



29 Beddington Grove, Wallington, Surrey, SM6 8LB, UK

Tel: 044 2086428178, 044 7900958876 Email: presidentcosmosuk@gmail.com www.cosmosuk.com

02nd April 2020

H.E. Nandasena Gotabaya Rajapaksa
Hon. President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Colombo
Sri Lanka.

Your Excellency,

**COSMOS calls for concerted and unified action on the part of all parties
to fight the twin pandemic - of COVID -19 and Underlying Racism**

On behalf of COSMOS UK (Council of Sri Lankan Muslim Organisations UK), an umbrella organisation of twenty-eight Sri Lankan Muslim Organizations based in UK, notes with delight, the constructive measures taken by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), in putting in place, sweeping procedures and plan of action to deal with this unprecedented crisis, which has reportedly earned the appreciation of the World Health Organisation (WHO). In fact, we are aware that the new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges and created a global crisis on all fronts, with many countries scrambling to contain or delay a potential COVID-19 tsunami.

COSMOS is also happy to note that the Muslim community in Sri Lanka, has joined with all other communities in fully supporting the efforts made by the GoSL and public health professionals to combat this pandemic. Already All Ceylon Jami-iathul Ulema (ACJU) and other Muslim organizations have given an exemplary lead in taking the necessary measures to stop all congregational activities, put the community in an alert mode, as well as organize donations and charitable activities to help the authorities and people in the fight against this invisible common enemy.

However, in the midst of this crisis, COSMOS wish to place on record the unfortunate developments adversely affecting the dignity and religious rights of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. **Firstly**, it is unfortunate that a subtle but well-orchestrated anti-Muslim campaign is also clouding the fight against Corona, both in the social Media as well as through dog whistles, targeting and demonising the Muslim community in various ways. Examples are many. This vicious campaign unless condemned and stopped by the government and the law enforcement authorities is proving to be and will prove counter-productive and self-defeating even in the short run. Both Hiru and Derana TV stations

particularly stands accused of leading this hate tirade, which is contributing to further mainstreaming of anti-Muslim hate in the society, especially witnessed in the Post-Easter Sunday period. There is an imperative need to punish those responsible who appears to engage in racist / hate speech and crimes with impunity.

Secondly, another matter which has recently caused extreme concern to the Muslim community is the withdrawal of the burial option, earlier available to the bereaved families of Covid fatalities, in addition to cremation. The Islamic faith requires the deceased to be buried in accordance with religious guidelines and it is forbidden to cremate the deceased as long as there is no proven threat to the living. It is therefore important that the religious beliefs and sensitivities of the bereaved families be recognised, and their wishes to bury their deceased be respected (instead of forcing a cremation), at a time of tremendous levels of emotional and psychological stress in their lives.

In this regard, WHO permitted both options- the burial and cremation of the dead bodies infected with the said virus. A copy of the said Guidelines issued by the WHO is given in the references below, for your easy reference. We have also been informed by the professionals that there is no scientific evidence of spread of disease after the body has been sealed in a body bag from respiratory or gastrointestinal fluids and therefore there is no difference in cremation or burial with regard to spreading of the virus. Countries like United Kingdom, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, Iran, Israel, USA and Italy too, among many other countries have permitted to bury the dead bodies of those infected with COVID 19.

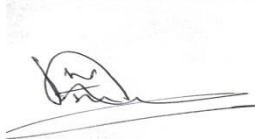
It was regrettable to note that the amendment made to the Public health guidelines in Sri Lanka to accommodate the burial option, in accordance with the WHO guidelines, was later removed without assigning any reasons. This has caused much anxiety and anguish to the affected families too. It must be stated that the Muslim community would have no qualms about the decision if the decision was taken based on scientific and medical concerns as laid down in WHO guidelines, However, this does not appear to be the case in this instance. Furthermore, allowing individuals or influencers to deviate or bypass established procedures is an extremely high risk approach given the circumstances related to COVID-19.

In this backdrop, COSMOS fervently appeal to the Government of Sri Lanka to reconsider reintroducing the amendment to provide the burial option too with strict conditions to avoid infection spread, as provided for in the WHO guidelines, in addition to the cremation option.

COSMOS finally calls upon the GoSL to consider the plea of the Muslim community of Sri Lanka to ensure that their dignity and religious rights are not infringed upon by take necessary measures to tackle hate speech as well to ensure that everyone's fundamental religious rights are protected, without compromising the public health of the population. As Your Excellency reiterated, the cooperation and involvement of all communities will be imperative in ensuring the prevention of the spread of this deadly virus.

Thanking you in anticipation of a favorable response from the GoSL.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. Liyas Abdul Wahid
Chairman
Cosmos UK

cc: Hon. Mahinda Rajapaksa-Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist
Republic of Sri Lanka

Hon. Pavithra Devi Wanniarachi- Minister of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous
Medicine

H.E Saroja Sirisena-High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in UK

References

WHO Guidelines

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/infection-prevention-and-control>

UK amends emergency Coronavirus legislation

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/03/23/emergency-coronavirus-legislation-altered-muslim-jewish-communities/>

Singapore

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/bodies-of-covid-19-patients-to-be-handled-according-to-strict-protocols-which-include>

India

<https://www.indiatoday.in/information/story/coronavirus-death-india-how-handle-covid-19-dead-bodies-1657799-2020-03-20>

Iran

<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-03-18/coronavirus-deaths-in-iran-lead-to-mass-burial-pits-for-victims-families-it-is-changing-the-way-they-mourn>

Israel

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/israel-coronavirus-aryeh-even-holocaust-survivor/2020/03/22/428f657c-6c35-11ea-a156-0048b62cdb51_story.html

Malaysia

https://www-malaymail-com.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/www.malaymail.com/amp/news/malaysia/2020/03/22/covid-19-maips-issues-guidelines-for-muslim-burial-rites-in-perlis/1849031?amp_js_v=0.1&usqp=mq331AQFKAGwASA%3D#origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&prerenderSize=1&visibilityState=visible&paddingTop=32&p2r=0&horizontalScrolling=0&csi=1&aoh=15849757439128&viewerUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Famp%2Fs%2Fwww.malaymail.com%2Famp%2Fnews%2Fmalaysia%2F2020%2F03%2F22%2F-covid-19-maips-issues-guidelines-for-muslim-burial-rites-in-perlis%2F1849031&history=1&storage=1&cid=1&cap=navigateTo%2Ccid%2CfullReplaceHistory%2Cfragment%2CreplaceUrl%2CiframeScroll

North American Fiqh Council guidelines on Prayer and Funeral Issues Pertaining to COVID-19

<http://fiqh-council.org/prayer-and-funeral-issues-pertaining-to-covid-19/>