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Sri Lanka

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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The Constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," but Buddhism is not recognized as the state religion. The Constitution also provides for the right of members of other faiths to freely practice their religion. While the Government publicly endorses this right, in practice there were problems in some areas.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

Parliament has not taken action on anti-conversion legislation first introduced in 2004. In May 2004, the Jathika Hela Urumaya Party (JHU) presented to Parliament a bill that would criminalize "unethical" conversions and on May 6, 2005, the JHU presented the bill for a second reading, despite a Supreme Court ruling that some sections of the bill were unconstitutional. Subsequently, the proposed bill was referred to a special parliamentary committee, which met for the first time in April 2006. The bill remained under consideration within the committee at the end of the period covered by this report.

Since late 2003, the country has witnessed a spate of attacks on Christian churches and on pastors and congregants. More than 300 attacks have been alleged since 2003, with several dozen confirmed by the U.S. Embassy. In response, major political and religious leaders have publicly condemned the attacks, and police have arrested and prosecuted approximately a dozen persons in connection with the incidents.

There were sporadic attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and some societal tension due to ongoing allegations of forced conversions and debate on anticonversion legislation.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials conveyed U.S. Government concerns about church attacks to government leaders and urged them to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators. Embassy officials also expressed concern to the Government about the negative impact anticonversion laws could have on religious freedom. The U.S. Government continued to discuss general religious freedom concerns with religious leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 25,322 square miles and a population of 19.4 million. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity are practiced. Approximately 70 percent of the population is Buddhist, 15 percent Hindu, 8 percent Christian, and 7 percent Muslim. Christians tend to be concentrated in the west, with much of the east populated by Muslims and the north almost exclusively by Hindus.

Most members of the majority Sinhala community are Theravada Buddhists. Most Tamils, who make up the largest ethnic minority, are Hindu. Almost all Muslims are Sunnis; there is also a small minority of Shi'a, including members of the Borah community. Almost 80 percent of Christians are Roman Catholics, with Anglican and other mainstream Protestant churches also present in the cities. Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, Anglicans, Pentecostal, and the Assemblies of God are also present. Evangelical Christian groups have grown in recent years, although membership is still small.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution gives Buddhism a "foremost position," but it also provides for the right of members of other religious groups to practice their religions freely. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has four departments, one each to deal with Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian affairs. According to the legislation defining their mandates, each department should formulate and implement programs that inculcate religious values and promote a virtuous society.

In May 2004, the JHU proposed a "Prohibition of Forcible Conversions" bill before Parliament. The bill carries penalties, including fines or jail sentences, for anyone convicted of or assisting in "unethical" conversion, with heavier penalties for converting women and children. In August 2004, the Supreme Court found key parts of the bill to be unconstitutional, but upheld sections that would criminalize forced conversion, conversion by deceit, or conversion by "allurement." On May 6, 2005, the JHU presented the same bill, without amendments, for its second reading. The bill was referred to a parliamentary standing committee for review. The standing committee has six months from the date of its composition to consider the bill and any proposed amendments to it. In April 2006 the Speaker of Parliament appointed the members of the standing committee, composed of seven Buddhists, six Christians, five Hindus, and two Muslims. At the end of the reporting period, the committee continued to hear testimony from religious and civil society leaders.

Despite the constitutional preference for Buddhism, a number of major religious festivals of other faiths are celebrated as national holidays. These include the Hindu Thai Pongal, New Year, and Deepawali festivals; the Muslim Hadji and Ramzan festivals and the Prophet Muhammad's birthday; and Christian Good Friday and Christmas.

Some Christian denominations resisted greater government involvement in their affairs; as a result, they were allowed to register through acts of parliament or as corporations under domestic law. Any religious group that wishes to register as a corporation must submit forms to do so. Registration gives a group legal standing as a corporate entity in financial and real estate transactions. There was no tax exemption for religious organizations as such; however, churches and temples were allowed to register as charitable organizations, which were entitled to some tax exemptions. There was no option for registering as a "religious group."

Religion is a mandatory subject in the public school curriculum. Parents and children may choose whether a child studies Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity. Students of other religious groups can pursue religious instruction outside of the public school system, since no instruction is provided for other religions. Schools teach religion from an academic point of view. Most private schools follow curricula similar to public schools because all students must take national exams administered by the government.

Matters related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance, were adjudicated according to the customary law of the concerned ethnic or religious group. The minimum age of marriage for women is 18 years, except in the case of Muslims, who continued to follow their customary religious practices of girls attaining marrying age with the onset of puberty and men when they are financially capable of supporting a family.

The application of different legal practices based on membership in a religious or ethnic group may result in discrimination against women.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Foreign clergy may work in the country, but for the last 3 decades the Government has limited the issuance of temporary work permits. Permission to work was usually restricted to denominations that were registered formally with the Government. Most religious workers in the country were indigenous.

The Government limited the number of foreign religious workers granted temporary residence permits.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Since 1983 the Government has fought the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a terrorist organization fighting for a separate state for the country's Tamil minority. In 2001, the Government and the LTTE each announced unilateral ceasefires, and in 2002 they agreed to a joint ceasefire accord. The peace process stalled in late 2005 following an escalation in violence. In 2006 renewed fighting broke out between the two sides. Religion did not play a significant role in the conflict, which was rooted in linguistic, ethnic, and political differences. Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians all have been affected by the conflict, which has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1983. The military issued warnings through public radio before commencing major operations, instructing civilians to congregate in safe zones around churches and temples. The Government, paramilitaries, and Tamil Tigers have been accused of involving religious facilities in the conflict or putting them at risk through shelling in conflict areas.

During the reporting period, human rights abuses were committed against individuals at places of worship in the north and east. While these incidents had an impact on religious freedom, they were not religiously motivated; instead, they were a product of the conflict situation.

On January 13, 2007, Reverend Nallathamby Gnanaseelan of the Tamil Mission Church of Jaffna was shot and killed by government security forces. Security personnel confiscated the deceased pastor's Bible, bag, and motorcycle. Government officials stated that the pastor had attempted to hurl a grenade at the security forces, although congregants insisted that the pastor was on his way to his church to conduct a fasting and prayer event. There was no evidence to indicate that his killing was religiously motivated.

Throughout 2006 there was an increase in the number of reported disappearances because of the conflict. Some Catholic priests who spoke out on humanitarian issues were among those who disappeared. On August 20, 2006, Father Thiruchelvan Nihal Jim Brown and his assistant, Wenceslaus Vines Vimalathas, disappeared after six armed men on motorbikes followed them from a security forces checkpoint near the village of Allaipiddy on Kayts Island, a predominantly Catholic neighborhood off the Jaffna peninsula. Father Brown had been at the church of St. Philip Neri when a firefight broke out on August 13, 2006, between the Navy and the LTTE, leaving 15 civilians dead and at least 54 injured. Human Rights Watch claimed he had been receiving death threats from senior Navy personnel. Local press reported that DNA tests completed at the Ragama General Hospital in Colombo confirmed that a mutilated torso found near Pungkudutheevu Island on March 14, 2007, packed in a military sand bag, belonged to Father Brown. However, in June 2007 the Ministry Foreign Affairs stated that the DNA results had confirmed the body was not Father Brown. There was no evidence that his killing was religiously motivated.

On June 17, 2006, in Pesalai, government troops were accused of storming a church, Our Lady of Victory, and opening fire where hundreds of civilians, including both Christian and Hindu Tamils, were seeking shelter from an exchange of fire between the Government and the LTTE.

On May 6, 2006, eight Tamil men were abducted from a Hindu temple in the north; this incident was also likely politically motivated. The men had been decorating the temple for a religious festival; they were reported missing on May 7, 2006, and their whereabouts were unknown at the end of the period covered by this report. Eyewitnesses said Army personnel were in the temple from early morning on May 7, and they had seen the eight men being taken away by Army personnel. Next-of-kin of the eight abducted men have registered complaints with the Human Rights Commission in Jaffna, the UN Special Rapporteur for Extra-Judicial Killings, and Amnesty International but no action has been taken.

On December 24, 2005, Joseph Pararajasingham, a Member of Parliament for the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and a Christian, was assassinated while attending midnight mass at a church in Batticaloa in the east. His killing was assumed to be politically motivated.

The police investigated many incidents of attacks and harassment against Christians when complaints were made. Occasionally the police were reluctant to pursue criminal charges against the suspected perpetrators, some of whom were Buddhist monks. Law enforcement officials believed that a majority of the attacks were conducted by a small number of extremist Buddhists.

In 2003 Brother Manoharan, a member of the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission, was arrested in connection with the death of an eleven year-old girl. The young girl, who had been sick, was prayed for by Brother Manoharan. He, along with the victim's parents, were taken into police custody on charges of "culpable homicide," tantamount to manslaughter. The three were released on bail on June 2, 2006, and a hearing was set for July 28, 2006. Brother Manoharan died of natural causes in November 2006. The local magistrate courts postponed the court case, and the Attorney General did not file charges against the deceased child's parents.

In May 2006 the pastor of the Godagama Prayer Centre in a Colombo suburb, Maharagama, was threatened by a local Buddhist monk-led mob to stop services. When he went to the police, he was told he should stop the services if the people of the area did not like it.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor United States citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

The LTTE has been listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States since 1997. While Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians all have been victimized by the LTTE, religious persecution has not played a major role in the conflict.

In 1990 the LTTE expelled some 46,000 Muslim inhabitants - virtually the entire Muslim population - from their homes in the northern part of the island. Most of these persons remained displaced and lived in or near welfare centers. Although some Muslims returned to the northern town of Jaffna in 1997, they did not remain there due to the continuing threat posed by the LTTE. There were credible reports that the LTTE warned thousands of Muslims displaced from the Mannar area not to return to their homes until the conflict was over. It appears that the LTTE's actions against Muslims were not due to Muslims' religious beliefs, but rather that they were part of an overall strategy to clear the north and east of persons unsympathetic to the LTTE. The LTTE made some conciliatory statements to the Muslim community, but many Muslims viewed the statements with skepticism. The LTTE continued to encourage Muslim internally displaced persons (IDPs) in some areas to return home, asserting they would not be harmed.

Although some Muslim IDPs returned home, the vast majority did not and instead waited for a government guarantee of safety in LTTE-controlled areas. Since the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement, the LTTE also carried out a number of attacks in the east in which Muslims have been killed. No arrests were made in these cases by the end of the period covered by this report.

In February 2007 BBC News reported Hindu priest Selliah Parameswar Kurukkal Parameshwara was taken from his home in eastern Batticaloa and killed. Only a few days before, he had met the President Rajapaksa in Vakaraï and blessed him in the Hindu tradition in a public ceremony. Government security forces had taken Parameshwara to Vakaraï to greet the President following the military's defeat of LTTE forces there. The LTTE were suspected in his death, and there was no evidence that this killing was religiously motivated.

On May 17, 2005, during an LTTE-sponsored strike over the erection of a Buddha statue on public land in Trincomalee in the eastern province, a Sinhala youth was killed, and four members of the same family were injured when a grenade was thrown at them. On May 18, 2005, the Trincomalee magistrate instructed the authorities to remove the Buddha statue. On June 17, 2005, the court of appeals in Colombo issued a suspension of that order. On April 7, 2006, an unidentified gunman shot and killed Mr. Vigneswaran, organizer of the LTTE-sponsored strike over the Buddha statue, for unknown reasons. At the end of the period covered by this report, the statue remained at the contested site.

On April 24, 2005, the chief priest of Annapani Hindu temple at Ariyampathi in Batticaloa was shot, allegedly by an armed LTTE gang, while attending to religious activities in the temple. The priest and two others were admitted to Batticaloa hospital with serious injuries. The police continued their investigation during the period covered by this report, but because the area was controlled by the LTTE, no other action was taken.

The LTTE has been accused of using church and temple compounds, where civilians were instructed by the Government to congregate in the event of hostilities, as shields for the storage of munitions.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Discrimination based on religious differences was much less common than discrimination based on ethnicity. In general, members of the various faiths tended to be tolerant of each other's religious beliefs. Harassment of Christians and attacks on their property and places of worship by Buddhist extremists opposed to conversion continued during the period covered by this report. Some leaders of different faiths publicly condemned these attacks. Some minority Islamic sects also faced discrimination, harassment, and threats on places of worship and on persons from some members of the majority Sunni Islamic community in Sri Lanka. Police generally provided protection for these groups at their request.

On May 18, 2007, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Negombo asked for and received local police protection at their mosque following threats from Sunni Muslims to take over the mosque, and Friday prayers passed without incident.

On May 11, 2007, a group of Sunni Muslims had come to the Ahmadi mosque in Negombo and held prayers there, barring the Ahmadi group from entering. Police were present on the scene but reported they did not want to use force to disperse the crowd inside the mosque.

In October 2006 the Ahmadiyya community had reported that the Sunni group had instructed the State media not to give any publicity to the minority Ahmadis, accusing them of being apostates. The Ahmadiyya group lodged complaints against a Sunni group for allegedly killing one of their members on October 14, 2006, and assaulting Pakistani Ahmadi Muslims in Negombo on October 9. Local police did not take any action on any of these cases during the reporting period.

During the period covered by this report, Christians, both of mainstream denominations and evangelical groups, sometimes encountered harassment and physical attacks on property and places of worship by some local Buddhists who believed they were threatened by these groups and were opposed to conversion. Some Christian groups occasionally complained that the Government tacitly condoned harassment and violence aimed at them. In some cases police response was inadequate, and local police officials reportedly were reluctant to take legal action against individuals involved in the attacks.

The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) stated that during the reporting period, there were 39 attacks on Christian churches, organizations, religious leaders, or congregants, 90 percent of which were reported to the police. Credible sources confirmed some of these attacks.

Allegations by Buddhist extremists of Christian involvement in "unethical" or forced conversions continued to be a source of tension between the two communities. Christians denied this charge, responding that people undergo conversion of their own free will. There were reports that members of some evangelical groups made disparaging comments about Buddhism while evangelizing. Some groups also alleged that Christians engaged in aggressive

proselytism and took advantage of societal ills such as general poverty, war, and lack of education. Christians countered that their relief efforts were not targeted at converting aid beneficiaries.

On February 11, 2007, the congregation of the Christian Centre of Bandaragama in Colombo district was meeting for Sunday morning worship when unknown persons began throwing stones at the hall where they were praying. A roofing sheet was damaged, but there were no injuries. Previously, on December 10, 2006, the windows of the hall had been smashed and destroyed. On December 24, anti-Christian posters had appeared in the area. The church lodged a police complaint about the incident of the rocks being hurled at the church.

On February 9, 2007, several areas in the district of Polonnaruwa reported persons were traveling in a vehicle with loudspeakers, calling people to gather for a meeting to chase away Christians. The Christians in the area expressed concern that the meeting might turn violent. The meeting was held as planned at a Buddhist temple in the Polonnaruwa town area, with approximately 150 persons in attendance. Police presence ensured that no violence occurred. However, the meeting participants decided to strongly advise the Christian clergy to resign and stop Christian activity in the region, or "face consequences for which the organizers of the protest would not be responsible."

In January 2007 the Supreme Court chose to delay its decision on a fundamental rights violation petition filed by the chief prelate of a Buddhist temple in Colombo against allegedly offensive images of Buddha imported into the country. The petition cited the Inspector General of Police, the Director General of Customs, the Attorney General, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs as respondents. The Supreme Court did not state when it would rule on the petition.

On December 17, 2006, the Pastor of the Dev Niwasa (Home of God) Church was asleep in his partially constructed house when five men broke into the house and assaulted him. The attackers destroyed the electricity connection, a motorcycle, and other belongings. The attackers then set fire to the house and forced the pastor into a vehicle. They drove him away, beat him, and verbally abused him, demanding that he stop his Christian ministry. He was thrown out of the vehicle some distance away. The pastor complained to the Gokarella Police on December 18, 2006, but police made no arrests by the end of the reporting period. The Pastor reports suffering from impaired vision due to the beating.

On December 7, 2006, the burial of M.S. Abdulla Pailvaan, a leader of a Sufi Muslim sect called the All Island Tharikathul Muffiheen (AITM), at a mosque triggered 9 days of violent clashes with other Muslim sects in Kathankudy in Batticaloa District. The Kattankudy Jamiyyathul Ulema (Board of Theologians) said that they had served an edict of Murthath (non-Muslim) on the deceased leader for preaching unorthodox religious practices and promoting pantheism. A Muslim judge held inquiries into Pailvaan's burial and ordered that his remains be exhumed and interred in the common Muslim Burial grounds. The judge also directed police to take down the tower of the Sufi sect's prayer center because it violated building height restrictions. Following the judgment, a group of Sunni Muslims attacked the Sufi mosque, killing two AITM members, injuring many more, and damaging several thousands of dollars worth of government and private property. To resolve the conflict, the AITM exhumed the body of their leader and buried him at a public cemetery.

On November 22, 2006, unidentified persons bombed the Lighthouse Church located in Mawatura, Gampola in Kandy District and injured a church worker. Rocks shattered the front window and came through the roof. The employee was rushed to a local hospital for treatment. The pastor lodged a complaint with the police.

On November 12, 2006, in Anamaduwa in Puttalam District, four members of the Prayer Tower church were returning from a funeral service when they were accosted by several men, who beat and stoned them. When the pastor of the church reported the incident to the police, the attackers accused the church of disturbing the neighbors with loud worship. The pastor countered that many of the neighbors were Christians and the worship service was only one-hour long each week. The police intervened on the pastor's behalf, and the attackers promised to not harass the church members again.

On November 12, 2006, the Mizpah Prayer Ministry congregation in Nawalapitiya gathered for worship when a mob disrupted the service and demanded that it be stopped immediately. The mob, including 12 Buddhist monks, a member of the local government, and two journalists from local newspapers, chased away the congregation. The mob threatened the pastor with death. The group later revisited the church and threatened the workers there. One of the attackers hit a church worker with a club, and others broke chairs. The church filed a formal complaint with local police, who made no arrests during the reporting period.

On November 8, 2006, an unidentified gang armed with rifles arrived in a van and stormed an office situated at the Al-Jumma mosque in Baduliya in the eastern town of Kattankudy. The gang shot indiscriminately at a group of persons in the office, and six individuals sustained injuries as a result. Kattankudy police believed the shooting was based on an unsettled dispute between two Muslim religious factions in the area, due to an earlier clash at the same mosque.

On October 30, 2006, a group of local men accosted the pastor of Calvary Chapel of Lanka in Polhena, Matara. Two to three men beat the pastor while the others looked on. The pastor was hospitalized for his injuries as a result. He made a complaint to Matara police.

On October 29, 2006, the congregation of the Assembly of God church in Yakkala in the Gampaha District met for worship. A group of approximately 50 Buddhists, including 4 local monks, arrived at the service and demanded that it be stopped. The monks told the pastor that there was no need for a Christian church in the Buddhist village. To prevent violence, the pastor agreed to cancel the service for that week. The mob demanded that he permanently close the church or face serious consequences. The pastor filed a complaint with the police, who agreed to provide protection to the congregation. However, on Sunday, November 12, mobs gathered again on the roads leading to the church. Anti-Christian posters were put up, and over 100 Buddhist protestors, some armed with clubs, prevented the Christians from attending services. The pastor called the police, but only two officers arrived and were unable to control the crowd. Police called further reinforcements and eventually dispersed the mob. On November 13, a man threw a container of black oil on a young woman who was visiting the pastor's home. She lodged a complaint with the Gampaha police.

On October 23, 2006, a church worker and his family at the Vineyard Community Church in the city of Gonawela, Kurunegala, were attacked by five men claiming to be police officers. The men threatened the family, beat the man with clubs, and aggressively shook a child. They also stole a gold necklace, damaged the building's electricity supply, and smashed pots and vases. The beaten man sustained serious internal injuries. On October 30, 10 men again attacked the Vineyard Community Church. They unsuccessfully tried to set the building on fire. No one was injured in this attack. Church members filed a complaint to the Pannala police, but they made no arrests during the reporting period.

NCEASL reported that on October 13, 2006, a prayer center in Hingurakgoda, Polonnaruwa was vandalized and set on fire. Unidentified assailants stole a keyboard, carpet, and mats; desecrated the interior of the building with human waste; then set fire to Bibles and hymnals. The pastor filed a complaint with the police, who were investigating.

In October 2006 an anonymous group sent threatening letters to most Catholic and Christian schools in Colombo demanding the cancellation of all Christmas programs. The group identified itself as an organization caring for children. Some schools reported receiving anonymous telephone calls warning that stern action would be taken against those schools that conducted Christmas programs. One threatening letter addressed to a Catholic school said that children should sacrifice Christmas fanfare and instead donate money to the security forces serving in the north and east. The schools held the Christmas programs in spite of these threats and there were no repercussions.

In August 2006 posters began appearing in Balana Kadugannawa demanding that the Dutch Reformed Church stop renovation work on a local orphanage. According to NCEASL, approximately 200 persons forced their way into the orphanage premises and began destroying the property. A Buddhist flag was hoisted on the roof. In September 2006 the Divisional Council revoked the license it had issued for the renovation work without indicating due cause. Church members filed a complaint with local police.

On July 1, 2006, a mob attacked the Harvest International Church in Hapugastenne in Ratnapura district. Attackers smashed and looted property and seriously injured two church workers, one of whom required minor surgery. The mob threatened to kill the pastor and his family if they did not shut down the church. The pastor filed a complaint with local police, who were investigating the case but had made no arrests by the end of the reporting period.

In June 2006 the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) of Sri Lanka, a private association, appointed a commission of inquiry to report on the strategies and funding of conversion of Buddhists to other religions. The officials of the ACBC intend to publish the report before the end of 2007.

In May 2006 the pastor of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Gampola, Kandy received a death threat. Shortly thereafter, a local social welfare officer and three Buddhist monks insisted the pastor go to the police station with them. At the station, the pastor showed his official ID and a copy of his church's incorporation act. The police strongly advised the welfare officer and the monks not to further harass the pastor; however, when the pastor sought a copy of his official complaint regarding the death threat, police were unresponsive. When Foursquare Gospel Church headquarters in Colombo raised the incident with local police contacts, they were informed there was no record of the pastor's complaint. The pastor deemed it too dangerous to continue meeting at the Gampola location, and congregants met elsewhere during the course of the reporting period.

On May 2, 2006, the United Christian Fellowship began constructing a community hall on land it purchased in Poddala in the Galle District. On May 6, 2006, a mob led by a Buddhist monk entered the premises and threatened the construction worker and the pastor. The worker was grabbed by his collar, and both he and the pastor were verbally abused. The mob threatened to demolish the building or set fire to it if a church were constructed, although the pastor explained the building was meant to be a community center. The pastor reported the incident to local police. Construction stopped and has not resumed. Threats continued over the reporting period and the work did not resume.

On April 23, 2006, a Methodist Church in Pilyandala reopened for the first time since 2003, when threats from Buddhist monks caused the church to close. At the reopening, the same group of monks led a mob who damaged congregants' vehicles. On April 30, 2006, burning tires were placed on the road outside the church. A court hearing was scheduled for June 16, 2006. After three court sittings, the Magistrate warned and discharged both parties. Congregants who lost property and vehicles filed separate cases to seek compensation. The church is no longer

functioning because a group of villagers led by some local Buddhist monks continued to create obstacles.

On February 14, 2006, a pastor from Alpitiya was summoned to the police station, where a crowd of approximately eighty persons including five Buddhist monks accused him of conducting unethical conversions. He was told not to gather congregants for prayers. The mob threatened him and hit him with an umbrella in police presence. Later that day, the mob attempted to storm the pastor's house. The pastor fled with his wife and children and alerted the police, who arrived and dispersed the crowd. Throughout February 2006, the pastor faced harassment including death threats and a poster campaign threatening anyone who helped the pastor or his family. Congregants faced harassment when they visited the pastor. In March 2006, a family that had sheltered the threatened pastor and his family during a previous tense situation, found burnt oil and human excrement thrown at their house. On March 22, 2006, after an investigation into their children's illness, the same family discovered that their well had been contaminated with trickle seeds and burnt oil. The family filed a complaint with the police. The congregation has not been meeting and the pastor no longer conducts services. A police inquiry did not result in any arrests. Police advised congregants to stop meeting, and the church is no longer functioning.

On January 22, 2006, in Bolaththa in the Gampaha District, a group of church-goers faced a large mob including Buddhist monks and a Catholic priest. The mob carried placards and shouted threats, demanding that church services be stopped. The mob insisted that the pastor only accept Christians from his own village into his church, and under duress, the pastor agreed. On January 23, 2006, the pastor's house was stoned. On February 12, 2006, the mob monitored church attendees and discovered the church organist came from a neighboring village. The mob grew threatening, and the pastor called the police. Police dispersed the crowd, but asked the pastor to limit services to congregants within his own village. The pastor has not conducted regular Sunday services since then. During this reporting period, the pastor and congregants met for services at another location.

On December 25, 2005, parishioners of the King's Revival Church in Alawwa in the Kurunegala District were attacked on their way to services. Four persons were injured. Police arrived on the scene immediately after being informed of the attack and the mob was dispersed. Soon after the attack, oil was dumped in the pastor's drinking well, and on January 16, 2006, assailants threw stones at the pastor's home, breaking a window. On January 26, 2007, a court ruled in favor of the church, which continues functioning in the same location.

On the evening of June 5, 2005, villagers threw bottles at the newly purchased home of the pastor of the Assembly of God church in Ambalangoda in Galle District. On June 6, following an argument between a mob of approximately thirty and the pastor, the mob attacked the pastor's home, damaging the windows and fence. The mob, which later grew to more than fifty persons, assaulted the pastor and his brother and stole the pastor's mobile telephone and more than \$2,000 (200,000 rupees) from him. The home also was vandalized and a Buddha statue and lamps were placed on the property. Police investigated, promptly removed the statue and lamps, and arrested six persons who remained free on bail at the end of the period covered by this report. The initial hearing was held in January 2006. The pastor reported that subsequently stones were thrown at his house, and villagers occupying the building he meant to use as a community center stopped him from using the facility. The accused approached the pastor and asked to settle out of court, promising to allow him to continue his work peacefully. The pastor asked that any settlement be agreed upon before a Magistrate and recorded in the Court. On April 27, 2007, a judge ordered the illegal occupants of the premises slated for the community center to vacate the area and remove fences they had built. However, the pastor reported he is still too frightened to reclaim his land from the unlawful residents.

In December 2004 St. Michael's Catholic Church in Kutwana was set on fire. This was the third attack against the church since 2003. Police made no arrests during the period covered by this report. During the reporting period, police provided a guard for congregants who meet in the restored church building for services.

In 2004 a large crowd attacked an Apostolic church in Kurunegala. The church and workers' quarters were burned. Five men were arrested but remained free on bail at the end of the period covered by this report. A hearing on this case was scheduled for July 2005. The attackers sought to settle out of court. The church agreed to a settlement on condition that the attackers accept fault for the incident. The church also filed a civil suit seeking compensation for damages. The next hearing was due in May 2007, though several hearings have been postponed.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials regularly meet with representatives of all the country's religious groups to review a wide range of human rights, ethnic, and religious freedom concerns. During the period covered by this report, embassy representatives met with government officials at the highest level to express U.S. government concern about the attacks on Christian churches and to discuss the anticonversion issue. On several occasions, the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom discussed the anticonversion issue with the country's Ambassador to the United States.

The U.S. Government is a strong supporter of a political solution to the conflict, and the U.S. Embassy supports interfaith efforts by religious leaders to promote a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

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