



# After Sri Lanka's Easter Bombings: Reducing Risks of Future Violence

Asia Report N°302 | 27 September 2019

Headquarters

**International Crisis Group**

Avenue Louise 149 • 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 502 90 38 • Fax: +32 2 502 50 38

[brussels@crisisgroup.org](mailto:brussels@crisisgroup.org)

*Preventing War. Shaping Peace.*

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
I. Introduction .....	1
II. The Attacks and Immediate Aftermath.....	3
A. Disorientation and Division at the Top .....	3
B. Uncovering the Jihadist Network.....	5
III. Looking Back: Could More Have Been Done? .....	9
A. Politicised and Complacent Intelligence and Policing .....	9
1. Intelligence failures .....	9
2. Policing failures .....	11
3. Theories of failure .....	12
B. Should Muslim Leaders Share the Blame?.....	13
IV. After the Attacks: An Anti-Muslim Backlash .....	18
A. Political Attacks and Exploitation .....	18
B. Renewed Anti-Muslim Violence .....	20
C. Other Actions Against Muslims.....	22
1. Arrests and rumours .....	22
2. Boycotts and threats .....	23
3. Dress restrictions.....	24
V. Inside the Muslim Community: The Challenges of Reform.....	26
A. The Critique of “Arabisation” .....	27
B. Madrasa Reform and Religious Intolerance.....	28
C. Reforming Muslim Family Law .....	29
VI. What the Government Should Do (and Not Do) Now .....	31
A. Reforms to the Intelligence and Policing System.....	31
B. Tracking and Monitoring Threats .....	31
C. Counter-radicalisation and Countering Violent Extremism .....	32
D. Ending Impunity.....	33
VII. Conclusion .....	35
APPENDICES	
A. Map of Sri Lanka .....	36
B. About the International Crisis Group .....	37
C. Crisis Group Reports and Briefings on Asia since 2016 .....	38
D. Crisis Group Board of Trustees .....	40

# Principal Findings

**What's new?** Easter Sunday's bombings produced Sri Lanka's deadliest single day of terrorist violence and its first experience of Muslim-on-Christian mass violence. Although the attackers were fringe actors, politicians and Sinhalese nationalists have used the bombings to justify actions that have harassed and humiliated the broader Muslim community.

**Why does it matter?** Harsh and unfair treatment of law-abiding Muslim citizens risks alienating large portions of the community and could raise sectarian tensions in Sri Lanka to yet more dangerous levels. It also diverts attention away from the need to address weaknesses in the state security apparatus exposed by the Easter attacks.

**What should be done?** The government should depoliticise its approach to intelligence and policing so that it can better respond to future threats. It should end practices and policies that demonise innocent members of the Muslim community, and protect Muslims from violence – including by holding accountable those who commit crimes against them.

## *Executive Summary*

Five months after Easter Sunday's devastating jihadist bombings killed more than 250 and injured roughly twice as many, the situation in Sri Lanka has only become more dangerous. Although the small group of Islamic State-inspired militants was clearly at the far fringes of Muslim society, and although no evidence suggests that any remain at large, Sri Lanka's peaceful Muslim population now confronts a significant backlash. Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists have waged a campaign of violence and hate while a weak and divided political leadership has either stood idly by or, worse, egged on the abuse. Meanwhile, political divisions within government have obstructed efforts to reform dysfunctional police and intelligence services that failed to head off the attacks, despite warnings from foreign partners. Rather than taking the country back toward the cliff of conflict, Sri Lanka's leaders should focus their attention on repairing the state's broken security apparatus, and stop alienating law-abiding Muslim citizens who represent 10 per cent of the population.

While threats are always easier spotted in hindsight, the Easter attacks nevertheless represented a massive security failure by the Sri Lankan state. Foreign intelligence services had warned their Sri Lankan counterparts of a significant imminent attack on churches weeks before the bombing, even naming the radical Salafi preacher, M.C.M. Zaharan, who helped organise the attacks. Not all of the small group of jihadists involved in the bombings were identified in advance, but Zaharan was known to Sri Lanka's police. The anti-terrorism division of the police had been tracking him since the faction he led brutally attacked followers of a moderate Sufi Muslim cleric in 2017, and had warrants out for his arrest.

A less dysfunctional government might have still failed to connect incoming intelligence with the information on Zaharan in Sri Lankan police files, but it would have tried much harder. The Sri Lankan government's complacency has several possible explanations. Senior leaders might have had suspicions about the sources of the intelligence. Police and intelligence officers might have discounted the possibility of mass jihadist violence in a country that had never seen it before. And national security agencies caught in an ugly political tug of war between President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe almost certainly suffered from too little coordination and too much politicisation.

What has happened since the attacks is as concerning as what happened before. To begin with, the government has done little to address the dysfunction that likely obstructed police and intelligence services from making deductions that could have prevented the attacks. The rivalry between Sirisena and Wickremesinghe persists and is now complicating investigations into the attacks and the failure to prevent them.

Worse still, with senior politicians refusing to take meaningful responsibility for the attacks, public anger has focused on the nation's nearly two million Muslims, whose leaders are accused of not foreseeing or preventing the radicalisation of Zaharan and his cadre. In fact, Muslim community leaders, and at least some politicians, repeatedly rejected Zaharan's preaching and warned police and government leaders several times about the growing threat he and his followers posed. And while the bombings have led some Muslims to undertake a process of "introspection" about

the changing nature of Muslim culture in Sri Lanka – calling for closer monitoring of foreign influence in religious schools and other institutions, for one – Zaharan was an extraordinary outlier in a community that has been notably peaceful amid Sri Lanka's political turmoil.

Nonetheless, the post-Easter backlash against Sri Lankan Muslims has been harsh and dangerous. Nationalist politicians and religious leaders from the majority Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-religious group have used the Easter attacks and the fears they provoked to reinforce a narrative blaming Muslims collectively for growing “extreme”. The government has allowed militant Sinhalese groups purportedly defending Buddhism to ramp up their post-war anti-Muslim campaign of economic boycotts, media pressure, and organised violence with impunity. The months since the Easter bombings have seen island-wide boycotts of Muslim businesses, vigilante attacks on women wearing *hijab*, and old and new media rumour campaigns by Sinhala nationalist groups alleging Muslim plots to sterilise Sinhalese women. Two days of devastating riots targeting Muslim businesses and mosques in mid-May raised fears of an island-wide pogrom like the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots that led to all-out war.

Yet, instead of condemning the attacks and investigating the perpetrators, President Sirisena chose instead to release from prison a prominent extremist monk, Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera, who promptly joined anti-Muslim protests, issued threats, and rallied other monks to demand “a government that will protect the Sinhalese”. The use of emergency laws to arrest hundreds of Muslims on flimsy or fabricated grounds has seen the Sri Lankan state, for the first time, move from failing to protect Muslims to actively violating their rights.

Given that members of the small group behind the Easter bombings all appear to be dead or arrested, public fears of further jihadist attacks in the short term have receded. But with dysfunction in the security services left largely unaddressed, and the country's political and Sinhalese Buddhist religious leadership either oblivious or indifferent to the ill will they may be sowing with the nation's law-abiding Muslim citizens, Sri Lanka is nonetheless taking steps down a dangerous path. It is past time to reverse course, lower communal tensions and focus on the critical and unfinished work of knitting together a fractured country.

**Colombo/Brussels, 27 September 2019**

# After Sri Lanka's Easter Bombings: Reducing Risks of Future Violence

## I. Introduction

---

Coming almost exactly ten years after the end of Sri Lanka's bloody civil war – which pitted government forces against a Tamil insurgency led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) – Easter Sunday's Islamic State-inspired bombings shook a country struggling to find its way toward a stable peace.<sup>1</sup> The peaceful transition of power in 2015 from the authoritarian presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa to the administration of his democratically elected, reform-oriented successor, Maithripala Sirisena, raised hopes that the country might be ready to turn the page on a fractious and divided past.

But after an initial period of important reforms, hopes for Sirisena and the “national unity” coalition he led with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe have disappeared. As the country's economy has sagged amid high external debt and large budget deficits and pledges to root out corruption have gone nowhere, the government's popularity has waned. Most of the government's key commitments made to the UN Human Rights Council in 2015 and the transitional justice agenda built on it remain unfulfilled.<sup>2</sup> Extensive efforts to draft a new constitution have come to nothing, with Sirisena eventually calling to reverse the signature accomplishment of his own administration: the 2015 enactment of the 19th amendment, which diluted an overconcentration of presidential power.<sup>3</sup> In October 2018, he tried to oust Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and replace him with the very man whose anti-democratic legacy Sirisena had campaigned against in 2015, Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Sirisena did not succeed in removing Wickremesinghe – whom the courts restored to his position in December 2018 – but his extra-constitutional manoeuvring shattered the already strained coalition between his Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP), leaving the latter to lead the

---

<sup>1</sup> Previous Crisis Group analysis most relevant to Sri Lanka's post-Easter crisis include: Crisis Group Commentary, “Sri Lanka's Easter Bombings: Peaceful Coexistence Under Attack”, 23 April 2019; Crisis Group EU Watch List 2018, First Update, “Militant Buddhists and Anti-Muslim Violence in Sri Lanka”, 15 May 2018; Crisis Group Commentary, “Buddhist Militancy Rises Again in Sri Lanka”, 7 March 2018; Crisis Group Asia Reports N°286, *Sri Lanka's Transition to Nowhere*, 16 May 2017; N°141, *Sri Lanka: Sinhala Nationalism and the Elusive Southern Consensus*, 7 November 2007; N°134, *Sri Lanka's Muslims: Caught in the Crossfire*, 29 May 2007. For analysis of the nearly three-decade civil war and insurgency of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°125, *Sri Lanka: The Failure of the Peace Process*, 28 November 2006, and N°191, *War Crimes in Sri Lanka*, 17 May 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See “Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka”, A/HRC/RES/30/1 (14 October 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Meera Srinivasan, “Sirisena calls for repealing law clipping presidential powers”, *The Hindu*, 23 June 2019. Among other things, Sirisena suggested that the diminution of executive branch powers had created political uncertainty.

government alone.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the increasingly heated political war between Sirisena and Wickremesinghe exacerbated bureaucratic infighting and dysfunction just as the country rounded the corner into 2019 – a presidential election year – facing daunting challenges. These included political polarisation, economic weakness, unhealed wounds from decades of civil war, and embittered relations between hard-line Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists and the Muslims they had been antagonising since 2011.<sup>5</sup>

The Easter Sunday attacks came against this fraught backdrop. This report examines the bombings, the political intrigues and policing failures that preceded them, the criticisms levelled at Muslim leaders for ostensibly failing to prevent the rise of Islamic militancy, and the counterproductive reactions of the state and non-Muslim religious leaders in the aftermath of the attacks. It also explores the damage done to ethno-religious relations in Sri Lanka since the bombings, the challenges of reform from within the Muslim community, and how to prevent intercommunal hostility from tipping into widespread violence.

The report is based on interviews with government officials, politicians, diplomats, business people, lawyers, journalists and Sri Lankan citizens from other backgrounds, conducted by phone, email and in Colombo from April to July 2019. It also draws on previous research about anti-Muslim violence and hate speech conducted in 2018 and early 2019, as well as Crisis Group's extensive prior work on Sri Lanka's civil war and its aftermath.

---

<sup>4</sup> Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°152, *Sri Lanka: Stepping Back from a Constitutional Crisis*, 31 October 2018. After twin judgments by the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal ruling his actions illegal, Sirisena was forced to reappoint Wickremesinghe on 16 December.

<sup>5</sup> Muslims in Sri Lanka, who make up almost 10 per cent of the population, are generally treated as a single ethnic community (though there are ethnic distinctions among them), alongside Sinhalese (at 75 per cent) and Tamils (at 15 per cent). Sinhalese are mostly Buddhist, while Tamils are mostly Hindu; 7 per cent of Sinhalese and 18 per cent of Tamils are Christians. For a brief analysis of anti-Muslim violence in March 2018, which destroyed mosques and Muslim-owned houses and businesses and killed three people, see Crisis Group Commentary, "Buddhist Militancy Rises Again in Sri Lanka", 7 March 2018.

## II. The Attacks and Immediate Aftermath

---

### A. *Disorientation and Division at the Top*

Already bruised and polarised by months of infighting among its most senior leaders, Sri Lanka suffered a disorienting blow on Easter Sunday, 21 April 2019, when a series of suicide bombings killed over 250 and injured hundreds more Christian worshippers and foreign tourists. The seven coordinated bombings targeted three Christian churches – in the capital Colombo, north of Colombo in Negombo, and in the eastern town of Batticaloa – and three high-end hotels in Colombo, and later a small guesthouse south of the capital.<sup>6</sup> It was the deadliest day of terrorist violence in the country's history. The attacks constituted Sri Lanka's first experience with jihadist mass violence, carried out by a rogue offshoot of a Sri Lankan Salafi militant group, the National Tawhid Jamaat (NTJ), with inspiration and modest support from individuals believed to have links with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>7</sup>

The government's immediate reaction to the attacks was confused and divided. President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe both claimed ignorance of multiple intelligence reports – including from India and the U.S. – that had warned of imminent suicide attacks on churches and other targets.<sup>8</sup> President Sirisena quickly blamed his defence secretary, who resigned on 25 April, and the Inspector General of Police, who refused to resign and was forced onto compulsory leave. The president's claims of ignorance were later contradicted by published reports and by testimony to parliament by senior police and defence officials. The prime minister's statements that neither he nor his senior UNP ministers had been informed of the warnings, and had been excluded from national security council meetings since mid-December (after courts reversed Sirisena's unconstitutional

---

<sup>6</sup> An eighth explosion was triggered by Fatima Ibrahim, the wife of one of the suicide bombers, when the police Special Task Force stormed one of the group's safe houses in Colombo's Dematagoda neighbourhood.

<sup>7</sup> *Tawhid* is Arabic for the oneness or unity of God. Various *Tawhid* groups compose one of the main movements for Islamic "reform" in Sri Lanka. The preaching of *Tawhid* groups in the Salafi tradition focuses on purging Islam of rituals and practices borrowed from other religious and cultural traditions. *Tawhid* groups are especially strong in the eastern province and among the young and less wealthy. The largest organisation of this type in Sri Lanka is *Tablighi Jamaat*, which draws followers from across all classes; it preaches strict segregation of the sexes, including the wearing of the *niqab* for women and a strict dress code for its male members. For a brief discussion of the major lines of Islamic practice in Sri Lanka, see Crisis Group Report, *Sri Lanka's Muslims*, op. cit., pp. 22-25. See also M.A. Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims: Ethnic Identity within Cultural Diversity*, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo, 2007, and Farah Mihlar, "Religious change in a minority context: Transforming Islam in Sri Lanka", *Third World Quarterly*, forthcoming. For a valuable analysis of the political, social and economic dynamics behind the strength of *Tawhid* groups in Kattankudy, see Jonathan Spencer, et al, *Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque: A Collaborative Ethnography of War and Peace*, London, 2015, chapter five.

<sup>8</sup> The first Indian warnings were received on 4 April 2019 and relayed to senior police officials by the Chief of National Intelligence on 9 April. They included the name of the main organiser, M.C.M. Zaharan, his brother and others involved in the attacks. Jeffrey Gettleman and Dharisha Bastians, "Sri Lanka authorities were warned, in detail, 12 days before attack", *The New York Times*, 29 April 2019.



attempt to remove him from office), led many in government and media to accuse the president of negligence and of politicising intelligence.<sup>9</sup>

Contradictory and badly coordinated statements by officials from different government and security agencies – including incorrect casualty numbers and unfounded warnings about further attacks – fuelled already high levels of public fear and a widely-shared sense that the government had lost control of the nation's security.<sup>10</sup> The government's blocking of most major social media and closing schools for two weeks – which never happened even during the nearly three decades of war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) – further heightened tensions and slowed the return to a sense of normalcy.

Amid the confusion, the government quickly launched a security crackdown, declaring a state of emergency on 22 April, the day after the attacks. The president issued emergency regulations giving security forces, including the army, sweeping powers of investigation, arrest and detention, and the weeks following the attacks saw island-wide police and army raids, mostly in Muslim villages and neighbourhoods.<sup>11</sup> Police arrested hundreds of citizens and discovered hidden weapons caches and safe houses used by the network behind the attacks, but also knives and small swords hidden in Muslim neighbourhoods and near mosques, apparently for protection against periodic mob attacks by anti-Muslim groups.<sup>12</sup> Muslim political and religious leaders worked hard to cooperate with investigations, helping security forces identify and locate suspects, and tried to reassure Sri Lankans of other faiths that they rejected the attacks – including by refusing Islamic burial rites to the dead attackers.<sup>13</sup>

Reports claiming to link NTJ members with ISIS fuelled fear of future attacks and deepened widespread anger toward Muslims from other communities, especially Catholics and Buddhists.<sup>14</sup> Exploiting popular fear and hostility toward Muslims, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists launched a major attack on Muslim businesses, homes and mosques on 12 and 13 May in Minuwangoda and towns in the North Western province, causing extensive damage.<sup>15</sup> Numerous reports of Muslim women being publicly harassed, including through demands to remove their headscarves – and not merely the face veils that were banned by emergency decree on 29 April – accompany widespread arbitrary arrests of Muslims on unsubstantiated or poorly supported suspicion of involvement with the attackers.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> The prime minister has also been criticised for failing to protest his exclusion from the national security council. "Sri Lanka paying deadly price for political infighting: analysts", AFP, 25 April 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Colombo residents, July 2019; "Errors raise questions about Sri Lankan response to bombing", *The New York Times*, 26 April 2019.

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of the emergency laws, see "Understanding Emergency: Easter Sunday Attacks 2019", Centre for Policy Alternatives, 25 April 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Muslim community leaders, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>13</sup> "Muslims cooperated with police to nab extremists", *Republic Next*, 9 May 2019.

<sup>14</sup> "We knew what was coming: Sri Lanka sees ISIS' hand in attacks", *The New York Times*, 3 May 2019.

<sup>15</sup> "Sri Lanka says hardline Buddhist groups likely to blame for anti-Muslim attacks", Reuters, 15 May 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Maneshka Borham, "Easter terror: A community tormented by overzealous law enforcement", *The Sunday Observer*, 7 July 2019.

## B. *Uncovering the Jihadist Network*

The Sri Lankan network that supported and carried out the attacks was built around two families.<sup>17</sup> The more active and important of these centred around the Salafi preacher M.C.M. Zaharan (also known as Zaharan Hashim), who was killed in one of two suicide attacks at the Shangri-La Hotel. A well-known and controversial figure in his native town of Kattankudy in the eastern Batticaloa district, Zaharan was a charismatic and forceful Salafi preacher, but also a rebel and outsider. His own religious organisations cut ties with him due to his aggressive behaviour and rhetoric – beginning with the madrasa he studied in and later including National Tawhid Jamaat itself, which Zaharan had helped found.<sup>18</sup>

At the time of the Easter bombings, Zaharan was not well known outside the small world of Kattankudy and those following politicised Muslim networks, but he was already associated with a significant record of violence – raising questions about why the police failed to see the attack coming. Zaharan had been on the run from police since a brutal 10 March 2017 attack by NTJ members on followers of Sufi cleric Abdul Rauff Zein.<sup>19</sup> Subsequent reports suggested Zaharan's students had vandalised Buddhist statues in the town of Mawanella in December 2018 – a small but unprecedented and symbolically important instance of violence by Muslims against Buddhist targets.<sup>20</sup> Next came the discovery of 100kg of explosives and weapons at a farm in the north-west town of Wanathavilluwa in January 2019 by police following leads from the suspected attackers in Mawanella.<sup>21</sup> March 2019 saw the shooting of M.R.M. Taslim, an advisor to Minister Kabir Hashim, the ruling party parliamentarian for Mawanella, after Taslim helped police track down those who vandalised the statues.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to Zaharan's Kattankudy-based network, built around his family, the team that eventually carried out the Easter attacks also involved lesser-known Colombo-based radicals associated with the Jamathe Millathu Ibrahim (JMI) organisation. The key members in this group were two brothers – Ilham and Inshaf Ibrahim

---

<sup>17</sup> Among the many overviews of Zaharan and his jihadist network published since the attack, the most reliable and comprehensive is Amarnath Amarasingam, "Terrorism on the Teardrop Island: Understanding the Easter 2019 Attacks in Sri Lanka", CTC Sentinel, May/June 2019. See also D.B.S. Jeyaraj, "Zaharan's family members dead in Sainthamaruthu skirmish between security forces and Islamic state terrorists", *Daily Mirror*, 2 May 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Zaharan was forced to leave Kattankudy Jamiathul Falah Arabic College before finishing his studies, and later thrown out of Darul Athar, the small group he co-founded in 2007, and denounced and ejected in December 2017 by National Tawhid Jamaat, which he had established in 2012. Amarasingam, *op. cit.*; Crisis Group interviews, Kattankudy residents, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Some of Zaharan's followers were arrested after the attack, but he and his brother Rilwan escaped and went into hiding. It remains unclear where Zaharan spent the next two years, with some reports suggesting he travelled to India. Amarasingam, *op. cit.*; Crisis Group interviews, Kattankudy residents, Colombo, July 2019; D.B.S. Jeyaraj, "Leader of Nation of Tawheed Jamaat Zaharan Hashim alias 'Abu Ubaida'", *Daily Mirror*, 5 May 2019.

<sup>20</sup> However modest, the attacks worried many officials and Muslim community leaders that the patience of Muslims in the face of years of violence by radical Sinhalese groups might be wearing thin. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim businessperson and academic, Colombo and Kandy, January 2019.

<sup>21</sup> "CID begins interrogation of suspects in possession of 100kg of explosives", *News First*, 18 January 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Secunder Kermani, "The man who might have stopped Sri Lanka's Easter bombings", BBC News, 31 May 2019.

– from a prominent Colombo business family. Much or all of the money needed to fund the attack reportedly came from the Ibrahim brothers.<sup>23</sup>

Those who knew and followed these networks were shocked that Zaharan and his supporters could have carried out such a complex and deadly series of bombings. The sophistication of the operation and the mass targeting of Christians – with whom Sri Lankan Muslims have no history of tensions – immediately led government and security experts to suspect international involvement.<sup>24</sup> This suspicion appeared to be confirmed two days after the attack when ISIS claimed responsibility, supported by photos and videos of the bombers with ISIS flags and pledging allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, however, Sri Lankan police say no evidence exists that ISIS ordered or directed the Sri Lanka attacks, or even knew of them in advance.<sup>26</sup> Rather, what is known so far suggests the bombers were inspired by the ISIS brand, eager for the high profile that ISIS affiliation would confer, and supported by several people outside Sri Lanka suspected of previous involvement with ISIS.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Zaharan shelved plans to attack Buddhist targets in favour of ISIS-inspired attacks on Christians and Western tourists, and the greater publicity and shockwaves this would cause.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Crisis Group interviews, journalist, government officials, Colombo, July 2019; Saeed Shah and Bill Spindle, “Sri Lanka bombers blew up motorcycles, lost fingers honing deadly skills”, *Wall Street Journal*, 5 May 2019.

<sup>24</sup> “Local group is blamed for attacks, but Sri Lanka suspects ‘international network’”, *The New York Times*, 22 April 2019.

<sup>25</sup> “IS Issues Formal Communique for Sri Lanka Bombings, Claims 1,000 Casualties”, SITE Intelligence Group, 23 April 2019. Police investigators now report that ISIS was requested after the fact by surviving members of Zaharan’s group, through a third-party in Indonesia, to claim credit for the attacks. “No evidence that ISIS was behind Easter attacks – Senior DIG Ravi Seneviratne”, Ada Derana (online), 24 July 2019.

<sup>26</sup> “No Islamic State link to Easter bombings: Sri Lankan investigator”, IANS, 25 July 2019. There is also no publicly available evidence to suggest that Zaharan or anyone involved in the attacks had links with any of the small number of Sri Lankans previously known to have joined Islamic State in Syria. In July 2015, ISIS publicly announced the death of a Sri Lankan Muslim man who had fought with them in Syria, having travelled to join their self-proclaimed caliphate in 2014 along with his family. Post-Easter parliamentary testimony by former police chief N.K. Illangakoon confirmed five other Sri Lankans, accompanied by their families, were known to have joined ISIS as fighters, and that in response police established a committee to monitor potential ISIS activity. “Former IGP constituted a committee to investigate signs of extremism”, *Daily News*, 26 July 2019. Statements in November 2016 by then Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe presenting all 32 family members as ISIS recruits and linking them to the teaching of “extremism” in Sri Lankan schools provoked strong criticism from Muslim community leaders as misleading and provocative. “Govt. alleges foreign extremists teaching at international schools”, *Island*, 18 November 2016; “Muslim Council slams Wijeyadasa’s inflammatory speech, says it will give rise to more tensions”, *Colombo Telegraph*, 19 November 2016. Rajapakshe has claimed the Easter attacks confirm his warnings: “I knew the Islamic State was preparing for an attack here. Nobody listened”. “‘We knew what was coming’: Sri Lanka sees ISIS’ hand in attacks”, *The New York Times*, 3 May 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interviews, government officials, journalists, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interviews, politicians, journalists, Colombo, July 2019; Saeed Shah and Bill Spindle, “Sri Lanka bombers blew up motorcycles, lost fingers honing deadly skills”, *Wall Street Journal*, 5 May 2019.

In addition to the ISIS claim of responsibility, there is circumstantial evidence of possible links, including the sharing by at least one of the attackers of photos and videos for ISIS to publish after the attacks.<sup>29</sup> According to some reports, Zaharan met and received training from Indians who had fought with ISIS.<sup>30</sup> Indian investigators also report evidence of connections between Zaharan and what they consider an ISIS cell based in the southern city of Coimbatore.<sup>31</sup> One of the bombers, Abdul Lathief Jameel Mohamed, was reportedly suspected of communicating with a well-known ISIS fighter while studying in Australia, and may have travelled to Syria.<sup>32</sup> Zaharan's brother, Rilwan, who died in a 26 April police raid in Santhamaruthu, along with one of the Easter bombers, A.M.M. Hashtun, are believed to have received bomb-making training in Turkey.<sup>33</sup> Finally, a Sri Lankan software engineer, suspected by Indian intelligence of connections with ISIS, is now in custody in Colombo on suspicion of working with the Ibrahim brothers and Zaharan.<sup>34</sup>

After the bombings, officials and journalists were struck by how long and how publicly Zaharan had been preaching in support of ISIS. In a well-attended – but later ignored – speech in Kattankudy in early 2017, he called on his listeners to support ISIS in Syria.<sup>35</sup> The speech triggered an anti-ISIS rally in Kattankudy on 3 February, and is likely the reason the NTJ formally expelled Zaharan in December 2017.<sup>36</sup>

Experiencing violent discrimination rarely leads directly to seeking violent revenge, but in Zaharan's case anti-Muslim attacks appear to have fed his increasingly lethal rage. Statements by police investigators and people who knew Zaharan indicate that anti-Muslim violence was one factor motivating Zaharan's and his team's increasing commitment to violence against other religious communities, or at a minimum used to justify that turn.<sup>37</sup> Following anti-Muslim riots in Kandy district in March 2018,

---

<sup>29</sup> Amarasingam, op. cit. This paragraph draws heavily on his article.

<sup>30</sup> Saeed Shah and Bill Spindle, "Sri Lanka bombers blew up motorcycles", op. cit.; James Griffiths and Swati Gupta, "ISIS suspect gave advance warning of Sri Lanka bombings, source says", CNN, 23 April 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Saikat Datta and Kris Thomas, "Sri Lankan bombers unmasked amid 'intel fiasco'", Asia Times, 24 April 2019; "NIA files charge sheet against alleged ISIS sympathizers", Hindustan Times, 26 February 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Niharika Mandhana, Rob Taylor, and Saeed Shah, "Sri Lanka bomber trained in Syria with Islamic State", *Wall Street Journal*, 29 April 2019; Alasdair Pal and Shihar Aneez, "The Western-educated bomber who botched Sri Lanka hotel attack", Reuters, 26 April 2019. The Dehiwela bomber was Abdul Lathief Jameel Mohamed, who studied for a time in Australia and the UK before returning to Sri Lanka.

<sup>33</sup> Saeed Shah and Bill Spindle, "Sri Lanka bombers blew up motorcycles", op. cit.; Jeffrey Gettleman, Dharisha Bastians, and Hannah Beech, "We knew what was coming: Sri Lanka sees ISIS' hand in attacks", *The New York Times*, 3 May 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Aneez Shihar, Shri Navaratnam, and Sanjeev Miglani, "A network of extremism expands", Reuters, 14 May 2019. "Zaharan successor, four others brought from Saudi", *Daily News*, 15 June 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Amarasingam, op. cit. According to a source quoted in Amarasingam, police and intelligence officials were in the audience.

<sup>36</sup> Amarasingam, op. cit. The full text of the letter can be found at Amarasingam, op. cit. Amarasingam adds that "from early 2017 he started presenting himself as a kind of ISIS representative in the country". Crisis Group email interview, August 2019.

<sup>37</sup> This was one of the key points made by former director of the police Terrorism Investigation Department in his testimony to a parliamentary inquiry into the attacks. "Zaharan's attitudes, preaching turned towards violent extremism after Digana attacks: Ex-DIG Nalaka Silva", *Colombo*

Zaharan posted a video on his Facebook page calling for attacks on non-Muslims and police, which many Muslim religious and civil society leaders shared with police and senior government officials.<sup>38</sup> That video and earlier ones Zaharan posted in February 2018, also denounced violent attacks on Muslims by Sinhalese Buddhist militants and threatened retaliation.<sup>39</sup>

In the weeks following the attacks, police arrested more than two hundred people suspected of involvement in them, and uncovered multiple safe houses and training camps used by the bombers and their supporters.<sup>40</sup> On 14 June, Saudi Arabia extradited to Sri Lanka five suspected members of the bombing network, including Zaharan's alleged deputy, Mohammed Milhan, also wanted for shooting minister Hashim's secretary in Mawanella.<sup>41</sup> Army Commander Lt. Gen. Mahesh Senanayake told parliament in late July that investigators had "confirmed reports" that some "extremists" had evaded arrest and are "still operating secretly", and arrests of additional suspects continued through August. These included arrests of suspected members of Jamathe Millathu Ibrahim (JMI) who allegedly trained with Zaharan and were prepared to carry out more attacks.<sup>42</sup>

---

*Telegraph*, 5 June 2019. A Kattankudy businessman and politician who knew Zaharan claims his increasingly violent rhetoric gained considerable traction and support in the wake of organised anti-Muslim violence, beginning from the 2012 mob attack on a mosque in the central town of Dambulla. Crisis Group interview, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim activists, May and July 2019.

<sup>39</sup> "Zaharan's video address of early 2019 February raises questions that have puzzled observers. The resemblance to LTTE is striking, as is the injunction to kill traitors instantly without pity. But the thrust of the message was the consignment to hell of the droves of Buddhist extremists, who have killed Muslims and vandalised their mosques and businesses. Rajan Hoole, "Sri Lanka should not turn a blind eye to the ascent of Wahabi extremism", *The Wire*, 15 May 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Given the large number of reported arbitrary arrests, it is unclear how many of this number were actually involved in supporting the attacks. More than 2,000 arrests were made under emergency and anti-terrorism laws in the months following the bombings.

<sup>41</sup> Milhan is also charged with murdering two police officers in the eastern town of Vavunithivu in late 2018, and is reported to have been preparing a second set of attacks. "Zahran successor, four others brought from Saudi", *Daily News*, 15 June 2019.

<sup>42</sup> "Army Commander calls for modern technology to boost security", *Daily FT*, 1 August 2019; "Another two received arms training with NTJ leader Saharan arrested", *Colombopage*, 19 August 2019; "18 terror suspects reveal they had taken oath to carry out second attack", *Ceylon Today*, 28 August 2019.

### III. Looking Back: Could More Have Been Done?

---

#### A. Politicised and Complacent Intelligence and Policing

A better-functioning national government might not have thwarted the Easter atrocities, but political and personal battles at senior levels contributed to government complacency and weakened the ability of the security services to detect and prevent the attacks. This picture has slowly emerged from police and journalist investigations, and especially from a parliamentary select committee established to investigate the attacks and the failure to act on intelligence warnings.<sup>43</sup>

##### 1. Intelligence failures

Testimony before the select committee indicates that President Sirisena's ongoing political war with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe – which has continued after Sirisena's failed attempt in late 2018 to remove him from office illegally – led Sirisena to consolidate power and exaggerated the already problematic politicisation of the police. These trends limited avenues for information sharing and policy debate in dangerous ways and may have weakened the police's ability to respond to Zaharan's threat.

In late December 2018, following court orders that forced Sirisena to reappoint Wickremesinghe as prime minister on 16 December, Sirisena took control of the entire national security and intelligence apparatus through questionable legal means, reassigning the police service from the Law and Order Ministry to the Ministry of Defence (which the Sri Lankan president runs by constitutional mandate).<sup>44</sup> Former Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando told parliament that at about the same time, Sirisena ordered him not to invite Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, State Minister of Defence Ruwan Wijewardene or Inspector General of Police Pujith Jayasundara to national security council (NSC) meetings.<sup>45</sup> Fernando also complained that during the ensuing four months he struggled to get meetings with Sirisena, and senior officials reported that NSC meetings during this period were infrequent.<sup>46</sup> Multiple reports and testimony to the select committee suggest Sirisena relied for national security

---

<sup>43</sup> The Rajapaksa-led opposition in parliament has boycotted the select committee and criticised the speaker's support for the process as a sign of his support for the UNP. "Speaker's actions in Parliament criticized", *News First*, 12 June 2019; "Wijedasa writes to Speaker on jeopardizing national security", *Ada Derana* (online), 6 June 2019.

<sup>44</sup> In considering the extent to which Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and the UNP share some blame for dysfunction within the security apparatus, some government officials aligned with the UNP concede they gave too little priority to security issues and should have resisted more strongly the president's legally questionable takeover of the police. Crisis Group interviews, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Meera Srinivasan, "Easter bombings: new evidence point to lapses", *Hindu*, 6 June 2019. In fact all three officials had been prevented from attending national security council meetings since 26 October, which is when Sirisena began his efforts to oust Wickremesinghe (and his UNP colleagues like Wijewardene). Sirisena long had bad relations with Jayasundara. Government officials associated with both the president and prime minister report the NSC had grown much less important, and its meeting less vital, than it had been during the civil war. Nonetheless, security council meetings did provide an obvious platform to coordinate a response to such warnings. Crisis Group interviews, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Meera Srinivasan, "Easter bombings: new evidence point to lapses", *Hindu*, 6 June 2019; Ranga Srilal, "Sri Lanka leader fires intelligence boss after criticism over bombings", *Reuters*, 8 June 2019.

information and advice almost exclusively on the director of the State Intelligence Service, Nilantha Jayawardena.<sup>47</sup>

In this divided and dysfunctional context, Indian intelligence agencies delivered to their Sri Lankan interlocutors increasingly detailed warnings of imminent suicide attacks on churches, beginning on 4 April. On 9 April, then-Chief of National Intelligence Sisira Mendis, relayed Indian government warnings of planned terror attacks to Defence Secretary Fernando and police chief Jayasundara. These warnings later reached the heads of the police Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) and the paramilitary Special Task Force, responsible for VIP protection.<sup>48</sup> Mendis testified, however, that the Indian warnings were never a main point of discussion at intelligence coordination meetings, held at least weekly. Neither the prime minister nor minister of defence was informed of them.<sup>49</sup> Mendis claims that when he raised the warnings at a 9 April meeting, State Intelligence Service Director Jayawardena, who liaised directly with the president, told him Sirisena had already been briefed.<sup>50</sup>

Both Fernando and Jayasundara reported receiving calls from Jayawardena on 20 April evening and early on 21 April morning relaying new warnings of imminent attacks.<sup>51</sup> None of those involved in these discussions took any decisive steps to address the threat.<sup>52</sup>

Sirisena has sought to deflect responsibility for the government's inaction in the face of these warnings. He denied receiving any information about future attacks prior to the morning of 21 April when he was vacationing in Singapore, though published reports cast doubt on his denials.<sup>53</sup> He pointed the finger directly at the former defence secretary and police chief, arguing they had enough information and authority to warn and protect churches and other possible targets.<sup>54</sup> He rejected crit-

---

<sup>47</sup> Meera Srinivasan, "Easter bombings", op. cit.; Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Meera Srinivasan, "Easter bombings", op. cit. Further complicating matters, the head of the Terrorism Investigation Division, Nalaka Silva, had been removed from office following his arrest in September 2018 on allegations of involvement in a mysterious, never-proven plot to assassinate the president.

<sup>49</sup> "Sri Lanka PM: Country must prepare for new terrorism phase", AP, 6 August 2019. "I was not informed of prior warnings", *Daily Mirror*, 7 August 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Ranga Srilal, "Sri Lanka leader fires intelligence boss after criticism over bombings", Reuters, 8 June 2019; "Advance warning of Lanka terror attacks not taken seriously: Official", PTI, 30 May 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Jayasundara says he alerted all his relevant deputy inspector generals, but did not warn the president, as he had no direct access; he also claimed he did not have the power to take stronger action. Meera Srinivasan, "Easter bombings", op. cit. Officials close to ongoing investigations dispute the ex-IGP's claims. Crisis Group interviews, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>52</sup> The only concrete action that appears to have been taken were alerts to diplomats and other VIPs issued by the head of the police Special Task Force, M.R. Latheef, who told parliament he was not provided the more detailed information on the planned attack that others had received, and could have done more if he had been. "Top police officers speak of multiple probes on Zaharan ahead of Easter Sunday blasts", *The Sunday Times*, 28 July 2019.

<sup>53</sup> "Sirisena contradicts Lanka intelligence chief's testimony, says not privy to Easter attack warning", PTI, 30 May 2019. According to one representative report, citing multiple authoritative sources, "State Intelligence Service (SIS) Director ... Jayawardena provided detailed reports [on the Indian warnings] to the President on at least three occasions". "Top officials allege president was briefed in advance of attacks", *Daily FT*, 29 April 2019.

<sup>54</sup> "Top officials allege president was briefed in advance of attacks", *Daily FT*, 29 April 2019.

icism directed at him in testimony before the parliamentary select committee, saying it comes from those who have an axe to grind because he dismissed them from their posts – including Fernando and Jayasundara. And he requested the speaker of parliament shut down the committee, which the speaker refused to do, and tried to prevent senior police officials from testifying, saying the public hearings threaten to interfere with ongoing judicial cases and reveal operational intelligence secrets.<sup>55</sup> Sirisena eventually agreed to give a statement to the committee in a closed-door session in his office on 20 September 2019.<sup>56</sup>

President Sirisena also appointed an ad hoc commission of inquiry to do its own investigation, which delivered their report to him on 10 June, but has not made it public. On 5 July, police arrested ex-police chief Jayasundara and former Defence Secretary Fernando on orders of the attorney general, working from undisclosed evidence purportedly gathered by the president's commission.<sup>57</sup>

## 2. Policing failures

The Sri Lankan public has largely focused on the government's failure to act on foreign intelligence, yet of equal concern is why years of police work within Sri Lanka did not serve to prevent the attacks. Evidence presented to parliament has confirmed that different branches of the police were aware of Zaharan and the threat he and his followers posed, even before receiving foreign intelligence reports, but failed to share information among themselves or coordinate their efforts.

Officials from the police's Terrorism Investigation Division report monitoring Zaharan since March 2017, following the NTJ attack on Sufi cleric Abdul Rauff Zein and his followers.<sup>58</sup> Two separate warrants for his arrest were issued by the anti-

---

<sup>55</sup> "Lanka president hits out at committee probing Easter Sunday attacks", Press Trust of India, 8 June 2019; "Sri Lanka MPs clash with president over Easter attacks probe", AFP, 9 June 2019. In his testimony to the select committee, Jayasundara alleged Sirisena offered him a post as an ambassador if he agreed to step down and accept blame, with the president promising he would be exonerated in the report of his commission of inquiry. When Jayasundara refused to resign, the president placed him on compulsory leave. Jayasundara has petitioned the Supreme Court to get his job back. Meera Srinivasan, "Easter bombings: new evidence point to lapses", *Hindu*, 6 June 2019. Sirisena fired Mendis after he testified to the select committee.

<sup>56</sup> "Parliamentary Select Committee probing Easter Sunday attacks, meet President" (sic), Presidential Media Division, 20 September 2019.

<sup>57</sup> "Hemasiri and Pujith named as first and second suspects in Easter attacks", *The Sunday Observer*, 7 July 2019. Earlier, the attorney general ordered the acting police chief to commence formal investigations into nine senior police officials. State Intelligence Service Director Jayawardena, a presidential confidante, is not among those being investigated. After initially refusing to do so, he eventually testified to parliament's select committee on 24 July, in closed session. Many political observers question the role played by the SIS chief both before and after the attacks, with some suspecting his public silence is meant to protect Sirisena. Crisis Group interviews, politicians, diplomats, lawyers, Colombo, July 2019. On 21 September, President Sirisena formally appointed a second, five-member Commission of Inquiry to investigate the Easter bombings. "Sri Lanka president appoints a commission to investigate into and take action on the Easter Sunday bomb attacks", *Colombopage.com*, 22 September 2019.

<sup>58</sup> The TID assigned a dedicated officer to investigate Zaharan. "Top police officers speak of multiple probes on Zaharan ahead of Easter Sunday blasts", *Sunday Times*, 28 July 2019. Former TID chief Nalaka Silva told parliament his department had in fact tracked Zaharan closely from 2014



terrorism division in July 2017.<sup>59</sup> And as noted above, the division head also received word about the Indian intelligence warnings concerning the Easter bombings in April 2019.

For its part, another unit within the police, the Criminal Investigation Division (CID), began tracking Zaharan's network after the December 2018 vandalism of Buddhist statues in Mawanella and the subsequent discovery of their arms cache hidden in Wananthawillu. But the criminal division was not aware of the terrorism division's inquiries – nor its warrants – nor were they informed of the Indian intelligence warnings.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, police chief Jayasundara – who supervised both the anti-terrorism and criminal investigation divisions – took no apparent steps to prepare a coordinated, cross-departmental response, even after intelligence warnings started to come in. With Zaharan in hiding and other members of his network then unknown, even the best policing might not have detected the plots. Still, better information sharing between police divisions and stronger leadership might have made the force more attuned to the Indian warnings and prompted them to take appropriate steps in response – for instance making special efforts to protect churches.

### 3. Theories of failure

The failure of so many government offices to connect and act on so much information has led journalists, politicians and others in Sri Lanka to float fringe theories about whether some officials deliberately ignored the warnings because they stood to benefit politically from the attacks.<sup>61</sup> Theories about collusion between government officials and the attackers are given added potency by claims from some officials that military intelligence under the Rajapaksa government worked closely with various *Tawhid* groups, both as informants and, reportedly, as agents provocateurs, to provide targets for radical Buddhist groups' agitations.<sup>62</sup> According to various UNP leaders, Zaharan himself had been a paid government informant.<sup>63</sup> Even without

---

and had seen Zaharan's rhetoric grow more violent following the March 2018 anti-Muslim riots in Kandy district. "Zaharan's attitudes, preaching turned towards violent extremism after Digana attacks: Ex-DIG Nalaka Silva", *Colombo Telegraph*, 5 June 2019; "Former TID head reveals Zaharan had both open warrant and Interpol blue notice", *Daily FT*, 5 June 2019.

<sup>59</sup> "IGP was barred from Security Council meetings", *Sunday Observer*, 4 August 2019.

<sup>60</sup> "Top police officers speak of multiple probes on Zaharan ahead of Easter Sunday blasts", *Sunday Times*, 28 July 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Crisis Group interviews, politicians, journalists and diplomats, Colombo, July 2019. The most often cited beneficiaries according to these theories are the Rajapaksa family and those elements of the security and intelligence services believed to remain loyal to them.

<sup>62</sup> Former Western province Governor Azath Salley told parliament that various *Tawhid* groups, including possibly Zaharan and NTJ, enjoyed protection thanks to their work as police and intelligence informants, beginning in the Rajapaksa administration. "Easter suspects were funded by Rajapaksa-era intelligence unit, says Azath Salley", *The Hindu*, 12 June 2019; Crisis Group interviews, government advisors, Colombo, July 2019. For years, Muslim politicians, lawyers and activists have alleged that the Rajapaksa government worked closely with Sri Lanka *Tawhid Jamaat* (SLTJ) as well as Bodu Bala Sena and other Buddhist militant groups. Crisis Group interviews, Colombo, 2014-2019.

<sup>63</sup> "Zaharan was on Govt. payroll: Kiriella", *Daily FT*, 5 June 2019. Some close to the president and prime minister say that Zaharan was an informant for and protected by military intelligence; other

substantiation, such theories, in the context of rival presidential and parliamentary investigations, have further weakened public trust in the government and fed political divisions.

More plausible theories suggest the government was blinded by its own presumptions and misjudgements. For example, some government sources note that intelligence and other officials knew of Zaharan, but considered him a relatively minor troublemaker, making it less likely they would take seriously the reports he was planning such a major attack.<sup>64</sup> This was especially the case because Sri Lankan intelligence work had been highly focused on the possibility of renewed Tamil militancy, with little serious consideration paid to the possibility of jihadist-style attacks.

Another factor may have been President Sirisena's widely reported mistrust of the Indian government, which he had reportedly accused just months before of backing a never-proven plot to kill him.<sup>65</sup> Observers suspect the president or those close to him might have feared the Indian warnings could be disinformation designed to damage the president's credibility.<sup>66</sup>

#### B. *Should Muslim Leaders Share the Blame?*

Almost immediately after the Easter attacks, many politicians, journalists and religious leaders in Sri Lanka began arguing that the country's Muslim political and religious leadership bears significant responsibility for the attacks. These arguments have taken the form of specific accusations against prominent Muslim officials as well as broader critiques of how Muslim leaders responded (or did not respond) to changes in their communities in recent years.

The question of what Muslim political leaders might or should have done to counter the radicalisation of Zaharan and his cadre has surfaced in the cases of three prominent Muslim politicians – Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiudeen and former Governors M.L.A.M. Hisbullah (Eastern province) and Azath Salley (Western province). All three were forced to resign in the face of accusations by Sinhalese hardliners that they shielded or assisted the Easter attackers.<sup>67</sup>

The accusations appear unfounded. While these leaders did have some prior connections to either Zaharan or a few others believed linked to the attacks, they were consistent with the sorts of relationships that Sri Lankan politicians often have with political supporters or constituents.<sup>68</sup> One of the three – former Minister of Industry

---

senior officials with close knowledge of the evidence dispute this. Crisis Group interviews, parliamentarian, government official, Colombo, July 2019. Some observers suspect the long-running battle between CID and military intelligence officials, angry at CID investigations into the alleged crimes of military intelligence units under the Rajapaksa government, may have further complicated investigations into Zaharan's group. Crisis Group interviews, journalists, lawyers, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Meera Srinivasan, "Sri Lankan President Sirisena alleges that RAW is plotting his assassination", *Hindu*, 16 October 2018. Sirisena denied the reports he had told his cabinet of an Indian plot. "No Indian link to assassination plot: Sirisena's office", *Hindu*, 18 October 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Crisis Group interview, government officials, diplomats and journalists, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>67</sup> See further discussion in Section IV.A.

<sup>68</sup> Bathiudeen has been accused of attempting to use his influence to prevent his brother from being arrested and working to have other suspects released from custody. Bathiudeen has denied the

and Commerce M.L.A.M. Hisbullah – said he met Zaharan in advance of the 2015 elections, as did other Muslim politicians seeking to drum up votes among Zaharan's followers. Hisbullah has pointed out that neither he nor others viewed Zaharan as a threat at the time, noting that, "Zaharan Hashim is a terrorist now, but until 2017 he was considered a religious leader".<sup>69</sup>

More generally, Muslim leaders point out that as Zaharan's behaviour grew more provocative and ultimately violent, many of them warned police about him and his then-NTJ colleagues and others with alleged ISIS links or sympathies.<sup>70</sup> Leaders of the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), the national body of Muslim clerics, claim they alerted security officials to the dangers of NTJ and others believed to have ISIS sympathies or links.<sup>71</sup> Officials with the Muslim Council of Sri Lanka, a coalition of religious and lay groups, also say they repeatedly warned authorities about Zaharan, NTJ and other radical elements.<sup>72</sup>

Commentators and politicians critical of Sri Lanka's Muslim political and religious leadership argue that such warnings were not enough. They say that by failing to challenge – and in some cases supporting – the ascendancy of hard-line, intolerant forms of conservative Islam popularly (but sometimes inaccurately) referred to as "Wahhabism", Muslim leaders helped create the conditions that produced NTJ

---

charges at length, and police have stated they have found no evidence Bathiudeen had terrorist links. "No evidence against Rishad: Acting IGP informs PSC", *Daily Mirror* (online), 28 June 2019. Most allegations against Bathiudeen are contained in a no-confidence motion signed by 64 opposition parliamentarians; for the text of the motion, see DBS Jeyaraj, "Mass resignation of nine govt ministers and Muslim politics undercurrents", *Daily Mirror*, 8 June 2019. "Ready to face investigations – Rishad", *Asian Tribune*, 11 May 2019.

<sup>69</sup> "Zaharan Hashim campaigned for Sirisena, says ex-Governor", *The Hindu*, 13 June 2019. The Terrorism Investigation Division questioned Hisbullah at length on 15 June 2019. "TID questions Hisbullah", *The Sunday Observer*, 16 June 2019. Political observers from Kattankudy have since confirmed that Hisbullah, at one point desirous of Zaharan's support, ultimately came to oppose his activities and was far from sympathetic to *Tawhid* groups. Crisis Group interviews, Colombo, July 2019. Hisbullah is also widely criticised for his role in establishing a controversial Islamic University in his home district of Batticaloa, a project surrounded by alleged procedural and financial irregularities. The university, yet to be fully built and not yet open, was allegedly established as a private company with more than \$24 million in donations from a Saudi charity. Hisbullah's brother is alleged to have received shares worth 500 million Sri Lankan rupees (\$3 million). Hisbullah and his brother have denied any wrongdoing. "Govt. to find out how Hisbullah's son got shares worth Rs 500 mn", *Island*, 10 May 2019; "Wahhabism confronted: Sri Lanka curbs Saudi influence after bombings", *Reuters*, 5 July 2015.

<sup>70</sup> "Easter attacks PSC: Where is the president of this country? Sirisena loyalist Salley asks", *Colombo Telegraph*, 12 June 2019. This includes warnings to the police by prominent Muslim Minister Kabir Hashim – the member of parliament for Manawella – following the shooting of his advisor in March 2019 after assisting a police investigation into Zaharan's network.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group interview, ACJU media secretary, Colombo, July 2019; "Cardinal commended by religious, political leaders", *Daily News*, 27 April 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interview, Hilmy Ahamed, Muslim Council Vice President, Colombo, July 2019. Sources familiar with political and security issues in the eastern province also take seriously reports that military intelligence provided support and protection to various *Tawhid* activists, possibly including Zaharan, which may have contributed to ignoring Muslim warnings about them. Crisis Group interviews, government officials, journalists, residents of Kattankudy, Colombo, July 2019. "Easter attacks PSC: Sally says NTJ was in cohorts (sic) with the police", *Colombo Telegraph*, 11 June 2019.

and a small number of ISIS adherents.<sup>73</sup> Articulating an increasingly popular position, one journalist argues:

[L]ocal Muslims have been silent observers, tacit supporters and active apologists of [Wahhabism's] growing sway within their communities ... [which] is accompanied by suffocating Arabized cultural and social norms that have resulted in the gradual alienation of local Muslims from the mainstream ... The violence that resurfaced on Easter Sunday is a product of an ideology that was tolerated by Muslim elders and leaders.<sup>74</sup>

Such criticisms often lose sight of certain points.<sup>75</sup> First, the transition Zaharan made from “a religious leader who was drawing Muslim youth with his sharp debates on religion” (as ex-governor Hisbullah described him before 2017) to militancy was novel in Sri Lanka.<sup>76</sup> It would have been difficult to anticipate.

Secondly, understanding the violence and hard-line Muslim attitudes that may have driven the Easter bombings requires a wider lens than “Wahhabism”. The idea that Wahhabi or other conservative teachings were more responsible for turning Zaharan's network toward violence than the charged and violent milieu from which they emerged is highly questionable. He and his fellow attackers notably came of age in the shadow of 30 years of war, which saw brutal LTTE wartime attacks on Muslims (including, most famously, the 1990 massacre in Kattankudy's Jumma Mosque). More violence can be traced to Muslim “home guard” militias, set up by the government to resist the LTTE. Later, Muslim armed groups emerged as thuggish enforcers for local politicians. Post-war “demilitarisation” efforts failed to disarm fully and retire such groups.<sup>77</sup> Leaders from all communities contributed to this violent dysfunction and have a responsibility to address it.

Thirdly, Muslim leaders may also have felt constrained from policing practices in their own communities given the hostility they faced in the post-war period. Starting in 2011, Sinhalese nationalists mounted a multi-pronged campaign ostensibly in the

---

<sup>73</sup> See for instance Rajan Hoole, “Sri Lanka should not turn a blind eye to the ascent of Wahabi extremism”, *The Wire*, 15 May 2019. Many in Sri Lanka refer to the broad range of conservative, puritanical and patriarchal forms of Islam as “Wahhabi”, often inaccurately applying the term. While the ACJU is routinely called “Wahhabi”, the majority of its clerics are in fact from the Tablighi Jamaat, a school of Islam in the Deobandi tradition originating from India. Crisis Group phone interviews, Muslim scholars, May 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Ranga Jaysuriya, “Wahabism and radicalization of local Muslims: Fix it for good”, *Daily Mirror*, 14 May 2019. Another commentator writes: “The reliance of successive Sri Lankan governments on Muslims votes and Muslim politicians and the economic and political power wielded by Saudi Arabia and other external forces have been major factors in the Sri Lankan government's failure to curb the spread of radical Islam”. Asoka Bandarage, “Roots of Sri Lanka attacks, and a way forward”, *Asia Times*, 24 April 2019.

<sup>75</sup> For a compelling challenge to the argument that holds “Muslim radicalisation” and the community as a whole responsible for the Easter atrocities, see Harini Amarasuriya, “Shifting the blame”, *Himal*, 20 June 2019.

<sup>76</sup> “Zaharan Hashim campaigned for Sirisena, says ex-Governor”, *The Hindu*, 13 June 2019.

<sup>77</sup> On the shadowy role of Muslim armed groups in the east, see Crisis Group Report, *Sri Lanka's Muslims*, op. cit., p. 25. On the politics of Muslim identity in Kattankudy and the role that the war and Tamil and Sinhala nationalism played in strengthening it, while also generating internal battles, including pressure on Sufis, see Jonathan Spencer et al, *Checkpoint*, op. cit., chapter 5.

service of combatting Islamic “extremism” that in fact targeted Muslims at large. It included economic boycotts, threats and repeated, violent, organised attacks on mosques and Muslim properties.<sup>78</sup> Sinhala nationalist politicians and radical groups often used the term “extremism” to impugn any expression of visible Muslim piety – including observing dietary rules and wearing headscarves – in a way that many Muslims considered distorted and unfair. The net effect of the violence was a “siege” mentality that may well have made Muslim leaders cautious about focusing criticism inward at their already embattled communities.<sup>79</sup>

Against this backdrop, a better question is whether Sri Lanka Muslim politicians and religious leaders, together with Sinhala leaders and police, should have done more to prevent and prosecute hate speech, threats and violence militants directed at other Muslims, especially in Kattankudy.<sup>80</sup> This includes two decades of periodic violence against Sufi mosques and followers, particularly in Kattankudy, including the desecration of the grave of a popular cleric in 2006, and more recently the NTJ attack outside Kattankudy's main Sufi mosque in March 2017.<sup>81</sup> It also includes the regular intimidation of and sometimes threats of violence against Muslim women activists, including candidates for local government.<sup>82</sup>

In particular, some liberal Muslim activists argue political and religious leaders at the national level should have spoken up more forcefully against aggressive, intolerant and repressive patriarchal forces in their community.<sup>83</sup> While rarely discussed in

---

<sup>78</sup> For two days in June 2014, in the western coastal town of Aluthgama, and again for four days in March 2018 in Digana and other towns in the central district of Kandy, Sinhalese mobs systematically burnt down Muslim shops and homes and damaged dozens of mosques. The police consistently failed to stop the attacks and, despite numerous arrests made after the 2018 violence, no one has been tried or convicted to date. The government has yet to pay compensation promised to families and businesses affected by the 2018 riots in Kandy. The impunity with which Muslims have been attacked regularly across the country for more than seven years has emboldened militant groups, confident they will escape punishment. For analysis of the 2018 rioting, see Crisis Group Commentary, “Buddhist Militancy Rises Again in Sri Lanka”, 7 March 2018, and Crisis Group EU Watch List 2018, First Update, *Militant Buddhists and Anti-Muslim Violence in Sri Lanka*, 15 May 2018. Smaller incidents of mob attacks on Muslim properties have happened more regularly, notably in Gintota in November 2017 and in Ampara in February 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim politicians and community leaders, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>80</sup> As one Muslim lawyer puts it: “While no one expected this extreme violence [on Easter], it shouldn't have taken a belief in NTJ launching an ISIS-style attack for Muslim leaders and police to have acted to stop them”. Crisis Group telephone interview, Muslim lawyer, June 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Significant incidents of *Tawhid* followers' violence against Sufis took place in Kattankudy in 1998, 2004, 2006 and 2017. See Crisis Group Report, *Sri Lanka's Muslims*, op. cit., pp. 24-25, and “Unholy tension in Lanka's Muslim East”, *The Sunday Times*, 16 August 2009; Jonathan Spencer et al, *Checkpoint*, op. cit., chapter 5.

<sup>82</sup> During campaigning in the 2018 local government elections, a prominent *Tawhid* activist threatened Muslim women candidates for not wearing face veils. Neither the electoral commission nor the police took action, and Muslim politicians failed to denounce the attacks. Feminist activists report being threatened by Bathiudeen supporters for their work to reform Muslim marriage laws and by Hisbullah agents while campaigning against him in the 2015 parliamentary elections. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim women activists, Colombo, July 2019; Rajan Hoole, “Sri Lanka should not turn a blind eye to the ascent of Wahabi extremism”, *The Wire*, 15 May 2019.

<sup>83</sup> The national body of Muslim clerics, for its part, says it has worked hard to end intra-Muslim violence and bring unity across doctrinal differences. In 2009, it issued a “Declaration of Unity”

public, or reported in Sinhala or English media, local Muslim leaders have been actively – and with some success – pushing back against *Tawhid* efforts to “purify” their community.<sup>84</sup> Whether or not this kind of attention from national leaders would have had an impact on Zaharan’s success in cultivating the network that conducted the Easter attacks is a matter of speculation, but it might have created more political space for those in the Muslim community who felt under pressure from *Tawhid* groups.

---

endorsed by all major currents of Islam in Sri Lanka, though violence against Sufis continued afterwards. Crisis Group interview, ACJU Media Secretary, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>84</sup> One scholar of the eastern province cites the ongoing construction of a major Sufi mosque in Kattankudy and the plans to build a separate Sufi meditation centre, as evidence of continued anti-*Tawhid* resistance. The strong tendency of Muslim religious and lay leaders to keep such disputes within their community, and the fact that they would largely be debated and reported on in Tamil, have made it harder for other communities to learn about them. Crisis Group phone interview, August 2019. For a detailed analysis of the fraught diversity of opinion among Sri Lankan Muslims, see Mohamed Faslan and Nadine Vanniasinkam, “Fracturing Community: Intra-group Relations among the Muslims of Sri Lanka”, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, November 2015.

#### IV. After the Attacks: An Anti-Muslim Backlash

---

Almost immediately after the Easter bombings, Sri Lanka's Muslims began to experience an unprecedented degree of public pressure and insecurity. Sinhalese nationalist politicians and commentators seized the moment to inject new energy into longstanding efforts to undermine the status and prosperity of the Muslim community, and anger and fear in other communities rose to dangerous heights.

##### A. Political Attacks and Exploitation

The Easter violence has already had profound political repercussions. The rapid exploitation of the attacks by nationalist politicians, combined with the deepening confusion and lack of counter-narrative by the UNP-led government, has aggravated growing rifts in Sri Lanka's tense and divided society. A presidential election scheduled for December has only increased the sense of growing polarisation. As one journalist explains:

[T]hings might begin to settle down if there weren't elections coming soon. But in a political context that was already uncertain and volatile before Easter, it is too tempting for the opposition not to exploit the situation by keeping the tension alive. Once a new government is in place, things might calm down.<sup>85</sup>

Quick to capitalise on popular fears was former Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, brother of ex-President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the top civilian defence official in the final years of the war against the LTTE. Within days of the bombings, Gotabaya announced his candidacy for presidency, promising to eradicate terrorism and emphasising security issues in his election campaign.<sup>86</sup> He accused the government of being responsible for the Easter bombings by "dismantling" the extensive intelligence networks he had established as defence secretary.<sup>87</sup> Gotabaya has also appealed strongly to Catholics – an important block of swing voters, many of who remain angry with the government for failing to protect them – endorsing Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith's call for an independent commission to investigate the security failures that led to the attacks.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, other key members of the Rajapaksa-led opposi-

---

<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group interview, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>86</sup> On 11 August, after much uncertainty, Mahinda Rajapaksa formally threw his support to his brother Gotabaya, who was nominated as the SLPP's candidate for president. "Rajapaksa names brother Gotabaya presidential candidate", *Hindu*, 11 August 2019.

<sup>87</sup> "Sri Lankan ex-defense chief Gotabaya says he will run for president, tackle radical Islam", Reuters, 26 April 2019; "Current govt failed in national security, killed abilities of military intelligence", *India Express*, 27 April 2019. Gotabaya and his supporters have presented little to support claims that the UNP-led coalition government weakened intelligence networks needed to deal with violent Islamist threat. Following Gotabaya's interviews, the army commander reinstated a former military intelligence official on bail, like some two dozen others, as a suspect in multiple killings and abductions. "Alleged death squad leader reinstated in special team under Army Chief", *Daily FT*, 13 May 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Crisis Group phone interview, Catholic activist, September 2019. Meera Srinivasan, "The painful pace of recovery from the Easter bombings", *The Hindu*, 7 September 2019. "Gotabaya pledges to

tion have fanned the flames of communal tensions, with some promoting explosive rumours that Muslim doctors had been sterilising Sinhalese women.

For his part, Sirisena, desperate to salvage his political career, has tried to curry favour with Sinhala Buddhist nationalists. The most prominent instance was his 23 May pardon of Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera, the general secretary of Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist organisation, and country's most prominent Buddhist militant. Gnanasara had been serving a six-year term for contempt of court.<sup>89</sup> Within days of his release, he was giving incendiary press conferences (as he had in the past), demanding the police arrest Muslim politicians he accused of conspiring with NTJ. On 7 July, the BBS, with some 1,000 monks in attendance, held a large rally in Kandy, where Gnanasara called for Sri Lanka to move to an exclusively Sinhalese government.<sup>90</sup>

Other religious leaders have also used the heightened tensions to sow division and press for political advantage. Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera – parliamentarian, presidential advisor and prominent nationalist monk – launched a hunger strike on 31 May, just outside the grounds of Sri Lanka's most sacred Buddhist site, the Temple of the Tooth, in the central town of Kandy. He demanded the prosecution of a Muslim doctor alleged in a press account – later disproven – to have secretly sterilised 4,000 Sinhalese women (discussed below in Section IV.C.1) and the immediate removal of Minister Bathiudeen and Governors M.L.A.M. Hisbullah and Salley from their posts – ostensibly for playing a central part in the “infiltration” of the state machinery by Muslim extremists.<sup>91</sup> Rathana's “fast unto death” was endorsed by the Sri Lanka's most senior monks – the Mahanayakes – and by senior Catholic clergy, including Cardinal Ranjith Joseph, who had won widespread praise for his calls for peace and restraint by Catholics following the Easter bombings.<sup>92</sup>

On 2 June, Rathana was joined by BBS head Gnanasara, who threatened island-wide “pandemonium” if the three Muslim politicians did not leave office by noon the next day.<sup>93</sup> The following day, as tensions rose and fears grew over major anti-Muslim violence, Gnanasara began to lead a protest march to Colombo. Within hours, Hisbullah and Salley announced their resignations. Soon thereafter, Bathiudeen and all eight other Muslim cabinet members and junior ministers also resigned, announc-

---

fulfill request of Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith”, *Ada Derana*, 25 August 2019; “Sri Lankan cardinal calls probes into Easter attack ‘biased’”, *Crux*, 15 August 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Gnanasara was convicted of four charges of contempt in August 2018 by the Court of Appeal and sentenced to six years in prison. In a separate case, the High Court in June 2018 convicted Gnanasara of criminal intimidation and sentenced him to a six-month sentence. “Statement on the Presidential Pardon of Gnanasara Thero”, Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), 24 May 2019. On 20 June 2019, CPA filed suit in the Supreme Court challenging Sirisena's pardon of Gnanasara.

<sup>90</sup> “BBS pledges to build Sinhala Parliament”, *Daily FT*, 8 July 2019.

<sup>91</sup> “Athuraliye Rathana Thero goes on hunger strike”, *Ada Derana*, 31 May 2019.

<sup>92</sup> The Cardinal has previously made clear his sympathies with Buddhist nationalism and is a widely mistrusted by Muslims and evangelical Christians. His support for Rathana earned him a coded rebuke from Finance Minister Samaraweera. “The cardinal truth”, *Colombo Telegraph*, 5 June 2019.

<sup>93</sup> The Sinhala word translated as pandemonium was *sanakeli*, literally “carnival”. The implied threat of violence was clear. “BBS Gnanasara promises pandemonium countrywide by tomorrow”, *Colombo Telegraph*, 2 June 2019.



ing they were giving the government a month to conduct an independent investigation of the charges against Bathiudeen, Hisbullah, and Salley.<sup>94</sup>

The Muslim ministers' unprecedented cross-party solidarity defused the immediate tension, in part because the mass resignations removed the ministers from the very positions their critics accused them of abusing to interfere with investigations into the bombings. As their resignations cast a positive light on the ministers, the Sinhalese nationalist leadership were left displeased, and the chief monks soon called for their return to office.<sup>95</sup> On 19 June, the two UNP Muslim ministers who had resigned, Kabir Hashim and Abdul Haleem, were sworn in again to the same positions; most of the remaining ministers, including Bathiudeen, returned to their posts at the end of July.<sup>96</sup>

Amid the heavy pressure on Muslim politicians and other figures, few national figures have voiced support for the Muslim community. Throughout the weeks of turmoil and violence following the Easter attacks, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's UNP-led government said and did little to challenge the aggressive political and rhetorical attacks on Muslim leaders or to reassure Muslim citizens they would be protected. With the exception of regular, strongly worded interventions by Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera challenging anti-Muslim campaigners, UNP leaders have done little more than issue mild statements lamenting the Muslim ministers' resignations and calling for an end to anti-Muslim attacks and boycotts.<sup>97</sup>

This lacklustre show of support for the nation's Muslims reflects a clear political calculus: the UNP, which has traditionally benefited from Muslim support in elections, is hesitant to challenge the anti-Muslim campaign too strongly, for fear of losing Sinhala voters to the more nationalist opposition led by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother Gotabaya. But some analysts note that in so doing they may be taking Muslim support too much for granted, and that significant numbers of Muslims may choose not to vote or decide it is safer to support the Rajapaksas in the coming election.<sup>98</sup>

## B. *Renewed Anti-Muslim Violence*

The Easter attacks breathed new life into an anti-Muslim campaign that Sinhalese nationalists had been waging since 2011. In the immediate aftermath of the Easter attacks, with the Catholic Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith and other priests calling for restraint and peace, the retaliatory violence many feared remained limited. But the calm did not last. Within days, mob assaults on a small community of Pakistani and Afghan refugees forced them out of their houses in Negombo, site of the worst church

---

<sup>94</sup> Meera Srinivasan, "Nine Muslim ministers and two governors step down in Sri Lanka", *Hindu*, 3 June 2019; "Ministers resigned for sake of country – Kabir Hashim", *Daily News*, 12 June 2019.

<sup>95</sup> "Leading Buddhist prelates request resigned Muslim ministers to return to duties", *Colombopage*, 6 June 2019; "Sinhala - Muslim bond should continue - Mahanayake Theras", *Daily News*, 12 June 2019.

<sup>96</sup> "Kabir and Haleem reappointed as ministers", *Ada Derana*, 19 June 2019; "Resigned Sri Lankan Muslim politicians return to government", *Associated Press*, 30 June 2019.

<sup>97</sup> "Govt. sans Muslim leaders not positive: PM", *Daily FT*, 5 June 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Crisis Group interviews, journalists and politicians, Colombo, July 2019.

bombing, and into makeshift camps.<sup>99</sup> Two weeks after the bombings, there were brief street clashes on 5 May between Muslims and Catholics near Negombo. Muslim shops and houses were damaged, but the police brought the situation under control quickly and the violence did not seem to be organised by groups outside the local area.<sup>100</sup>

Much worse came the following weekend on 12-13 May, when well-established Sinhala Buddhist militant groups launched a major attack on Muslim businesses, homes and mosques in Puttalam, Kurunagala and Gampaha districts. One Muslim was killed and the violence reportedly did as much damage in 36 hours as was done in 5 days of anti-Muslim rioting in March 2018.<sup>101</sup>

As details about the weekend violence emerged, it became clear that this was not spontaneous retaliation for the Easter attacks, but a continuation of the years-long and orchestrated anti-Muslim campaign. The attacks followed the same script as previous incidents of large-scale rioting against Muslims, with nationalist organisations bussing in supporters and mobilising local Sinhalese, and security forces, despite their extra powers under emergency law, failing to maintain order and in some cases appearing to assist rioters.<sup>102</sup> Two of Sri Lanka's best-known Buddhist militants – Amith Weerasinghe, leader of Mahasohon Balakaya, and Dan Priyasad, head of Nawa Sinhale National Movement – joined the crowds.<sup>103</sup> The general secretary of Sirisena's Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Dayasiri Jayasekera, made a public intervention to arrange bail for several Sinhalese arrested for the rioting.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> The situation for the roughly 1,600 refugees – mostly Ahmadis and Christians who fled persecution in Pakistan and Afghanistan – was extremely difficult in the initial weeks. After being forced from their homes in Negombo, they lived in unsanitary makeshift open-air camps, with hundreds staying in the grounds of the Negombo police station. Eventually, many were relocated to government camps in the northern province, as they awaited settlement in third countries. As of early September 2019, there were just under 100 refugees still in the camps. Crisis Group phone interview, human rights activist, September 2019. See Ruki Fernando, "Refugee crisis in Sri Lanka after the Easter Sunday bombings", *Groundviews*, 4 May 2019.

<sup>100</sup> "Muslim shops in Sri Lanka attacked as tensions remain after Easter Sunday bombings", CNN, 8 May 2019.

<sup>101</sup> Lisa Fuller and Rukshana Rizwie, "In Sri Lanka, Muslims say Sinhala neighbours turned against them", *Al Jazeera*, 2 May 2019. The violence began in Chilaw on the evening of 12 March in response to a Facebook post by a Muslim shopkeeper, mistranslated into Sinhala, that appeared as a threat. The man's shop was attacked by mobs and damaged.

<sup>102</sup> This earned the police a sharp rebuke from the Human Rights Commission, which criticised their slow response, the transfer and release on bail of suspects in response to the demands of rioting crowds, and the lack of crowd control training and equipment. "Recent Communal Violence in the North-Western Province, Chilaw District and Minuwangoda Town", HRSC, 23 May 2019.

<sup>103</sup> Both Weerasinghe and Priyasad were arrested and released on bail without charge and have denied any wrongdoing. Each had been previously arrested for other alleged anti-Muslim activities. Weerasinghe, arrested in connection with the March 2018 riots in Kandy, was released on 31 October 2018, just days after Sirisena's illegal appointment of Mahinda Rajapaksa as prime minister. Both were out on bail at the time of the May 2019 riots.

<sup>104</sup> Widely circulated video showed Jayasekera arriving at the Hettipola Police Station and transporting six suspects in his personal vehicle to the Bingiriya Station where they were released on bail. Seen with Jayasekera outside the police station was Namal Kumara, a close friend of Amith Weerasinghe, who was instrumental in Weerasinghe's release on bail. Jayasekera denies any wrongdoing and argues he was attempting to defuse a dangerous situation. His actions suggest changed political calculations on the part of Sinhala politicians, who have previously been careful to distance

Many Sri Lankan political observers believe the Rajapaksa-led opposition party, the Sri Lanka People's Front (SLPP), has encouraged the violence, and that local SLPP politicians have been involved in stoking it, a charge the party denies.<sup>105</sup> They also worry that the SLPP has a political motive to promote further violence in advance of the election. With virtually no support from Tamils or Muslims, the SLPP's chances of victory arguably depend on reducing minority (and especially Muslim) support for the ruling UNP. They could well calculate that more violence against Muslim communities would fuel Muslim dissatisfaction with the UNP-led government, while deepening a sense among other voters that the state has lost control of security. Similarly, violence in Muslim-majority electoral districts, close to or on election day, could discourage Muslim voters from going to the polls.<sup>106</sup>

### C. Other Actions Against Muslims

#### 1. Arrests and rumours

Following the Easter attacks, more than 1,800 Muslims were arrested in connection to the bombings or related incidents, with nearly 300 Muslims still in custody as of early September.<sup>107</sup>

Families of those arrested and Muslim community leaders complain that many of those imprisoned had no connections to the attacks or extremist groups but had been reported to the authorities out of fear or bigotry.<sup>108</sup> In mid-May, police arrested a Muslim woman – applying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act – for wearing a dress they believed featured the *dharmachakra*, a revered Buddhist symbol.<sup>109</sup> In fact, the image was of a boat wheel. After 17 days in jail, the woman was released on bail, but authorities have not dropped charges against her and she remains subject to prosecution.<sup>110</sup>

---

themselves publicly from anti-Muslim violence. “Have a single law for all Sri Lankans”, *Daily Mirror*, 13 June 2019.

<sup>105</sup> Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, politicians and journalists, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, politicians and journalists, Colombo, July 2019. For the Rajapaksas to win, “Tamils and Muslim need to feel the government can't do anything to help them”, argues one government minister.

<sup>107</sup> Crisis Group phone interviews, Muslim lawyers, August 2019; “Sri Lanka: 293 suspects held over Easter Sunday attacks”, Andalou Agency, 5 September 2019.

<sup>108</sup> For examples of arbitrary arrests, including for possessing the Quran, see “Women's Action Network: Standing in protest and solidarity after the Easter attacks”, *The Sunday Observer*, 30 June 2019. In some cases, police reportedly demanded large sums in exchange for release. Crisis Group interviews, lawyers and activists, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>109</sup> The ICCPR Act of 2007 incorporates the ICCPR, an international human rights treaty, into Sri Lankan law. Section 3 (1) of the Act states that “no person shall propagate war or advocate national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence”. Unlike other laws used to prosecute defamation and hate speech, the ICCPR Act allows police to hold suspects for extended periods without bail. After years of unsuccessfully calling for its application in cases of hate speech against religious minorities, many rights activists are now angry about its recent arbitrary use against Muslims. For a helpful analysis of the dilemmas involved in applying the ICCPR Act, see Gehan Gunatilleke, “Broken shield and weapon of choice”, *The Morning*, 24 June 2019.

<sup>110</sup> Lisa Fuller and Rukshana Rizwie, “Muslims ‘targeted with arbitrary arrests’ after Easter massacre”, *Al Jazeera*, 16 June 2019. Worries about the use of the ICCPR Act to target minorities and politi-

Rumours and unfounded allegations spread through both traditional and social media, fanning popular fears and prompting more arbitrary arrests. The best-known instance concerns Dr. S.S.M. Shafi – a Muslim physician who practices at the Kurunagala government hospital – whom a newspaper accused without evidence of sterilising 4,000 Sinhalese women. In May, the police detained Dr. Shafi under the Prevention of Terrorism Act on suspicion of illegally gained wealth. Nationalist monks and politicians subsequently mounted a campaign of attacks against Shafi in the media for alleged links to terrorists and to Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, who had been the subject of a similar campaign.<sup>111</sup>

After two month's detention, Dr. Shafi was released on bail on 25 July. National police investigators told the court they have found no evidence for any of the charges against Dr. Shafi and accused local police, the magistrate and hospital officials of falsifying documents.<sup>112</sup> Still, the attacks against him have ongoing popular resonance, in part because they bring together three key themes of the long-running anti-Muslim campaign: a fear of Muslim militancy (now heightened after the Easter attacks), envy of the supposedly illicit or unfair wealth of Muslims, and belief in a Muslim plan of covertly sterilising Sinhalese to reduce their numbers. Lamented one leading activist, "Muslims have been made into devils by the local media".<sup>113</sup>

## 2. Boycotts and threats

While sporadic boycott campaigns against Muslim businesses have had localised effects over the past seven years, the current campaign is larger and causing considerably greater damage to Muslim shopkeepers and businesses across the island.<sup>114</sup> "A lot of wealthy Muslims are already beginning to apply for visas to the EU and Canada", says one government minister.<sup>115</sup> In some cases, the boycotts have been enforced through intimidation, with Sinhala shoppers threatened and harassed after shopping at Muslim-owned stores.<sup>116</sup>

Public remarks made in June 2019 by Ven. Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thera, the chief priest of the Asgiriya chapter and one of Sri Lanka's two most senior Buddhist monks, used violent rhetoric to boost both the boycott campaign and the sterilisation rumours targeted at Dr. Shafi. Saying "Muslims don't love us", the senior cleric called on Buddhists not to patronise Muslim shops or eat at Muslim restaurants, because "they have fed poison to our people". He then suggested that "hundreds of thousands of our children" had been sterilised by a Muslim doctor, saying, "these

---

cal dissidents increased following reports that police were due to arrest senior Sinhala journalist Kusal Perera on the basis of a complaint made by a well-known Buddhist nationalist activist. "Govt. abusing UN law to make arrests: rights group", AFP, 17 June 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Alexander Ulmer, "Unsubstantiated claims Muslim doctor sterilized women raise tensions in Sri Lanka", Reuters, 6 June 2019.

<sup>112</sup> "Sri Lanka magistrate grants bail to illegally detained Muslim doctor", *Economy Next*, 25 July 2019; "Dr. Shafi to file damages against 'witch-hunters'", *The Sunday Observer*, 4 August 2019. Sri Lanka's top obstetricians have cast doubt on the accusations against Dr. Shafi. "Delving into 'Sterilisation Story'", *Daily Mirror*, 7 June 2019.

<sup>113</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>114</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim business owners and activists, Colombo, July 2009.

<sup>115</sup> Crisis Group interviews, government minister, businessmen, journalist, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>116</sup> Crisis Group phone interviews, rights activists, June 2019.

traitors must not be allowed to live in freedom. Some female devotees said [people like the doctor] should be stoned to death. I don't say that, but that is what should be done". The Asgiriya chief priest concluded with an exhortation to "unite as Sinhalese and as Buddhists" and endorsed the Rajapaksas' return to power in the upcoming presidential election.<sup>117</sup>

Few Sinhala politicians reacted to the Asgiriya chief priest's comments. With the exception of Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera – who denounced the speech as an example of the "Talibanisation" of Buddhism – and Economic Reforms Minister Harsha de Silva, no one in the government or opposition challenged him. Speaking on 18 June at a Buddhist ceremony that included the Asgiriya chief priest, President Sirisena repeated his customary praise of the Buddhist clergy, announcing that "the country will never head towards any wrong direction if the state rulers act on the advice and guidance of the *Mahasangha* [senior clergy]". He then added: "You would have seen what [the chief priest] said. I am not going to say anything about it. You would be aware of it".<sup>118</sup>

### 3. Dress restrictions

Within days of the Easter attacks, President Sirisena signed an order under emergency powers banning all face coverings, including the burqa and *niqab* worn by some Sri Lankan Muslim women.

The burqa ban fulfilled a longstanding demand of militant Buddhist groups – one that preceded the Easter bombing – even as critics pointed out that none of the Easter bombers had covered their faces and that women wearing veils had never posed a security threat in Sri Lanka. In the wake of the ban, many Muslim women reported being harassed on the street and refused service at government agencies and private businesses when wearing a headscarf, even with their faces visible.<sup>119</sup> Many Muslim women whose religious beliefs, or families, require them to wear a veil in public found themselves forced to stay home.<sup>120</sup>

In the same vein, the Ministry of Public Administration issued a circular entitled "Ensuring Security in the Office Premises of the Government" establishing a restrictive dress code for public sector employees and for visitors to government offices. The code requires women to wear one of two types of *sari*, in effect banning forms of dress typically worn by Muslim and Tamil women. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka ruled the circular violated a range of fundamental rights, having estab-

---

<sup>117</sup> Making clear his comments targeted Muslims beyond Dr. Shafi, the chief priest said: "If one of our people had done the same to them in their country, they would have cut us to death". This plays off a common belief among Sinhalese that Buddhists and other non-Muslims are treated harshly and have fewer rights in Arab and other Muslim-majority countries. For earlier, more conciliatory comments on Muslims by the chief monk, see "Sinhala – Muslim bond should continue – Mahanayake Thera", *Daily News*, 12 June 2019.

<sup>118</sup> "If the rulers act on advice of Mahasangha the country will not head in the wrong direction – President", *pmdnews.lk*, 19 June 2019. Ven. Gnanarathana Thera gave the speech on 15 June 2019 but video of his comments only began to circulate on 18 June, the day of Sirisena's speech.

<sup>119</sup> The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka requested public servants and private businesses to ensure full access to all women complying with the emergency rules. "Re: Denial of Access to Women Due to Their Attire", HRCSL letter to Chambers of Commerce, 21 May 2019.

<sup>120</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, women activists, May 2019.

lished no rational relation between the banned forms of dress and security issues, and requested it be withdrawn. Though the commission's "direction" to the ministry is nonbinding, the public administration ministry later revised the circular to remove the ban on the abaya and hijab.<sup>121</sup> With the expiration of the state of emergency on 22 August, the legal ban on niqab is no longer in effect. In the face of frequent public abuse, however, many women choose not to wear the veil, and even "women in hijab continue to be harassed", one human rights lawyer reports.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> "Public Administration Circular No.13/2019 dated 29/05/2019 entitled 'Ensuring Security in the Office Premises of the Government'", HRCSL letter to Ministry of Public Administration, 3 June 2019.

<sup>122</sup> Crisis Group email interview, September 2019; Ameen Izzadeen, "Niqab seeks return in Sri Lanka amid fears, uncertainty", Andalou Agency, 6 September 2019.

## V. Inside the Muslim Community: The Challenges of Reform

---

Harassment, violence and arbitrary arrests are taking their toll on a community notable for its restraint in the face of years of provocation. “Many youths are locked up for months, for things that aren’t a crime, like having a Quran”, complains one community leader. This leader adds: “They are without hope. They are asking ‘what is the future for us in this country’? Muslims are angry – if they can treat us this way despite being good citizens ... But we are still preaching calm and peace”.<sup>123</sup> A young Muslim entrepreneur worries that:

Demonisation could lead to some innocent Muslims being radicalised. I’m hopeful that Muslim radicalisation won’t take root, but the potential exists if the government doesn’t take meaningful steps on law and order. The army and police need to be sensitised to the Muslim community.<sup>124</sup>

Since 21 April, Muslim clerics, political leaders, and citizens, have condemned the Easter violence and gone to great lengths to reassure Sri Lankans of other faiths that Muslims are a moderate and peaceful community. They have argued that Zaharan had little support and that mainstream organisations had roundly rejected him.<sup>125</sup> The All Ceylon Jamiyyah Ulama (ACJU), representing the nation’s Muslim clerics, publicly rejected both the Easter attackers and ISIS as un-Islamic and refused to bury the bombers with Islamic rites.<sup>126</sup> The ACJU also quickly agreed to support, as a temporary gesture, the government’s emergency regulations banning face coverings, despite their earlier rulings that wearing the veil was a religious duty.

Muslims across the country, but particularly in Zaharan’s home province in the east, have also played a vital role in assisting police and military investigations into the network behind the attacks, contributing to the arrest of scores of suspects and the discovery of safe houses and hidden weapons.<sup>127</sup> Muslims express considerable anger at the damage the Easter bombings have done to relations with Sri Lanka’s other communities and to the loss of business and security in the attacks’ aftermath.<sup>128</sup> This has led some Muslims to advocate for changes and reforms that are also supported by proponents from outside the community. In their understandable attempt to assuage the concerns and fears of other communities, however, Muslim community leaders face significant challenges that need careful management.

---

<sup>123</sup> Crisis Group interview, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>124</sup> Crisis Group interview, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>125</sup> “Kattankudy CSOs say ‘we are ashamed’; reveal Zaharan Hashim’s violent history”, *Colombo Telegraph*, 28 April 2019.

<sup>126</sup> “Hating people of other religions, not Islamic – Mufti Haniffa”, *The Sunday Observer*, 12 May 2019. In 2015, following news of the death of a Sri Lankan man who had joined ISIS, the ACJU and other Muslim organisations formally denounced ISIS as un-Islamic. “Muslims in Sri Lanka unite to condemn Islamic State (ISIS)”, *Colombo Telegraph*, 25 July 2019.

<sup>127</sup> “Muslim leaders espouse middle path”, *Daily FT*, 17 May 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim residents and businessmen, Colombo, July 2019.

### A. *The Critique of "Arabisation"*

The disorienting shock of the Easter attacks has accelerated a process of "introspection" among some in the Muslim leadership and middle class about whether the adoption of foreign-influenced religious practices and clothing may have estranged Muslims from the wider Sri Lankan community, feeding mistrust of Muslims and even violence against them.<sup>129</sup>

Some liberal Muslims voice a growing concern about "Wahhabism" and "Arabisation" that has echoes of the longstanding – and since Easter, increasingly widespread – belief among Sinhalese that Muslims have grown dangerously "Arab" and should return to a "Sri Lankan" identity. In the same way that Sinhala critics of "Arabisation" point to the growing number of women wearing the abaya and niqab, the increase in Arabic language signs at Muslim institutions, and the rows of date trees that line the streets of Kattankudy – Muslim critics see in these and similar changes signs of unhealthy Saudi and other Middle Eastern influences on their community.<sup>130</sup>

But whether the critique of "Arabisation" comes from outside the Muslim community or from within, there are risks to adopting the critique as an organising principle for policy change. First, the Arabisation critique accepts a Sinhalese nationalist narrative that the growing separation between ethno-religious communities in Sri Lanka is solely the result of changes in Muslims' behaviour. This neglects the role that Sinhala and Tamil nationalism has played in encouraging the development of an increasingly separate Muslim identity and growing social distance between communities. With Muslims caught between the competing violent nationalisms of Sinhalese and Tamils, the appeal of a distinctive identity centred on piety and influenced by already strong global Islamic movements was especially powerful during the war years.<sup>131</sup> The post-war assertion of pro-Sinhala bias in state institutions – not least the police – which facilitated often violent anti-Muslim campaigning, further reinforced these developments.

Second, among Sinhalese nationalists, the critique of Arabisation frequently slides from a call for Muslims to abandon practices deemed "Arab" and Middle Eastern to a demand for conformity to the dominant, Sinhala culture – in language, dress, food, and education. This demand is frequently supported by unsubstantiated claims of links between everyday religious practices like the niqab and burqa – which many Sinhalese and some liberal Muslims see as problematic or even discriminatory – and violent extremism and terrorism.<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> This was a point made by a cross-party group of Muslim politicians and community leaders. Uditha Jayasinghe, "Muslim leaders espouse middle path", *Daily FT*, 17 May 2019; "Namini Wijedasa, "Muslim leaders condemn bombings but plead that the whole community not be tarnished", *The Sunday Times*, 12 May 2019.

<sup>130</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim community leaders, Colombo, July 2019.

<sup>131</sup> See Farzana Haniffa, "Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 42, no.2/3 (2008), pp. 349-352.

<sup>132</sup> In response, there have also been organised efforts by Muslim activists since 2014 to "de-Arabise" women's appearance by making available affordable abayas in brighter colours, rather than black. Echoing the feelings of many middle-class Muslims, one male activist remarked: "If we could go back to how we dressed 30 years ago, half the problem would be solved". Crisis Group interview, Colombo, January 2019.



Such claims, and the demand to conform, risk alienating the many Muslims who derive a strong sense of identity and personal dignity from their distinctive culture and piety traditions. As a result, many Muslims are wary of adopting, in the name of “introspection”, even a milder version of the Arabisation critique. In the disdainful words of one young Muslim businessman, “‘introspection’ is a term Colombo Muslims use to keep their Sinhala friends by disassociating themselves from religious practices their friends aren’t comfortable with”.<sup>133</sup>

### B. *Madrasa Reform and Religious Intolerance*

Some Muslim leaders share widespread concerns about the lack of monitoring of foreign religious scholars and preachers.<sup>134</sup> Even though there are no reports of Sri Lankan madrasas preaching violence or anti-Buddhist or jihadist ideology, Muslim leaders tend to agree that, as a precautionary step, the curriculum, faculty and funding of madrasas should be subject to government regulation.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, the education ministry was drafting a law to regulate them, with the involvement of Muslim religious and community leaders, even before the Easter attacks, and the legislation is now awaiting cabinet approval.<sup>136</sup>

But while there seems to be merit in enacting this legislation, it raises the question of what the government intends to do in order to staunch the indoctrination and radicalisation of young people of other faiths. As one activist and researcher puts it, “the problem of intolerant, at times violent, religiosity is growing in all Sri Lankan communities and needs to be addressed as a national problem – not an exclusively Muslim one”.<sup>137</sup>

Beyond well-publicised attacks on Muslims, the problem of religiously motivated violence includes evangelical converts from Catholicism destroying Catholic statues, stricter versions of Hinduism enforced through intimidation, and Buddhists from the Theravadan tradition – dominant in Sri Lanka – using threats of violence to shut down the activities of those following Mahayana Buddhist practices more common

---

<sup>133</sup> Crisis Group interview, Colombo, July 2019. Proactive efforts by Muslims to rebuild connections and trust with other communities could nevertheless be constructive. Prior to the Easter attacks, Muslim community leaders had already begun an “Open Mosques” initiative to invite non-Muslims to visit and learn about what happens in mosques. The National Masjid Awards, begun in 2018, honours mosques for their “contributions to the nation” and is “designed to bring the mosque into the community as a local organisation to serve the whole community, and not only Muslims”. Crisis Group interview, Muslim activist, Colombo, February 2018.

<sup>134</sup> “Muslim leaders espouse middle path”, *Daily FT*, 17 May 2019. Hundreds of foreign Islamic clerics and teachers were deported for overstaying their visas in the weeks after Easter. “Sri Lanka expels 200 clerics after attacks as Catholics celebrate Mass in private”, AFP, 5 May 2019.

<sup>135</sup> Ali Sabry, a prominent lawyer who has represented Gotabaya Rajapaksa, endorsed tighter madrasa regulation in May, arguing: “We should know the curriculum taught, calibre of teachers, the funding, governance, structures for which there needs to be an act, regulatory and supervisory body”. “Bombers do not represent Muslims nor Islamic faith – Muslim leaders say in one voice”, *Daily News*, 17 May 2019.

<sup>136</sup> “Amended Bill to regulate madrasas to be presented to Cabinet: PM”, *Daily FT*, 18 May 2019.

<sup>137</sup> Crisis Group interview, researcher, Colombo, July 2019. For a comprehensive study of religious violence in Sri Lanka’s initial post-war years, see Centre for Policy Alternatives, *Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka*, March 2013.

outside Sri Lanka.<sup>138</sup> Sri Lankan leaders and political commentators – in parliament, the media and at the community level – should at the very least speak out about the dangers of religious intolerance in all communities, and underscore that Muslims are hardly the only (or even the predominant) source of religiously motivated violence in the country. Government and Buddhist religious leaders should also give greater support to the efforts of those monks working to revise the curriculum in Buddhist seminaries to encourage greater understanding of and tolerance for other religions.<sup>139</sup>

### C. *Reforming Muslim Family Law*

In the wake of the Easter bombings, a range of Sinhala nationalist groups and politicians launched a reform campaign under the banner of “One Country, One Law”.<sup>140</sup> Demanding a series of legal changes ostensibly designed to end separate educational, legal and administrative arrangements based on religion, campaigners have focused much of their attention on the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA), which regulates marriage, divorce and inheritance.<sup>141</sup>

Until the Easter attacks, the leading champions of reforming the MMDA had been Muslim women, who argue that it has a discriminatory and harmful impact on Muslim women and girls. Of particular concern are its failure to set any minimum marriage age for Muslims (set at eighteen for all other communities in Sri Lanka), its ban on women as judges in the religious courts that hear divorce cases, the lack of any consent required from women, women’s unequal rights to divorce and objections about polygamy.<sup>142</sup> For years the Islamic clerics association, the ACJU, has resisted efforts to reform the MMDA, with Muslim politicians supporting the ACJU.<sup>143</sup>

Sinhala nationalist politicians, in turn, have long criticised what they see as the special rights granted Muslim men under the MMDA and the mistreatment of women

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Buddhist monks, Colombo, April 2019.

<sup>140</sup> For reforms proposed by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), see “Solution or another problem”, *The Morning*, 27 May 2019. Other important champions of “One Country, One Law” have been the prominent monk Athuraliye Rathana Thera and the Rajapaksa-aligned opposition parliamentarian, Wimal Weerawansa.

<sup>141</sup> In addition to the MMDA, there is also a separate law on marriage and inheritance for Buddhists living in the districts of the former Kandyan Kingdom, and Thesawalamai law, which applies to all who reside in the northern Jaffna peninsula, regardless of religion or ethnicity.

<sup>142</sup> For a valuable overview of the issue, see Sabra Zahid and Hyshyama Hamin, “Long Overdue: Breaking down the minimum age of marriage in Sri Lanka”, *Groundviews*, 15 July 2019. For a comprehensive list of proposed reforms, see Muslim Personal Law Reform Action Group (MPLRAG), “Muslim Women’s Demands on reforms to the MMDA”, 4 April 2017. MPLRAG also supports the politically more difficult route of abolishing Article 16 of the constitution, which prevents any aspects of personal laws from being struck down on grounds of discrimination. MPLRAG, “Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s) on repealing Article 16(1)”, 6 November 2016.

<sup>143</sup> Dominated by clerics from Tablighi Jammat, not Salafis, the ACJU’s centre of gravity is very conservative, particularly on gender issues. The ACJU has previously accepted modest changes to the MMDA, but resisted the key demands of women activists, including eighteen as the minimum age of marriage and women Islamic court judges. Crisis Group interview, ACJU spokesman, Colombo, July 2019. The few religious scholars and preachers who have publicly supported stronger reform have found themselves ostracised and forced out of the ACJU and local Mosque Federations. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim woman activists, Colombo, July 2019.

and girls this allows. Mainstream Sinhala politicians have previously refrained from pushing for reform, preferring to leave the decision to “the Muslim community”, in the form of its all-male leadership.<sup>144</sup> They are now demanding not only the reform of the MMDA but its entire repeal.<sup>145</sup>

As post-Easter pressure grew for to abolish the MMDA, Muslim legislators announced in July their support for major amendments to the law, in line with some of the key demands of women reformers, including establishing eighteen as the minimum age for marriage and accepting women as Islamic court judges. Presenting their proposed amendments to the justice minister, Muslim politicians promised legislation would be presented to parliament soon.<sup>146</sup> Within days, however, the ACJU announced its opposition, claiming the proposals raised “religious concerns” that require further consultation before they are submitted to Cabinet. Failure to delay the reforms would constitute “a historic treachery and betrayal of the Muslim community”, the clerics warned.<sup>147</sup> Amendments approved by Cabinet on 20 August, for consideration by parliament, contain major loopholes that have been strongly challenged by Muslim women’s groups.<sup>148</sup>

Reforms to the MMDA have the potential both to create legal protections for Muslim women and girls and to help reduce a major source of prejudice against Muslims (ie, as a “backward” community that oppresses women and allows the sexual exploitation of girls). With proper backing from male Muslim politicians, reforms long supported by Muslim women’s groups should be able to avoid being seen as imposed by external political forces, with the risk that could bring of further alienating parts of the Muslim community.<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> As one politically connected Muslim lawyer explains, “The ACJU and Muslim MPs have a mutually supportive relationship: given the respect that the ACJU and imams have in most of the community, politicians have been scared to challenge ACJU policy and contribute substantial amounts of money to the ACJU to ensure that their sermons don’t challenge them”. Crisis Group interview, Colombo, July 2019. Just as Muslim politicians sought not to challenge the ACJU, with its power to influence the votes of average Muslims, Sinhala politicians have largely abdicated their responsibility and left the issues to Muslims, whose support they generally need to remain in power. For an argument to this effect, Ameer Ali, “Easter carnage & grand failure of leadership”, *Colombo Telegraph*, 23 April 2019.

<sup>145</sup> The leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which had previously worked closely with Muslim women reformers, had moved to this more radical position.

<sup>146</sup> “Proposal on amending Muslim Marriage & Divorce Act to be handed over to justice minister”, *Ada Derana*, 15 July 2019. Women’s activists, while welcoming the proposed changes, called for a more comprehensive approach to MMDA reform, arguing that other key changes must be included. See MPLRAG, “Piecemeal reform will perpetuate discrimination and hardship under the MMDA”, 15 July 2019.

<sup>147</sup> “MMDA reforms to stop child marriage still stifled by ACJU”, *The Sunday Observer*, 4 August 2019; “ACJU clerics want marriage reform delayed”, *The Sunday Observer*, 21 July 2019.

<sup>148</sup> MPLRAG, “Cabinet minister fails to adequately address MMDA reform concerns”, 23 August 2019.

<sup>149</sup> See R.K. Radhakrishnan, “‘We cannot be pushed too much’: Rauff Hakeem, Sri Lankan Muslim leader”, *Frontline*, 3 June 2019.

## VI. What the Government Should Do (and Not Do) Now

---

Government officials express confidence that the short-term threat of further attacks from any possible remaining members of Zaharan's network is low.<sup>150</sup> But whether or not this is the case, the question of how Sri Lanka handles the aftermath of the Easter attacks – the reforms it chooses to pursue, and the way in which it manages intercommunal rifts that preceded and have been exacerbated by the attacks – could have an important impact on the country's peace and security over the longer term. So far, the government is not off to a good start, but can still seek out a better path.

### A. *Reforms to the Intelligence and Policing System*

Information surfaced about the run-up to the Easter attacks suggests that Sri Lanka needs improved arrangements to coordinate and process intelligence on security threats. In particular, the National Security Council, currently with no formal status, rules, or staff, needs to be both better resourced and subject to more meaningful oversight. It should be given a statutory foundation, headed by an appointed national security advisor and supported by its own secretariat.<sup>151</sup> The government should establish clear lines of authority between the different intelligence agencies and clear procedures for sharing information.

Such changes will only be effective, however, if the new arrangements are protected from political interference and manipulation. Parliamentary investigations have made clear how easy it is for senior politicians to control, manipulate or abuse intelligence. To make this harder in the future, parliament needs to enact legislation giving it a formal, regular oversight role on intelligence matters.<sup>152</sup>

### B. *Tracking and Monitoring Threats*

The events of Easter Sunday made clear that Sri Lanka needs to hone its capacity to track and monitor information about threats. Not all of the failures of the security apparatus were a function of poor coordination and a failure to heed warnings. Although the Sri Lankan police knew a lot about some aspects of Zaharan's activities, serious gaps remained.

Sri Lankan authorities – supported by UN capacity-building agencies and foreign donors – should improve their tools and protocols for monitoring online propaganda and militant recruitment and the travel of suspected militants in and out of Sri Lanka. The government has requested technical assistance from several UN agencies – including for greater border security and better information sharing with

---

<sup>150</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Colombo, July 2019. In late July, testimony to parliament, the Army Commander reported there were credible reports that some “terror suspects” were still at large, but he gave no details. “IGP was barred from Security Council meetings”, *Sunday Observer*, 4 August 2019.

<sup>151</sup> For a thoughtful analysis of the NSC's failings and a proposal for reform, see Daniel Alphonsus, “National Security Council needs reforming”, *The Sunday Observer*, 5 May 2019.

<sup>152</sup> Sri Lanka has no laws specifically to regulate the intelligence sector and its activities, including establishing the legal basis for surveillance work. Crisis Group interview, government advisor, Colombo, July 2019. Inquests being held outside Sri Lanka for foreign victims of the bombings – for instance in the UK – may help shed additional light on policing and political failures.

international partners – and planning for various initiatives are already underway within the UN and between the UN and government departments.<sup>153</sup>

Given the government's poor human rights record, special care needs to be taken to build in human rights safeguards for new counter-terrorism tools and protocols, including by Sri Lanka's foreign partners.<sup>154</sup> Rights protections should also be central in government attempts to establish better oversight of foreign funding to religious schools and institutions – including through the legislation on madrasas discussed in Section V.B.

The government and its partners should avoid adopting new legislation to ban “hate speech” and disinformation spread through social media.<sup>155</sup> Sri Lanka already has several laws to prosecute hate speech and religious defamation. What has been lacking is the political will to apply it even-handedly: the strongest available law, the ICCPR Act, has since Easter principally been used against Muslims, often on questionable grounds, and has never been used to prosecute militants claiming to defend Buddhism. Any new laws to regulate social media should only follow wide consultation and adhere to the guidelines on social media content regulation issued by the UN special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.<sup>156</sup>

### C. Counter-radicalisation and Countering Violent Extremism

Proposals for programs to tackle “violent extremism” – including ones prominently floated by presidential advisors in the weeks after the attacks – tend to focus both on reforming the security services and on programs to “rehabilitate” and “deradicalise” individuals deemed to pose particular risks.<sup>157</sup> These proposals should be treated with great caution.

---

<sup>153</sup> Crisis Group interview, UN official, Colombo, July 2019. The UN agencies and offices involved include the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UNCTED), the Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. As a result, coordination and coherence in policies and assistance offered will be both challenging and essential. Representatives of UNCTED and UNODC met government officials in Colombo in June. “Sri Lanka to engage with UN on counter-terrorism strategy”, *Daily Mirror*, 8 June 2019.

<sup>154</sup> On 18 September, Cabinet approved a memorandum entitled “Introducing an effective legal framework to counter terrorism”. The two-page document lists a range of offences and provisions to be included in future draft legislation – including “commission of offences abroad”, “entering or remaining in designated areas overseas”, and restrictions on overseas travel – designed to address threats from international jihadist networks. It is not yet clear how this proposed legislation relates to the draft Counterterrorism Act, which has been repeatedly revised since 2016 but remains stalled in parliament.

<sup>155</sup> “Sri Lanka proposes new law on fake news after Easter attacks”, AFP, 5 June 2019.

<sup>156</sup> “2018 thematic report to the Human Rights Council on content regulation”, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 6 April 2018.

<sup>157</sup> At a 7 May meeting with the Sri Lanka-based heads of diplomatic missions, chaired by President Sirisena, officials presented the outline of a long-term plan to tackle “violent extremism”. The five-part plan envisages “restoring the security and intelligence services”, “regulating the religious space to prevent radical preachers, especially foreign preachers, from preaching hatred”, removing extremist content online and “holding service providers accountable” for hosting it, “rehabilitation programme

First, at a minimum, no program should have any relationship with, or be modelled on, the government's current "rehabilitation" program for LTTE members, which has long been dogged by allegations of torture and other rights abuses.<sup>158</sup> The government has not learned from its mistakes in that context, and could well import bad practices into the program it is now contemplating. Apart from the human rights concerns it raises, a program that reproduces the flaws of old approaches would likely be counterproductive given the anger it would almost certainly stoke among Muslims.

Secondly, any program run by the Sri Lankan government to change the mindset of the handful of jihadists who may return to Sri Lanka, or others discovered to be involved in groups advocating violence, risks generating more resentment than positive change. Notwithstanding the shocking scope of the Easter attacks, there is little evidence of a significant jihadist presence among Sri Lanka's Muslims. Unless carefully tailored, a state-sponsored de-radicalisation program could stigmatise large numbers of Muslims based on the actions of a fringe few. It would also be difficult to justify a program for rehabilitation or de-radicalisation that does not extend to violent Sinhalese nationalists as well.

Finally, in that vein, the credibility of any plan to "counter violent extremism" in Sri Lanka hinges on whether it includes a plan for dismantling – or otherwise addressing the threat from – the networks of Sinhalese extremists, who, in the name of defending Buddhism, have repeatedly attacked both Christians and Muslims. The failure of the UNP-led government over the past four years to dismantle these networks, hold perpetrators to account, or challenge the ideas used to justify violence against Muslims helped foster the atmosphere in which severe anti-Muslim violence flared three weeks after the Easter bombings.

#### D. *Ending Impunity*

Noticeably missing from the government's proposed reforms is ending impunity for violent and hateful acts against Muslims. Even the best-planned and sophisticated policy for countering violent extremism will likely fail so long as Muslims continue to be demonised, boycotted and attacked at will, with no consequences for those who organise and carry out the violence. In addition to better and broader training in and resources for riot prevention, police, attorney general and the courts must finally begin to prosecute those involved in the many anti-Muslim riots since 2014.<sup>159</sup> Regional

---

to de-radicalise terrorists" and community programmes to "counter-radicalise" sympathisers, and an end to separate religious schools. The five-point plan was credited in part to the academic Rohan Gunaratna, who has been dogged by controversy and criticised for his involvement with the government's post-war "rehabilitation" program for former LTTE members. See Maneshka Borham and Anurangi Singh, "Rohan Gunaratna debunked?", *The Sunday Observer*, 26 May 2019. In a further irony, the plan was presented by Chief of Defence Staff, Rear Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne, who is currently on bail following his arrest for blocking police investigations into the abduction and murder of eleven Tamil and Muslim youth in 2008.

<sup>158</sup> See "Report of the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL)", UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 16 September 2015; Crisis Group Asia Report N°209, *Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: Harder than Ever*, 18 July 2011, pp. 17-19 and "Beyond lawful constraints: Sri Lanka's mass detention of LTTE suspects", International Commission of Jurists Briefing Note, September 2010.

<sup>159</sup> Crisis Group interview, government advisor, Colombo, July 2019.

Police Deputy Inspectors General, area army commanders and district secretaries all have considerable powers and should be supported to take more active roles in overseeing anti-riot security operations – and held accountable when these fail.

Ending impunity for attacks on Muslims will require clear leadership from the top. The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government promised major action on this front when it came to power in 2015, but other than statements from a handful of liberal Sinhala politicians who have little ability to determine government policies, it has not moved to hold perpetrators accountable. There is particular reason to worry about the safety of Muslim communities and candidates in the forthcoming presidential election campaign. Monitoring the ability of Muslims to participate in campaigning and voting free of intimidation and violence should be high on the agenda of domestic and international elections monitors.<sup>160</sup>

Finally, Sri Lanka's international partners can help, including through maintaining political pressure on Colombo at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Even though UNHRC Resolution 30/1, renewed at the council's March 2019 session, focuses primarily on policies to support reconciliation and accountability for the injustices of the civil war, it also contains specific clauses directly relevant to its post-Easter challenges. These include most directly the government's unfulfilled pledge to:

[I]nvestigate all alleged attacks by individuals and groups on journalists, human rights defenders, members of religious minority groups and other members of civil society, as well as places of worship, and to hold perpetrators of such attacks to account and to take steps to prevent such attacks in the future.<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>160</sup> The National Election Commission is preparing to invite four foreign poll monitor groups for the presidential election. "Foreign polls monitors to cover Presidential elections", *The Sunday Observer*, 25 August 2019.

<sup>161</sup> UN Human Rights Council Resolution 30/1, 1 October 2015, op. par. 11. Other outstanding government commitments to the UNHRC include "effective security sector reform" (op. par. 8) and new "anti-terrorism legislation in accordance with contemporary international best practices" (op. par. 12).

## **VII. Conclusion**

---

Although Sri Lanka's devastating Easter bombings were partly the result of forces and dynamics from outside the country, they also have deep internal roots. These include longstanding social and political fissures and state dysfunctions. Rather than tackle these internal problems, too much of Sri Lanka's political and religious leadership is taking steps that risks exacerbating them. Especially worrying have been the anti-Muslim attacks by influential Sinhala Buddhist nationalists – physical violence, boycotts, and media smear campaigns. These are wrong on their face but they threaten to further marginalise, humiliate and anger Muslims. Government leaders have done precious little to solve this problem and sometimes they have acted in ways to make it worse.

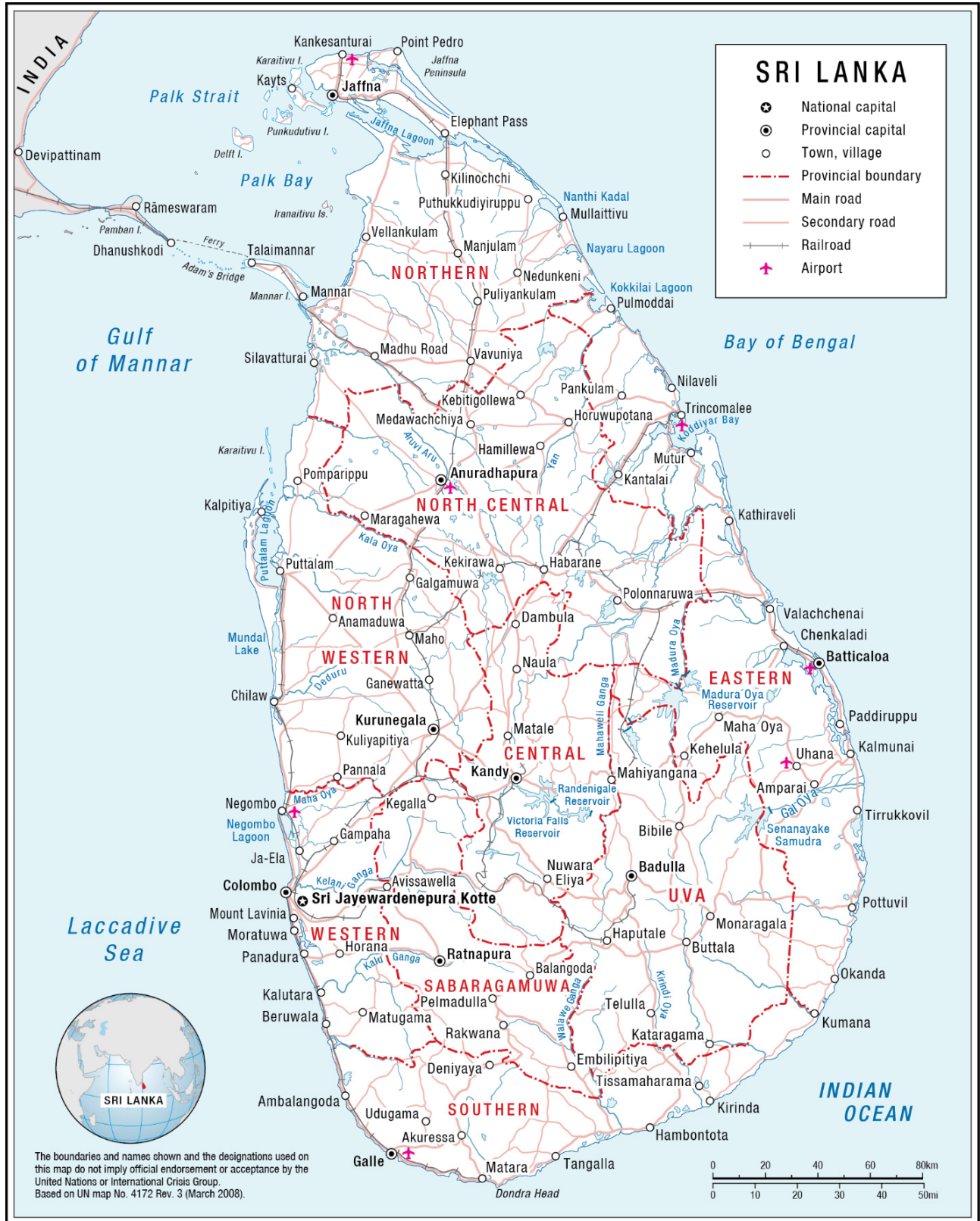
They have also done too little to fix the structural failures inside the government's security apparatus that helped lead to the Easter bombings. The government needs both to reform its approach to policing and intelligence, and to work with Muslim leaders and leaders of Sri Lanka's other religious communities to dismantle any hidden jihadist networks and discourage the growth of new ones.

But for those efforts to be successful, the government must also address Muslims grievances: ending discriminatory enforcement of anti-terrorism laws, protecting the community from violence, speaking up when its leaders are targeted in hate speech, and ending impunity for past attacks. Any new government policies need to avoid reinforcing the narrative that Muslims as a whole have become a problem in need of action, or obscuring the uncomfortable fact that the Easter bombers succeeded thanks principally to the failures of the state, not the Muslim community. If Sri Lanka's leaders want to raise their odds of avoiding future such incidents they should focus on addressing the former, and stop alienating the latter.

**Colombo/Brussels, 27 September 2019**



Appendix A: Map of Sri Lanka



## Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

---

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, German Federal Foreign Office, Global Affairs Canada, Irish Aid, Iceland Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the UK Department for International Development, and the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Crisis Group also holds relationships with the following foundations: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Charles Koch Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Korea Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Ploughshares Fund, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, UniKorea Foundation, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

**September 2019**

## Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on Asia since 2016

### Special Reports and Briefings

*Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

*Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

*Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid*, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

*Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy*, Special Briefing N°1, 30 April 2019.

*Seven Opportunities for the UN in 2019-2020*, Special Briefing N°2, 12 September 2019.

### North East Asia

*Stirring up the South China Sea (IV): Oil in Troubled Waters*, Asia Report N°275, 26 January 2016 (also available in Chinese).

*East China Sea: Preventing Clashes from Becoming Crises*, Asia Report N°280, 30 June 2016.

*China's Foreign Policy Experiment in South Sudan*, Asia Report N°288, 10 July 2017 (also available in Chinese).

*The Korean Peninsula Crisis (I): In the Line of Fire and Fury*, Asia Report N°293, 23 January 2018 (also available in Chinese).

*The Korean Peninsula Crisis (II): From Fire and Fury to Freeze-for-Freeze*, Asia Report N°294, 23 January 2018 (also available in Chinese).

*The Case for Kaesong: Fostering Korean Peace through Economic Ties*, Asia Report N°300, 24 June 2019.

### South Asia

*Nepal's Divisive New Constitution: An Existential Crisis*, Asia Report N°276, 4 April 2016.

*Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh*, Asia Report N°277, 11 April 2016.

*Sri Lanka: Jumpstarting the Reform Process*, Asia Report N°278, 18 May 2016.

*Pakistan's Jihadist Heartland: Southern Punjab*, Asia Report N°279, 30 May 2016.

*Pakistan: Stoking the Fire in Karachi*, Asia Report N°284, 15 February 2017.

*Afghanistan: The Future of the National Unity Government*, Asia Report N°285, 10 April 2017.

*Sri Lanka's Transition to Nowhere*, Asia Report N°286, 16 May 2017.

*Sri Lanka's Conflict-Affected Women: Dealing with the Legacy of War*, Asia Report N°289, 28 July 2017.

*Countering Jihadist Militancy in Bangladesh*, Asia Report N°295, 28 February 2018.

*China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Opportunities and Risks*, Asia Report N°297, 29 June 2018 (also available in Chinese).

*Building on Afghanistan's Fleeting Ceasefire*, Asia Report N°298, 19 July 2018 (also available in Dari and Pashto).

*Shaping a New Peace in Pakistan's Tribal Areas*, Asia Briefing N°150, 20 August 2018.

*Sri Lanka: Stepping Back from a Constitutional Crisis*, Asia Briefing N°152, 31 October 2018.

### South East Asia

*The Philippines: Renewing Prospects for Peace in Mindanao*, Asia Report N°281, 6 July 2016.

*Myanmar's New Government: Finding Its Feet?*, Asia Report N°282, 29 July 2016 (also available in Burmese).

*Southern Thailand's Peace Dialogue: No Traction*, Asia Briefing N°148, 21 September 2016.

*Myanmar's Peace Process: Getting to a Political Dialogue*, Asia Briefing N°149, 19 October 2016 (also available in Burmese).

*Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State*, Asia Report N°283, 15 December 2016 (also available in Burmese).

*Building Critical Mass for Peace in Myanmar*, Asia Report N°287, 29 June 2017 (also available in Burmese).

*Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar*, Asia Report N°290, 5 September 2017 (also available in Burmese).

*Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace*, Asia Report N°291, 8 November 2017 (also available in Thai and Malay).

*Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis Enters a Dangerous New Phase*, Asia Report N°292, 7 December 2017 (also available in Burmese).

*The Long Haul Ahead for Myanmar's Rohingya Refugee Crisis*, Asia Report N°296, 16 May 2018 (also available in Burmese).

*Myanmar's Stalled Transition*, Asia Briefing N°151, 28 August 2018 (also available in Burmese).

*Bangladesh-Myanmar: The Danger of Forced Rohingya Repatriation*, Asia Briefing N°153, 12 November 2018.

*Fire and Ice: Conflict and Drugs in Myanmar's Shan State*, Asia Report N°299, 8 January 2019 (also available in Burmese).

*A New Dimension of Violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State*, Asia Briefing N°154, 24 January 2019 (also available in Burmese).

*Building a Better Future for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh*, Asia Briefing N°155, 25 April 2019.

*An Opening for Internally Displaced Person Returns in Northern Myanmar*, Asia Briefing N°156, 28 May 2019 (also available in Burmese).

*The Philippines: Militancy and the New Bangsamoro*, Asia Report N°301, 27 June 2019.

*Peace and Electoral Democracy in Myanmar*, Asia Briefing N°157, 6 August 2019.

## Appendix D: International Crisis Group Board of Trustees

### CHAIR

**Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown**  
Former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

### PRESIDENT & CEO

**Robert Malley**  
Former White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region

### OTHER TRUSTEES

**Fola Adeola**  
Founder and Chairman, FATE Foundation

**Hushang Ansary**  
Chairman, Parman Capital Group LLC; Former Iranian Ambassador to the U.S. and Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs

**G rard Araud**  
Former Ambassador of France to the U.S.

**Carl Bildt**  
Former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Sweden

**Emma Bonino**  
Former Foreign Minister of Italy and European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid

**Cheryl Carolus**  
Former South African High Commissioner to the UK and Secretary General of the African National Congress (ANC)

**Maria Livanos Cattau**  
Former Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce

**Ahmed Charai**  
Chairman and CEO of Global Media Holding and publisher of the Moroccan weekly *L'Observateur*

**Nathalie Delapalme**  
Executive Director and Board Member at the Mo Ibrahim Foundation

**Alexander Downer**  
Former Australian Foreign Minister and High Commissioner to the United Kingdom

**Sigmar Gabriel**  
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice Chancellor of Germany

**Robert Fadel**  
Former Member of Parliament in Lebanon; Owner and Board Member of the ABC Group

**Frank Giustra**  
President & CEO, Fiore Group; Founder, Radcliffe Foundation

**Hu Shuli**  
Editor-in-Chief of Caixin Media; Professor at Sun Yat-sen University

**Mo Ibrahim**  
Founder and Chair, Mo Ibrahim Foundation; Founder, Celtel International

**Yoriko Kawaguchi**  
Former Foreign Minister of Japan; former Environment Minister

**Wadah Khanfar**  
Co-Founder, Al Sharq Forum; former Director General, Al Jazeera Network

**Nasser al-Kidwa**  
Chairman of the Yasser Arafat Foundation; Former UN Deputy Mediator on Syria

**Bert Koenders**  
Former Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations

**Andrey Kortunov**  
Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council

**Ivan Krastev**  
Chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies (Sofia); Founding Board Member of European Council on Foreign Relations

**Tzipi Livni**  
Former Foreign Minister and Vice Prime Minister of Israel

**Helge Lund**  
Former Chief Executive BG Group (UK) and Statoil (Norway)

**Susana Malcorra**  
Former Foreign Minister of Argentina

**William H. McRaven**  
Retired U.S. Navy Admiral who served as 9th Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command

**Shivshankar Menon**  
Former Foreign Secretary of India; former National Security Adviser

**Naz Modirzadeh**  
Director of the Harvard Law School Program on International Law and Armed Conflict

**Saad Mohseni**  
Chairman and CEO of MOBY Group

**Marty Natalegawa**  
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, Permanent Representative to the UN, and Ambassador to the UK

**Ayo Obe**  
Chair of the Board of the Gor e Institute (Senegal); Legal Practitioner (Nigeria)

**Meghan O'Sullivan**  
Former U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser on Iraq and Afghanistan

**Thomas R. Pickering**  
Former U.S. Under-Secretary of State and Ambassador to the UN, Russia, India, Israel, Jordan, El Salvador and Nigeria

**Ahmed Rashid**  
Author and Foreign Policy Journalist, Pakistan

**Juan Manuel Santos Calder n**  
Former President of Colombia; Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2016

**Wendy Sherman**  
Former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and Lead Negotiator for the Iran Nuclear Deal

**Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**  
Former President of Liberia

**Alexander Soros**  
Deputy Chair of the Global Board, Open Society Foundations

**George Soros**  
Founder, Open Society Foundations and Chair, Soros Fund Management

**Jonas Gahr St re**  
Leader of the Labour Party and Labour Party Parliamentary Group; former Foreign Minister of Norway

**Jake Sullivan**  
Former Director of Policy Planning at the U.S. Department of State, Deputy Assistant to President Obama, and National Security Advisor to Vice President Biden

**Lawrence H. Summers**  
Former Director of the U.S. National Economic Council and Secretary of the U.S. Treasury; President Emeritus of Harvard University

**Helle Thorning-Schmidt**  
CEO of Save the Children International; former Prime Minister of Denmark

**Wang Jisi**  
Member, Foreign Policy Advisory Committee of the Chinese Foreign Ministry; President, Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Peking University

---

#### PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL

A distinguished group of individual and corporate donors providing essential support and expertise to Crisis Group.

CORPORATE	INDIVIDUAL	
<b>BP</b>	<b>(5) Anonymous</b>	<b>Stephen Robert</b>
<b>Shearman &amp; Sterling LLP</b>	<b>Scott Bessent</b>	<b>Ludék Sekyra</b>
<b>Statoil (U.K.) Ltd.</b>	<b>David Brown &amp; Erika Franke</b>	<b>Alexander Soros</b>
<b>White &amp; Case LLP</b>	<b>Herman De Bode</b>	<b>Ian R. Taylor</b>

---

#### INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Individual and corporate supporters who play a key role in Crisis Group's efforts to prevent deadly conflict.

CORPORATE	INDIVIDUAL	
<b>Anonymous</b>	<b>(3) Anonymous</b>	<b>Faisal Khan</b>
<b>APCO Worldwide Inc.</b>	<b>Mark Bergman</b>	<b>Cleopatra Kitt</b>
<b>Atlas Copco AB</b>	<b>Stanley Bergman &amp; Edward Bergman</b>	<b>Michael &amp; Jackie Lambert</b>
<b>Chevron</b>	<b>David &amp; Katherine Bradley</b>	<b>Samantha Lasry</b>
<b>Edelman UK</b>	<b>Eric Christiansen</b>	<b>Leslie Lishon</b>
<b>Eni</b>	<b>Sam Englehardt</b>	<b>Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Foundation</b>
<b>HSBC Holdings Plc</b>	<b>The Edelman Family Foundation</b>	<b>The New York Community Trust – Lise Strickler &amp; Mark Gallogly Charitable Fund</b>
<b>MetLife</b>	<b>Seth &amp; Jane Ginns</b>	<b>The Nommontu Foundation</b>
<b>Noble Energy</b>	<b>Ronald Glickman</b>	<b>Brian Paes-Braga</b>
<b>RBC Capital Markets</b>	<b>David Harding</b>	<b>Kerry Propper</b>
<b>Shell</b>	<b>Geoffrey R. Hogue &amp; Ana Luisa Ponti</b>	<b>Duco Sickinghe</b>
	<b>Geoffrey Hsu</b>	<b>Nina K. Solarz</b>
	<b>David Jannetti</b>	<b>Clayton E. Swisher</b>
		<b>Enzo Viscusi</b>

---

#### AMBASSADOR COUNCIL

Rising stars from diverse fields who contribute their talents and expertise to support Crisis Group's mission.

<b>Amy Benziger</b>	<b>Lindsay Iversen</b>	<b>Nidhi Sinha</b>
<b>Tripp Callan</b>	<b>Azim Jamal</b>	<b>Chloe Squires</b>
<b>Kivanc Cubukcu</b>	<b>Arohi Jain</b>	<b>Leeanne Su</b>
<b>Matthew Devlin</b>	<b>Christopher Louney</b>	<b>Bobbi Thomason</b>
<b>Victoria Ergolavou</b>	<b>Matthew Magenheimer</b>	<b>AJ Twombly</b>
<b>Noa Gafni</b>	<b>Madison Malloch-Brown</b>	<b>Dillon Twombly</b>
<b>Christina Bache</b>	<b>Megan McGill</b>	<b>Annie Verderosa</b>
<b>Lynda Hammes</b>	<b>Hamesh Mehta</b>	<b>Zachary Watling</b>
<b>Jason Hesse</b>	<b>Tara Opalinski</b>	<b>Grant Webster</b>
<b>Dali ten Hove</b>	<b>Perfecto Sanchez</b>	

---

#### SENIOR ADVISERS

Former Board Members who maintain an association with Crisis Group, and whose advice and support are called on (to the extent consistent with any other office they may be holding at the time).

<b>Martti Ahtisaari</b> Chairman Emeritus	<b>Christoph Bertram</b> <b>Lakhdar Brahimi</b>	<b>Aleksander Kwasniewski</b> <b>Ricardo Lagos</b>
<b>George Mitchell</b> Chairman Emeritus	<b>Kim Campbell</b> <b>Jorge Castañeda</b>	<b>Joanne Leedom-Ackerman</b> <b>Todung Mulya Lubis</b>
<b>Gareth Evans</b> President Emeritus	<b>Joaquim Alberto Chissano</b> <b>Victor Chu</b>	<b>Graça Machel</b> <b>Jessica T. Mathews</b>
<b>Kenneth Adelman</b> <b>Adnan Abu-Odeh</b>	<b>Mong Joon Chung</b> <b>Sheila Coronel</b>	<b>Miklós Németh</b> <b>Christine Ockrent</b>
<b>HRH Prince Turki al-Faisal</b>	<b>Pat Cox</b> <b>Gianfranco Dell'Alba</b>	<b>Timothy Ong</b> <b>Roza Otunbayeva</b>
<b>Celso Amorim</b> <b>Oscar Arias</b>	<b>Jacques Delors</b> <b>Alain Destexhe</b>	<b>Olara Otunnu</b> <b>Lord (Christopher) Patten</b>
<b>Richard Armitage</b> <b>Diego Arria</b>	<b>Mou-Shih Ding</b> <b>Uffe Ellemann-Jensen</b>	<b>Surin Pitsuwan</b> <b>Fidel V. Ramos</b>
<b>Zainab Bangura</b> <b>Nahum Barnea</b>	<b>Stanley Fischer</b> <b>Carla Hills</b>	<b>Olympia Snowe</b> <b>Javier Solana</b>
<b>Kim Beazley</b> <b>Shlomo Ben-Ami</b>	<b>Swanee Hunt</b> <b>Wolfgang Ischinger</b>	