



Oral Statement

Human Rights Council 55th Session

Agenda Item 2: General debate on the oral update by the High Commissioner

4 March 2024

Delivered by Markus Hofer

Mr. President, Mr. High Commissioner,

In Sri Lanka, minority religious communities face discrimination, intimidation, hate speech, and violence.

Local authorities continue to obstruct worship activities arbitrarily. Disputes over sacred sites and land in the North and East have continued.

In 2023, the government arrested four people including a Christian pastor under the ICCPR Act of 2007 for religious statements and for speech that are legitimate and protected under international law. All four were all released on bail and no one was sentenced.

During the year, the government also proposed to introduce legislation to mandate registration of places of worship. Freedom of expression has also come under threat in the country with the passage of the Online Safety Act. The accelerated way bills have been passed recently with minimal stakeholder consultation is also a cause for concern.

And four years on, justice still evades victims of the Easter Sunday bombings.

We urge the Sri Lankan government to investigate the Easter Sunday attacks and bring perpetrators to justice, to put an end to violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief, and to repeal the Online Safety Act.

We also urge Sri Lanka to refrain from mandating registration for places of worship and to ensure that democratic principles are followed in the lawmaking process.

Thank you.