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Sri Lanka

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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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 during the period covered by this report.

Anti-conversion legislation first introduced in 2004 remained under consideration. In May 2004, the Jathika Hela Urumaya Party (JHU) presented to parliament a bill that would criminalize "unethical" conversions and on May 6, 2005, despite a supreme court ruling that some sections of the bill were unconstitutional, the JHU presented the bill for a second reading. Subsequently, the proposed bill was referred to a special parliamentary committee, which in April 2006, met for the first time. The bill remained under consideration within the committee at the end of the period covered by this report.

In June 2004, the then-minister of Buddhist affairs presented a separate draft anti-conversion bill to the cabinet. It was not formally approved; however, it was sent to the attorney general for review. In April 2005, the cabinet approved a revised version of the bill and in June 2005, the bill was formally "gazetted," the first step toward introducing it in parliament. By the end of the reporting period, it had not been introduced.

In October 2004, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) Party formally proposed a constitutional amendment that would declare Buddhism the state religion. While the amendment remained on parliament's "order paper," the bill never reached parliament's formal agenda and made no progress over the reporting period.

Although previously the courts had generally upheld the right of Christian groups to worship and to construct facilities to house their congregations, a supreme court decision promulgated in 2003 ruled against recognizing a Roman Catholic group and determined that its medical services constituted "allurement." At the same time, the supreme court ruled that although the constitution supports the right of individuals to practice any religion, it does not support the right to proselytize. The group protested the ruling to the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), which in October 2005, stated that the supreme court did not uphold [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) standards.

Since late 2003, the country has witnessed a spate of attacks on Christian churches and sometimes pastors and congregants. Approximately 250 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 close to a dozen persons in connection with the incidents.

Despite generally amicable relations among persons of different faiths, there has been an ongoing violent resistance by some Buddhists to Christian church activity, in particular that conducted by evangelical groups. There were sporadic attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and some societal tension due to ongoing allegations of forced conversions and debate on anti-conversion legislation. In May 2005, at the invitation of the Government, the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom visited and met with various religious groups and civil society.

The U.S. government discussed 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 anti-conversion laws could have on religious freedom. The U.S. government continued to discuss general religious freedom concerns with religious leaders and with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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 all are practiced. Approximately 70 percent of the population was Buddhist, 15 percent Hindu, 8 percent

Christian, and 7 percent Muslim. Christians tended 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 were Theravada Buddhists. Most Tamils, who made up the largest ethnic minority, were Hindu. Almost all Muslims were Sunnis; there was also a small minority of Shi'a, including members of the Borah community. Almost 80 percent of Christians were Catholics, with Anglican and other mainstream Protestant churches also present in the cities. Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, Pentecostal, and the Assemblies of God were also present. Evangelical Christian groups have grown in recent years, although membership was 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 faiths to practice their religions freely. The Government's respect for religious freedom varied, and there was no improvement in the status of religious freedom.

Prior to the November 2005 presidential election, each religion had a ministry to oversee its affairs; however, after President Mahinda Rajapaksa took office, he replaced them with a single Ministry of Religious Affairs with four departments, one each to deal with Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian affairs. According to the legislation defining the mandates, each department should formulate and implement programs that inculcate religious values and promote a virtuous society.

On October 29, 2004, the JHU proposed a constitutional amendment declaring Buddhism to be the state religion. The JHU stated that the purpose of the amendment was strictly to protect Buddhism; however, the amendment also contained clauses restricting conversion of Buddhists. On November 25, 2004, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) challenged the amendment, and in December 2004 the CPA's petition was heard before a three-judge bench of the supreme court. The court determined that the proposed amendment was inconsistent with the constitution. The court also determined that since the amendment sought to repeal parts of the constitution, approval from a two-thirds majority in parliament and a referendum endorsing it would be required for passage. The bill remained on parliament's "order paper," the document from which agenda items are drawn; however, the JHU made no attempt to put the amendment on parliament's agenda, and the bill made no progress during the reporting period.

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.

In June 2004, the then-Minister of Buddhist Affairs also presented a draft anti-conversion bill to the cabinet. It was not formally approved, but it was sent to the attorney general for review. The cabinet approved a revised bill in April 2005 and formally "gazetted" it in June 2005, the first step toward introducing the bill in parliament; however, the bill never reached parliament, and it was not the subject of public debate during the reporting period.

The 2004 JHU and government-sponsored bills are substantially similar. Both bills carry penalties, including fines or jail sentences, for anyone convicted of or assisting in "unethical" conversion. The private member bill has heavier penalties for converting women and children, whereas the ministerial bill has such penalties only for converting children. The ministerial bill holds that for any group found guilty of performing "unethical" conversion, all its members may also be found guilty, and that any foreigner found guilty under this act would be deported and may be labeled a "prohibited visitor."

Despite the constitutional preference for Buddhism, a number of major religious festivals of other faiths were celebrated as national holidays. These included 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. The year 2006 also marks the 2,550th death anniversary of the Buddha. In commemoration, the Department of Buddhist Affairs within the Religious Affairs Ministry organized an ordination ceremony for 2,550 novice monks.

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." Such groups must either register as a corporation or as a charitable organization by having a bill put forward in parliament on their behalf.

In 2003, the Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross of the Third Order of Saint Francis requested incorporation as a non-profit organization through a bill in parliament. A citizen raised an objection to the bill, and the case went to the supreme court, which ruled against the incorporation bill. The court claimed the order could not be incorporated if it was involved in proselytizing and providing material benefit. The supreme court deemed that incorporation under such circumstances would violate the constitution. The Teaching Sisters lodged a complaint with the HRC and in April 2004, the HRC asked the Government to provide a response. The Government raised technical objections. In October 2005, the HRC provided a ruling that the supreme court decision did not meet ICCPR standards. The Government was given ninety days to respond but did not do so. Officials noted that the supreme court's decision was a constitutional determination, and as such could not be over-ridden by a HRC decision. The current constitution does not bring government policies fully in line with ICCPR obligations. The incorporation bill's parliamentary session ended in April 2004 when a new parliament was elected, and the country's law requires all bills that have not completed the legislative process be re-introduced if they are to be considered; no one has sought to re-introduce the bill.

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 followed curricula similar to public schools because all students had to take national exams administered by the government.

The Government placed renewed emphasis on the work of national councils for interfaith understanding in the wake of the attacks on Christian churches and evangelical groups' property.

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 eighteen 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 three 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.

After the supreme court ruled against the Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross' 2003 incorporation bill, a complaint was lodged before the HRC, which considered the case and requested a response from the Government. In October 2005, after assessing the government's response, the HRC found that the supreme court's actions did not meet ICCPR standards. Government officials remarked that the supreme court upheld the constitution, which also does not fully conform to ICCPR requirements. The Teaching Sisters have not sought to re-introduce the incorporation bill, which was made void when its legislative session ended in April 2004 due to the election of a new parliament.

The Government also 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. However, in 2001, the Government and the LTTE each announced unilateral ceasefires, and in 2002 a joint ceasefire accord was agreed to by the parties. The peace process has stalled since escalating violence in late 2005 has challenged the Ceasefire Agreement and put both parties at risk of returning to open conflict. 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 thousand lives. The military issued warnings through public radio before commencing major operations, instructing civilians to congregate in safe zones around churches and temples; however, in conflict areas in the north, the Government occasionally was accused of bombing and shelling Hindu temples and Christian churches. In 2003 some Buddhist clergy were allowed to visit shrines in LTTE-controlled areas for the first time in many years. Some Christians also visited holy sites in LTTE-controlled areas that had not been accessible to them during the period of armed conflict.

During the reporting period, some 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 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. 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. NGOs remained concerned for the men's safety. On June 17, 2006, in Pesalai, Sri Lankan 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.

There was some harassment of Christians and attacks on their property and places of worship by Buddhist extremists opposed to conversion. The police investigated many of these incidents when complaints were made, but were occasionally 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. By early 2005, several alleged attackers had been arrested.

At the height of the attacks on Christian churches in 2005, several government leaders, including then-President Kumaratunga and then-minister of Christian affairs, publicly denounced the attacks. In February 2005, at a ceremony held at the Buddhist and Pali University, Kumaratunga stated that such attacks would not be tolerated and ordered police to fully investigate each incident. The president also pledged to act against extremists.

In November 2004, the first meeting of the newly formed National Advisory Committee for Peace and Reconciliation (NACPR), formed by then-President Kumaratunga, took place. The committee was due to deliberate on matters pertaining to the peace process and to promote understanding and reconciliation among different communities; however, the NACPR failed to function during the reporting period.

In May 2004, leading Catholic and Buddhist clergy met to continue a dialogue on religious tolerance.

Since late 2003, police have arrested almost a dozen persons connected with various attacks. Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe also convened regular meetings of the four ministers dealing with religious concerns as part of their portfolios and established religious "amity" committees around the island; however these committees did not function during the reporting period.

On August 7, 2005, the Horana Police ordered Christians from the Foursquare Gospel Church in the Kalutara District to stop meeting for worship and prayer. The verbal order was issued by the Head Quarters Inspector after a mob threatened the worshippers on two consecutive Sundays--July 31 and August 7, 2005. As a result, congregants took to meeting at an alternate location.

During the commemoration of the Buddha's 2550th death anniversary in May, the Ministry of Education issued a notice instructing public schools without a Buddhist shrine room to build one. In a clarification, the Ministry of Education amended the notice to note that Christian, Muslim, or Hindu schools under the ministry's purview would not have to build a Buddhist shrine room.

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 thousand 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 is 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 was waiting 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 2003 four Muslims were killed; while the LTTE denied any involvement, this incident fueled tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the area.

Unlike in previous years, the LTTE did not target Buddhist sites during the period covered by this report; however, the LTTE did not indicate that it would abstain from attacking such targets in the future. The Government continued to keep security at a number of religious sites island-wide following the 1998 bombing of the Temple of the Tooth.

In December 2004 a group of men in the LTTE-controlled area of Vakeneri in Batticaloa District attacked and damaged what was described as a Christian family church. The police reported two men inside the church were assaulted and the church was damaged. The police claimed they were unable to take any action against the accused since the area was under LTTE control.

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.

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. At the end of the period covered by this report, the statue remained at the contested site. 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.

The LTTE has been accused in the past 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.

On July 7, 2005, In LTTE-controlled Kayankerny near Batticaloa in the east, assailants attacked the newly built Christian Family Church. Unidentified attackers dug three holes in the ground near the foundation of the building and detonated dynamite. The explosions caused damage to the walls, roof, and floor of the church. The church building was also set on fire. Police in Batticaloa assessed that it was most likely LTTE members who perpetrated the attack.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Discrimination based on religious differences was much less common than discrimination based on ethnicity. In general, the 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.

During the period covered by this report, Christians, both of mainstream denominations and evangelical groups, sometimes encountered harassment and physical attacks by some local Buddhists who believed they were threatened by these groups. Some Christian groups occasionally complained that the Government tacitly condoned harassment and violence aimed at them. In some cases, the 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 stated that during the reporting period, there were approximately seventy-five attacks on Christian churches, organizations, religious leaders, or congregants, 90 percent of which were reported to the police. The U.S. Embassy 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 in earnest and were not targeted at converting aid beneficiaries.

In May 2005, at the invitation of the Government, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion Asma Jahangir held several meetings in the country on religious freedom. She concluded that while allegations of forced conversion remained vague and no direct testimonies were available, second-hand accounts by credible sources indicated that conversions through "improper" means have sometimes occurred.

No action was taken during the period covered by this report in the 2003 attack against a member of the Assembly of God Church in Thanamalwila or the 2003 attack against Pastor Rozario in Galle. The Assemblies of God group in Thanamalwila abandoned the building, part of which was burned. Police have not made any arrests in either case.

No action was taken in the three separate attacks that occurred in Ratnapura in 2003. Investigations continued into 2005 but yielded no results.

No action was taken in the 2004 attack against the World Vision office in Kebithigollwa, or the 2004 arson attack against the Our Mother Most Pure Catholic shrine in Mattegoda.

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, but another hearing is scheduled for October 2006. The Apostolic church also filed a civil suit seeking compensation for damages.

In 2004, the Christian Fellowship Church at Wadduwa in Kaluthara District was attacked by a mob led by a Buddhist monk. The attackers threw rocks, attempted to assault worshippers with sticks, and damaged a police vehicle. Police have not taken any action to settle the dispute between the church and the monk. The problem was not resolved during the reporting period.

In 2004, a crowd threatened the pastor of the Prayer Tower Church in Mahawewa in reaction to a rumor that he was building a Bible school. Police made no arrests during the period covered by this report.

In May 2004, a mob of armed men attacked the Assembly of God Church in Yakkala and assaulted the church members. Police officials arrested three persons, and an initial hearing was held in September 2005. The next hearing is scheduled for August 2006. In October 2004, the same church had human excrement thrown at its outer wall. In November 2004, police arrested two men allegedly involved with the attack and referred the matter to the mediation board for settlement. On February 8, 2006, three unidentified men in masks assaulted the church's pastor. The pastor lodged a complaint with the police and gave the name of a likely perpetrator. The police took the case to court on February 15, 2006, when the magistrate remanded both the suspect and the pastor. The pastor was shortly released on bail; prosecutors did not obtain sufficient evidence to pursue the case against the suspected attacker.

On June 19 and 20, 2004, following the introduction of the ministerial anti-conversion draft bill, large groups, including Buddhist monks, attacked the Christian Fellowship Church in Wadduwa. In response to the June 19 incident, police remained at the church to provide protection. On June 20, police also were attacked while they attempted to guard the church. Police issued an arrest warrant for one of the Buddhist monks involved in the June 20 attack, but by the end of the period covered by the report they had not located him. In November 2004, the police filed a case against four monks and one layperson who were identified in a police line-up. The accused were granted bail after a court appearance and did not spend any time in police custody. The presiding judge referred the case to the attorney general, upon whose advice the case was dismissed in 2005.

In August 2004, three days after receiving a death threat, a pastor of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Gampola, Kandy discovered a fire at his bedroom window. Police investigated; however, no further action was taken during the period covered by this report. After the fire, the pastor moved to a new location in Gampola. In May 2006, the same pastor 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 and gave a series of excuses. 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.

In December 2004, a concert in Colombo featuring Indian film stars was forced to close down after a hand grenade was thrown at the performers, killing two spectators and injuring several others. Some Buddhist monks demanded that the concert be cancelled because the proposed date coincided with the first death anniversary of a prominent monk.

Police continued to investigate and offered monetary rewards for information leading to an arrest; however, no action was taken during the period covered by this report.

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. The church used its own funds to repair the facility.

On April 25, 2005, police arrested Mohamed Nilam, a Muslim, for stoning and damaging a statue of Buddha in Nugegoda in the outskirts of Colombo. The magistrate released Nilam on bail and ordered him to report to the police every Sunday morning. A hearing was held on August 23, 2005, and Nilam publicly apologized and was released with a warning.

On May 1, 2005, a Buddhist monk-led mob attacked the Zion Prayer Center in Balapitiya, in Galle District. The pastor's wife and two other women were seriously injured in the attack, and furniture and the electric sound system were damaged. The pastor, who was away from the center at the time of the attack, filed a complaint, which was referred to the mediation board. No further action was taken during the period covered by this report.

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, causing damage to 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 were effectively stopping him from using the facility. Another hearing is scheduled for October 2006.

On July 16, 2005, in Pulasthigama, Polonnaruwa the Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church was attacked during the night and set on fire. The central crucifix, holy altar, sacrificial items, and other valuable items were destroyed because the church was almost completely burnt down. One of the caretakers was stabbed with a knife by the attackers.

On December 20, 2005, in Lunugala (Uva Province), a group of Buddhists told a Christian family's pastor that a deceased Christian man could not be buried in the local cemetery. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka intervened on the family's behalf, after which the burial was permitted.

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 21, 2006, in Alpitiya, a mob of approximately twenty armed men walked into the pastor of the Assembly of God Church's home. The pastor's wife was home alone with their three young children during this time. The mob issued an ultimatum that the pastor stop services and all Christian activity. The men overturned a table, chairs, and other furniture in the house before leaving, threatening that if the pastor continued his work, the group would destroy all of the family's belongings. The police were alerted and the Sunday service was held with police protection.

On February 14, 2006, the same pastor 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 and the mob threatened him and hit him with an umbrella in police presence. Later that same 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.

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, causing damage to the windows. 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.

On February 6, 2006, a man arrived at the Dutch Reformed Church in Galle looking for the pastor in charge, who was not there at the time. The assailant then told the pastor's wife that if the pastor visited the neighboring town of Hikkaduwa, people would kill him. The man also made derogatory and obscene statements about Jesus Christ and Christians.

On April 23, 2006, a Methodist Church in Pilyandala re-opened for the first time since 2003, when threats from Buddhist monks caused the church to close. At the re-opening, the same group of monks led a mob who let air out of congregants' tires, pushed over motorcycles, and damaged vehicles. The congregants continued to face threats, and on April 30 burning tires were placed on the road outside the church. A court hearing was scheduled for June 16.

On May 2, 2006, the United Christian Fellowship began constructing a community hall on land they purchased in Poddala in the Galle District. On May 6, 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.

According to media reports, on May 13 and 14, 2006, in Hatton, a mob threatened to stop a youth camp sponsored by a Ceylon Christian Youth Mission since it did not stop its activities in honor of the Buddhist holy day of Wesak. The Hatton police have no record of a complaint filed.

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.

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.

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 met 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 anti-conversion 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 anti-conversion issue with the country's ambassador to the United States.

The U.S. government is a strong supporter of the peace process launched by the Government, and the U.S. embassy encourages the interfaith efforts by religious leaders to promote a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

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