



PRESS RELEASE

05th January 2021

RE – Update on Actions on Forced Cremation of Muslims and Christians in Sri Lanka

We are writing to update Council of Sri Lankan Muslim Organisations UK (Cosmos UK) affiliates and its members efforts and actions to date on Forced Cremation.

1. In April 2020, Cosmos UK wrote letters to President of Sri Lanka, Prime minister of Sri Lanka, Health Minister of Sri Lanka, Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka High Commission in London.

General Secretary of Cosmos UK, Shakeer Nawas, was briefed by High Commissioner in late April 2020 over a Phone call acknowledging our letter on forced cremation and a discussion about the reason for Cremation only Policy by Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and this was further confirmed with a written reply from Sri Lanka High Commission office in London on 09.06.2020 stating “...to protect the entire nation from the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic as the burials take longer than cremations, and the country’s groundwater levels are too high thereby heightening the risk of the spread of the virus...”

2. The High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to the UK HE Saroja Sirisena and the Diplomatic officers of the High Commission scheduled an online meeting with the heads of Sri Lankan Associations in the UK for a discussion on enhancing connectivity between the High Commission and British Sri Lankans on 30.10.2020. President of Cosmos UK Mr. Liyas Abdul Wahid joined this meeting and highlighted the minority Muslims apprehensions particularly about the Forced Cremation to High Commissioner, Diplomatic staffs and invited heads of Sri Lankan Associations in UK. Mr Liyas requested the High Commissioner to address this perturbing action to GoSL.

3. We have updated and written to All Party Parliamentary Group - Cosmos UK (APPG Cosmos) members and many UK MP's on this subject. We are pleased to inform many MP's including Chair of APPG Cosmos UK Mr. Bob Blackman (MP for Harrow East) and Ms. Claudia Webbe (MP for Leicester East and APPG Cosmos Member) and many other MP's have written to Sri Lanka High Commission on this Subject. Mr. Wes Streeting (MP for Ilford North and Member of APPG Cosmos) on 24.11.2020 raised a question in the Parliament to Rt Hon D Nigel Adams MP Minister of State (Minister of Asia) about GoSL on "*...accountability for previous human right abuses, as well as an effective challenge to the present Government for ongoing human rights abuses...*".
4. On our request Hon Bob Blackman MP (Chair of APPG COSMOS UK) and Hon. Afzal Khan MP, (Vice Chair of APPG COSMOS UK) wrote to Rt Hon Dominic Raab (First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs) and requested for his intervention on this issue. Also, Mr Afzal Khan wrote to the Foreign Secretary with related questions to reply in the House of Commons.
5. We also wrote to Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP (Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs), British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Ms. Sarah Hulton OBE and Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon (Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth) on this subject.

We received responses from Lord Ahmad on 29th April 2020 and on 04th January 2021. In his reply Lord Ahmad noted that he is deeply sympathetic to our concerns. He had spoken to Sri Lanka Foreign Minister in November 2020 and many occasions to Sri Lanka High Commissioner in London regarding this matter. We are working closely with Lord Ahmad and Foreign & Commonwealth Office on this subject. Further, British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka directly expressed the concerns to the GoSL on this subject.
6. Cosmos President attends a regular Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) meetings and at the last virtual meeting on 08th July 2020, he raised the cremation issues. This meeting was chaired by Head of South Asia Mr. Fergus Auld who confirmed this matter will be escalated to relevant stakeholders.

7. Cosmos UK has also written to Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and many international Humanitarian organisations on this subject. Many of these organisations have already issued statements against Forced Cremation to GoSL.
8. Recently Cosmos selected 22 major Islamic countries from OIC list and sent letters and emails about forced cremation to Foreign Ministers of OIC countries and pleaded to intervene on this forced cremation matter in Sri Lanka. We will continue to follow up on this subject and will write to the rest of the OIC countries Foreign Ministers in due course.
9. We also prompted many other organisation including non-Muslim Sri Lankan organisation as well as others in UK to raise this issue with authorities and other Humanitarian Organisations. We continue to receive correspondences from these organisations and we are very much thankful to their support and actions. Our members have been in constant touch with various individuals and organisations in Sri Lanka who are actively involved in addressing this issue with the GoSL and exchange information with us.
10. We have also drafted letter templates on forced cremation issues to use by general public, affiliates, and its members to inform their local MP's, Humanitarian Organisations etc. Many members have used to contact their local MP's and have also shared the replies which have all showed recognition of the issue. We encourage all the public to use these templates and share the outcome with Cosmos UK to increase collective pressure to GoSL.
11. We continue to use social media such as Cosmos Twitter, Cosmos Facebook to highlight the development on this subject by tagging relevant authorities, individuals and leaders for an action and awareness. We are also highlighting this issue in various local and international medias to build awareness and pressure. We encourage the public to follows us on twitter (@COSMOSUKSL) and Facebook to stay up to date with the latest events.
12. We are also collaborating with Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) to further our reach and influence on this issue. We are thankful to MCB who are playing a major role in achieving the

desired outcomes. They have rendered their expertise in different areas of work, international and local contacts and more specifically their recognition as a reputed Islamic body globally. We are taking a multi-disciplinary approach to try and achieved the desired outcome including Legal, Medical, International Lobbying, Community / Faith Group Engagement, Media etc.

13. Cosmos UK being a member of MCB Task Force also request its affiliates and members to donate to the Emergency Legal and Advocacy Fund set up by MCB on following link:

<https://muslimgiving.org/stopforcedcremations>

14. We wish to reiterate that while COSMOS UK is tirelessly working on this subject, we continue to silently support and encourage all efforts taken by different organisations, institutions and activist in the UK, Sri Lanka and internationally in overcoming discrimination against the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. Please include in your prayers (duas) everyone who is suffering in Sri Lanka as well as those who are fighting to eradicate the communal discrimination.

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