

## Colombo Statement on the Church in Sri Lanka

### Religious Liberty Partnership (June 2012)

As members of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka, we stand with our Christian brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka who seek equality, justice, reconciliation and lasting peace. We specifically call on all Christian denominations and organizations worldwide to take this appeal for prayer and support of those working for religious freedom in Sri Lanka to their members in recognition that we are One Body united in Christ.

#### The RLP acknowledges:

- The end of the 30-year internal conflict has provided an opportunity for peace and reconciliation amongst all ethnic and religious communities throughout Sri Lanka, and the church has been and remains committed to this effort.
- The end of the armed conflict has also brought to an end the colossal loss of lives and allowed the Sri Lankan people freedom of movement throughout the country without fear for their lives. However we encourage greater efforts to strengthen democratic values, good governance and the restoration of the rule of law in all parts of the country where corruption, abductions and acts of violence can be addressed.
- That despite intimidations and violations of human rights, there is a functioning Parliamentary democracy in Sri Lanka with regular elections being held.
- That although extreme elements within religious sectors have called for anti-conversion laws, the Sri Lankan government has taken care to protect the constitutional right to freedom of religious choice by not enacting proposed laws that would subject religious conversion to criminal scrutiny.
- That the establishment of the Parliamentary Select Committee to resolve tensions and ensure the equal protection rights of all constituent ethnic groups is a critically important initiative.
- The recommendations of the Lessons Learned Reconciliation Commission appointed by the President of Sri Lanka to ensure reconciliation and justice for all citizens affected by the war, and we encourage the Sri Lankan Government to address unresolved issues of accountability as a natural process of reconciliation and nation building.
- The appeal issued by 31 Bishops of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, including the Bishop of Mannar, calling for the implementation of the Lessons Learned Reconciliation Commission, and we join with the 63 additional Catholic leaders and others who have urged an end to the intimidation of the Bishops as a result of their calls for reconciliation.

- That the Christian church in Sri Lanka, representing all ethnic communities, must work together in the pursuit of this ministry of reconciliation, and we call on the Catholic community to support formal recognition of the Evangelical Protestant Christians in Sri Lanka, recognizing that in unity Christians can work more effectively towards the peace, development and prosperity of the nation of Sri Lanka.

### **We call on the worldwide church:**

- To pray for the recognition of Evangelical Protestant Christians by the government, as equal citizens with due respect and rights accorded to other religious communities in the country. That the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, which celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2012 and is part of the World Evangelical Alliance (with a constituency of 600 million), be recognized as the representative body of Evangelical Christians in Sri Lanka.
- To pray that laws endangering the freedom of religion, conscience and choice, such as anti-conversion laws or arbitrary regulations imposing compulsory registration of places of worship, are not pursued or promulgated by the Sri Lankan government.
- To pray for an end to the forced closure of churches by the police and local authorities, based on an ambiguous circular issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.
- To pray for an end to the continued violent attacks on clergy and places of Christian worship.
- To pray that all religious communities will enjoy the Constitutional guarantees on religious freedom and that policies and practices which inhibit these freedoms will be abolished.
- To pray for full national reconciliation, as well as greater understanding and harmony, within Sri Lanka.

### **The RLP commits:**

- To work toward the full realization of the religious rights of all Sri Lankans, including the rights to freely change one's beliefs and freely propagate those beliefs without governmental interference or permission.
- To stand in solidarity with the Evangelical Christian community as they seek to obtain equal rights alongside other religious constituencies in Sri Lanka.
- To call for all our constituencies and the church worldwide to pray for and support the Sri Lankan church as it seeks to respond in a Christ-like fashion to religious liberty violations, and to pray for the freedom of all Sri Lankan citizens under the rule of law.

Editorial note: The list of signatory members of the Religious Liberty Partnership can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/RLP-SL2012>