



## People for Human Rights and Equality Inc. (PHRE)

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### **Statement on the Recent Violence in the Ampara and Kandy Districts**

***"Impunity is the now very visible and ugly face of corruption at the highest levels in Sri Lanka and it emboldens lawlessness at every level."***

While appreciating all steps taken to contain the communal violence that recently broke out in the Kandy and Ampara districts, PHRE notes with deep regret the continuing tendency in Sri Lanka to resort to unlawful mass violence against members of one community or another. The victims in this instance are seen to be mainly Muslim Sri Lankans, but in reality all Sri Lankans are victims. The country is still recovering from a horribly wasteful civil war that has destroyed resources and damaged, in yet not fully realised ways, the country's social, cultural and political fabric, in addition to the irreparable cost to the lives of tens of thousands of individuals all over Sri Lanka.

The flourishing of extremists, perverts and sadists, though often only as small minorities, is sadly a fact of life not only in Sri Lanka but in most parts of the world. The difference in Sri Lanka today is that many of these extremists are considered to be valued and valuable members of society, as recent events demonstrate. Yet, in the pursuit of their chauvinistic goals they direct their violent energies without regard to the welfare, peace and long term stability of the country, conditions which ensure life as it should be - free, un-deprived and humane.

The laws of the land must provide for the prompt detection and just punishment of anyone who seeks to disturb, or incites disturbance of peace in the land. That is elementary and most countries including Sri Lanka do have such laws.

But laws are useless unless we ensure the rule of the law always and everywhere. Unswerving commitment to the rule of law and eternal vigilance about its implementation are of an importance that can never be overstated. Yet that is where Sri Lanka has been disappointingly neglectful. To use a now very familiar word there, *impunity* - widespread and ever present - is the principal bane of Sri Lanka and it fatally saps the moral fibre of society. Impunity is the now very visible and ugly face of corruption at the highest levels in Sri Lanka and it emboldens lawlessness at every level. The 'culture' of impunity lies at the heart of the recent tragic events in the Kandy and Ampara districts. The arrogance of the perpetrators of the violence and the at least initial apathy of the law enforcement organs are the direct and indirect products of long established impunity.

The perpetuation of malicious and vicious misinformation campaigns is a serious problem in Sri Lanka. As taught by the Buddha himself, critical, considered and impartial analysis of opinions and so called facts, and a general education in schools and universities that nurtures those skills are the only reliable remedy against chauvinistic generalisations and the hateful projects born of them. But in the meantime, a vigilant machinery that effectively counters misinformation that threaten to disrupt national life, with prompt lucid statements of facts from relevant authoritative sources can be a timely defence against the all too frequent descent into tribalism in that country.

PHRE therefore advocates:

- i) the identification and just punishment without delay of all who incited and participated in the violence in the Kandy and Ampara districts, as well as elsewhere in the country;
- ii) a fair and thorough investigation of the law enforcement agencies and the executive at all levels to ensure that there is in future no delay or apathy in the impartial enforcement of existing law. Legitimate public scepticism in this regard is detrimental to democratic civil life;
- iii) a committed program by a reliable agency - eg., a university or some research institute - to counter vicious and potentially disruptive canards by placing before the public relevant well researched facts of the matter.

PHRE also wishes to convey its deep sympathy and sincere fellowship with all those who have suffered directly or indirectly by the senseless violence in the country.

*\* PHRE is a multi ethnic group of Australians, deeply concerned to promote all democratic values but especially the human rights and civil equality of all persons. Members of PHRE are mostly of Sri Lankan origin and have a particular interest in the protection and promotion of peace and the welfare of all residents of Sri Lanka.*