

THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT AGAINST ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

IMADR Oral Statement: 26th session of the Human Rights Council
Item 4: General Debate

19 June 2014

Thank you Mr. President,

We strongly condemn the violence in South Western Sri Lanka which caused the death of 3 persons and the serious injury of around 80 people. It is outrageous that the Government of Sri Lanka ignored our previous appeals and allowed the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) to continue to operate committing hate crimes against Muslims and Christians. In her report to the Council last March, the High Commissioner referred to the emergence of religious extremism and urged the Government to take measures against hate speech and such intolerance. Unfortunately, some member States dismissed our calls by categorising these incidents as sporadic violence.

Together with other civil society organisations, we have consistently taken the position that the failure of the Government to facilitate an environment towards reconciliation and lasting peace based on the LLRC recommendations would lead to intensified tensions again. We have called the Government to take actions against the BBS and promulgate laws to deal with their hate speech and violent activities. The BBS has carried out attacks against mosques and business establishments of Muslims and intensified its campaign against other religious communities including Christians. Government high officials, especially the Defence Secretary, have been directly involved in supporting the BBS through participating in their public events.

It is shocking to note that the Government, which was able to deploy the armed forces against the unarmed villagers to safeguard the interest of a corporate entity during the Rathupaswala incident, did not take any emergency measure to protect the Muslims with the same sense of urgency. The recently established special police unit aimed to deal with religious clashes is only a cosmetic measure to appease the international community.

We urge the Government of Sri Lanka to immediately investigate the heinous crime and adopt measures to prevent the repetition of such violence. We call upon the international community to support the human rights defenders working against religious extremism in the country. We also believe that this is an opportunity for all the Council member States to support the effective implementation of the resolution on "*Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka*" (A/HRC/25/L.1/Rev.1).

Thank you Mr. President.