the Christians, but wanted to uphold fundamental rights. The church has continued to meet, but they vary their meeting times and venues. “We are very careful. I go into the village on my motorbike so I am highly mobile,” said Pastor Solomon. “The situation is constant now, but we are not out of trouble. They could organise another mob assault.”

14.3. Pastor Nirnanjan, General Supervisor and Vice President of the Four Square Gospel Church, Sri Lanka

The Four Square Gospel Church (FSGC) was established in 1979, and now has 1,041 meeting places across Sri Lanka. Pastor Nirnanjan started working with the church in 1982, and in 1986 it was incorporated and registered. In recent years, the FSGC has suffered a variety of attacks, including attacks on meeting places, pastors and church members and death threats. In some places, the landlords of venues where meetings are taking place are pressured into forcing the FSGC not to use the venue. This results in the FSGC losing its deposit.

On Friday, September 17 this year, an incident took place in Kiribathagoda, 20km north-east of Colombo. Pastor Stanley Lawrence and his wife went to a house on a motorbike. After finishing the hour-long meeting at 5.30pm, they left, but as they drove away on their motorbike they were stopped by a mob of about 10 people, pushed off the motorbike and attacked with oars. Mud was thrown at them. As they were wearing helmets, they were not badly hurt. The mob shouted: “You are Pentecostals and fundamentalists. This is a Buddhist village. Stop coming here. If you come back, we will kill you.” The owner of the house went to the police, but did not press charges because her husband, who is not a Christian, discouraged her from doing so and the police advised her it would cause difficulties for her in the village if she did.

Pastor Nirnanjan advised Pastor Lawrence to send others into the village instead of going personally, and to vary the days and timings of visits. Earlier, in December 2003, after the death of a famous Buddhist monk which provoked a fresh wave of anti-Christian violence, Pastor Nirnanjan advised all FSGC pastors not to make a lot of noise during church services and meetings, not to clap, in some cases not to sing and not to carry Bibles on the

¹³ Document available from CSW

roads, in order to minimise the risk of becoming easy targets. Churches were also advised to rotate times and days of meetings and avoid doing anything that would rouse local Buddhist sentiments.

On January 3, 2004 Pastor Niranjan's house in Pitte Kotte, 10km south of Colombo, was stoned. Although he believed few people in the area knew he was a pastor, he was registered on the electoral roll as a pastor and that may be why his house was attacked. Previously, pastors used to carry an identity card that identified them as 'pastors', but now few wish to carry such identification.

In another incident, a FSGC pastor was deliberately framed in a way designed to stir animosity towards him. The pastor's neighbour gave a pile of dirty old rags to a child, and told the child it was a present from the pastor. When the child's father discovered this, he was furious and went straight to the pastor to demand an explanation. Fortunately, the pastor asked the child who had given him the rags, and the child answered truthfully. The child's father believed his son and the incident was over. But it had the potential to have turned into an unpleasant situation.

On August 20 this year, the FSGC held its annual convention at the University of Kandy in Peradinya, near Kandy, with 1,400 participants, a combination of pastors and church members. They obtained official permission, and organised their own security. The FSGC President, Pastor Lesley, was under tight security because there had been previous attacks on him. On the third day of the conference, a group came and threw five homemade nail bombs into the conference venue. These were firecrackers, with nails and pins mixed together. They were thrown from several directions. One person was injured in his leg. One bomb failed to explode. The police arrived immediately. Fearing a further attack the next day, the FSGC ended the conference early. However, they knew that six monks had been watching the movements from a nearby hillside and monitoring the activities. The incident was reported on Swarna Vahini Television, but the television report argued that the FSGC had obtained permission to use the premises under false pretences, claiming it was a family development programme, and that it should not have been approved by the government. The FSGC has lodged a complaint to the television station, but although Swarnawahini promised to broadcast a correction, it has not appeared yet.

"We fear the future will be tough, tougher than in the early days," said Pastor Niranjan. "In the early days we were very safe, as we only met in homes, not churches, but now the Buddhist monks are aiming at the other churches also."

In response to criticisms of unethical conversions, the pastor said: "Any conversion, when people accept Christ, the monks lose their support from the people because they don't feed them any more." [Buddhists provide the temple monks with dhana (food) and when they convert to Christianity, they often stop providing food to the monks. The monks are dependent on the people for their food]. He also dismissed allegations that the church gives money to people to build new houses, in exchange for conversion, and that it is destroying the culture. "This is not true and they cannot prove it."

In March this year, a meeting was held between the churches, the police and the Buddhist monks at the FSGC's headquarters in Nugegoda, 15km south of Colombo. This was one of many such meetings held across the country at the previous government's instigation. The Buddhists showed letters and vouchers allegedly used by Jehovah's Witnesses to lure converts. In some of these meetings Buddhist monks threatened church leaders. An FSGC representative asked the Buddhists to prove that the FSGC were "fundamentalists", and the Buddhists left the meeting.

In Horana, 35 km south of Colombo, the police called a meeting and the Buddhists used the recommendations for action against the church detailed in the 2002 Presidential Commission on Buddha Sasana report. The police ordered FSGC, AoG and Lutheran churches to stop meeting immediately. Ceylon Pentecostal Church and Catholics had registered for permission to build a church, but others had not. They were meeting in rented homes. Police threatened to close them down despite constitutional guarantees on meeting in homes. The Buddhists suggested that they close down all other churches and that

all Christians go to worship in the local Catholic church. The Buddhists also drove a van with loudspeakers around the village announcing that the church activities had been stopped and that if anyone was found to be engaging in church meetings, they should be reported to the monk.

The FSGC church in Horana has grown from just 15 people in January to 100 today. It meets in six different groups. When the police realised that the church was scattered, they become more friendly and offered protection for the church members' homes.

Before the General Election earlier this year, there was a Deputy Inspector of Police who was responsible specifically for investigating religious tensions, violence and other problems. However, since the election, this mandate has been discontinued. It is recommended that the Inspector General of Police reinstate this role.

In a special appeal for prayer, Pastor Niranjana said: "People around the world need to pray for strength and stability for our church and wisdom to do the correct thing. Please pray too for Christians not to reach out in a violent or a wrong way in the face of attack."

14.4. Pastor Kumara, Assemblies of God Church, Kesbawa

Pastor Kumara founded the Assemblies of God (AoG) church in Kesbawa in 1984, and purchased land and established a church building last year. He has been physically attacked once, in Anuradhapura in 2000, when a mob, accompanied by monks and a government official, threatened and then assaulted him with a club. One man punched him in his face with a ringed finger, and he lost a front tooth as a result.

In the first half of 2003, the church was subjected to many attacks, usually mobs throwing rocks, stones, burned oil, at the church. These attacks continued so much that the church decided to have people on guard at the church building at night. Then in August, men on motorbikes, with their faces covered in masks, threw homemade bombs at the church. An 18-year old boy was injured on his arm and back. After this attack, the AoG leadership decided it was not safe for the pastor to remain, and so he was relocated. On September 24, 2003 at Lam, the church was completely burned down. The CSW team visited the site almost a year later on this visit. Photographs are available from the CSW office.

Pastor Kumara's home has been circled by people at night time on several occasions, and he has been followed in his car. Hate literature has also been distributed. A monk, Kamburupitiye Nandarathana, wrote an article falsely accusing the pastor of being Tamil and supporting terrorism – in fact Pastor Kumara is Sinhalese. (This same monk told the pastor that if he did not move out of the village, he would sit outside his gate and fast unto death.) An article in a women's tabloid newspaper, Rajina, claimed, in a story headlined "If you want to see God you need to come to church naked", that a pastor in Ganenulla had told female members of his church that they needed to come to church naked if they wanted to see God. The NCEASL has investigated this case and found no evidence for this story. But the clipping of this article was distributed in Kesbawa, with the slogan "From Gallenwe to Kesbawa" handwritten on top.

Anti-Christian posters have also been displayed in the area. The police tried to stop some of the posters being put up, and took down some, but several have not been taken down. One poster called on "Buddhists and Sinhalese to stand up and protect Buddhism for future generations"; another proclaimed "Let's beat the conspiracy to destroy Buddhism in Sri Lanka"; another called all Buddhists to a special meeting in the temple, to discuss "the people's protection". It said "if you cannot come, someone from your household must attend". It was soon after this meeting that the church was burned. "Kesbawa is a hotbed of anti-Christian activity," he said.

14.5. Pastor A.G. Chandrapala, Assemblies of God Church, Yakkala (Gampaha District)

Pastor Chandrapala founded the church in 1999, and in May 2003 it moved into a new building in Yakkala. On May 16, after the service, a group of Buddhist monks, accompanied by 60 lay people, came and verbally abused and threatened the pastor. Then on May 23, a mob lay in wait during the church service and stopped one church member as he left at the end of the service. They interrogated and assaulted him. Two people burst into the premises and started smashing furniture. The pastor called the police, who, with the help of church members, identified the attackers and were able to arrest one person. The police took statements and fingerprints. The damage done to the church furniture, pulpit, guitar and refrigerator amounted to 15,000 Rupees (£100). The police provided two police officers for protection for future Sunday services. However, when the temple monk was informed that the church was under police protection, the monks rang the temple bell summoning all the villagers to the temple. This led to a large protest outside the church. Subsequently 15 police officers, along with the Headquarters Inspector, came to meet the pastor, and told him that the situation was no longer under their control. They said all they could do was to try to initiate a discussion between the Christians and Buddhists to settle the matter. They told him they could no longer provide protection, and advised the pastor to move out. He was offered 42,000 Rupees (£290) to pay the advance on the rent and move out, but the landlord refused to return the deposit for the building. The pastor said he would not move out until he had received his deposit money back, and that the church would continue to meet. So far there have been no further problems and he has continued the church activities in the area. The police have instigated action against the attackers, and the case is ongoing. The first hearing was held on September 7, and three people were identified as the attackers. The next hearing will be held in November. The pastor believes that while the case is still being considered, the villagers are afraid to attack again, but they harass the church in other ways, particularly by playing Buddhist preaching on cassettes during the church service. The church has received no compensation for the damage caused in the attack.

15. Abbreviations

FSGC	Four Square Gospel Church
JHU	Jathika Hela Urumaya
NCC	National Christian Council
NCEASL	National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka