

Incident Reports – 2010

Compiled by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL)

NOTE:

- All incidents contained in this report are based on information received by NCEASL from member Churches and affiliates.

- As far as possible, all information has been verified through interviews with victims, Church leaders, eye witnesses and Police and through site visits by NCEASL staff.

- NCEASL has monitored and documented incidents since 1987.

- It is generally accepted that approximately 40% of incidents are never reported.

**** EXPLANATORY NOTE:**

The marked reduction in the number of violent incidents – in comparison with 2009 may be attributed to the upward trend of utilizing the Circular issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (in November 2008) to arbitrarily close down places of worship. Although the Circular in question is not a law sanctioned by Parliament, it is used very effectively to question the legality of churches and order them to close down, unless they can show proof of a letter of approval from the Ministry.

It must be noted that there is no legal requirement or prescribed procedure that allows the Ministry of Religious Affairs or any other government office to bestow legitimacy for religions or permission for places of worship to function.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed under article 10 and 14 (1) (e) of the Sri Lankan Constitution.

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Church and Pastor's residence burned down **The Pentecostal Assembly of Sri Lanka** **Mathugama (Kalutara District)**

16th January 2010

At approximately 2 p.m., the Pastor of the church his wife and two children returned home after attending a prayer meeting and lunch at the house of a friend to find their house had been set on fire. From what they observed the fire had raged for a while and almost all their belongings were burned. The walls of the house were black with soot and the flames had caused serious damage to the roof. In shock, the family put out the last of the flames and alerted the Police.

The extent of damaged caused by the fire made it impossible for the Police to find any fingerprints of the persons responsible.

The Pastor was asked to be present at the local Police Station on the 18th of January for an inquiry. Assuming it would be to investigate the burning of his house and his complaint where he indicated those whom he suspected of the crime, the Pastor arrived at the Police Station. However, he found a large gathering of villagers and Buddhist monks present at the Police Station. They loudly protested against any Christian worship taking place in the area.

Pastor assaulted and threatened **Creator Almighty God Believers church** **Getalawa (Anuradhapura District)**

9th February 2010

The pastor was threatened and warned by a few men not to stay in the area of Getalawa. He was told that he cannot engage in any Christian ministry and if he persists, he will be killed and thrown in to the *Kokawewa* Lake.

Church attacked by mob

**Living God prayer center
Thirupenthurai (Batticaloa District)
19th February 2010**

The church was attacked by a mob at approximately 11.00 in the night.

Pastor assaulted and threatened

**Creator Almighty God Believers church
Getalawa (Anuradhapura District)**

16th February 2010

At approximately 11.00 a.m. after the service was concluded two Buddhist monks arrived at the church premises and threatened the pastor saying he should not come to the area for Christian work in the future. Meanwhile another monk ordered the pastor, his wife and sister-in-law to walk in a procession for nearly 3 kilometers. While they were being marched, they began to assault the pastor. Amidst the crowds the pastor's wife and his sister-in-law were verbally abused.

Prior to this incident, on the 09th of February the pastor was threatened saying he cannot turn up in the future in this area for any Christian work, and if he does, would be killed and thrown in to the 'kokawewa'.

The incident was reported to the police immediately. The police subsequently arrived at the scene. Further, the mob was strictly warned by the police that such acts should not be committed in the future and if not action would be taken against them.

Church attacked by mob

**Living God prayer center
Thirupenthurai (Batticaloa District)**

19th February 2010

The church came under attack during the night, causing some damage.

Dedication service disrupted by mob

**Church of the Foursquare Gospel
Kalutara (Kalutara District)**

6th March 2010

The dedication service of the Pastor's residence was disrupted by a large mob of over 100 persons led by several Buddhist monks and individuals with close links to certain politicians. The mob shouted abuse at those gathered for the service and threatened the pastor to stop the service. They declared this was a Buddhist country and Christians

need permission to conduct meetings and services and threatened those attending the service to leave the premises. Some of the monks sat inside the house and refused to leave.

A complaint was lodged at the Kalutara Police by the pastor. The Police advised the Monks not to resort to violence but demanded the pastor to show prior authorization from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Kalutara Urban Council to engage in religious activity at the premises. (This is not a legal requirement).

The Pastor sought protection for his family, fearing an attack during the night. The Police provided a guard for the night.

Church attacked by mob
Living God prayer center
Thirupenthurai (Batticaloa District)

07th March 2010

A mob attacked the church at approximately 1.00 in the morning. A complaint was lodged at the Batticaloa police station in relation to the incident. This church was previously attacked on the 19th of February 2010.

Christian youth assaulted and arrested following altercation
Assemblies of God
Wellawaya (Monaragala District)

22nd March 2010.

At approximately 7.00 p.m. four youth who were on their way from a prayer meeting at the church were accosted and assaulted by the owner of a hotel which is located near the church, resulting in an altercation between them. The owner of the hotel claimed he sustained an injury and was hospitalized for treatment. The four youth were subsequently arrested by the Police, based on his complaint alleging he was attacked by these four youth who are strangers to the village. Contrary to his allegation, all four young people are children of families resident in the village for many years. A complaint was lodged by the families at the Wellawaya police station on the 22nd night.

It is reported that the hotel owner has in recent months acted aggressively towards the congregation, hurling abuse at them while they went to the church. Later that same night, the church was stoned by unidentified persons.

Church vandalized by mob, services suspended

**Church of the Foursquare Gospel
Germanwatte, Pugoda (Gampaha District)**

28th March 2010

At approximately 10.30 a.m. a mob of about 150 people led by 3 Buddhist monks forcibly entered the church premises. They hurled stones at the building and destroyed chairs and other furniture. The pastor was threatened with death by the mob who shouted at him to stop Christian worship in the area. Following information and threats of an impending attack on the church, the usual morning service was postponed and hence the congregation were not present during the incident. Some of the attackers spat in the face of the elderly mother in law of the pastor who was present. A complaint made to the Police was later withdrawn, in the hope of reaching an amicable settlement after the Parliamentary Elections and the church suspended services due to the very tense and volatile situation that prevailed.

This ministry has functioned in Germanwatte since 1996.

**Church stoned, attacked, furniture set on fire
The Apostolic Church
Dolosbagaya, Nawalapitiya (Kandy District)**

4th April 2010

A group of people hurled stones at the roof of the church, causing damage to the roof. This ministry has been in the area for the past 14 years.

13th April 2010.

The church was attacked by an unidentified gang during the night. The pulpit, musical instruments and furniture used by the Sunday School children were removed from the building and set on fire. The congregation of about 150 people were shocked by this act of aggression.

A complaint was lodged at the Nawalapitiya police station in relation to act of arson.

**Pastor and others assaulted by mob
Church of the Foursquare Gospel
Bulathkohupitiya (Kegalle District)**

2nd May 2010

A group of 12 Christians headed by the pastor were assaulted and subjected to intimidation by a mob of about 500 people led by a Buddhist monk. The incident occurred at approximately 4.30 p.m. when the group of Christians were distributing leaflets in the village of Edurampolawatta, pertaining to a Christian film that was to be screened the following day.

The group of Christians were humiliated and forced to walk a distance of approximately 3 kilometres to the Bulathkohupitiya town, while the mob shouted, threatened and beat them. The men were forced to remove their shirts. The mob took photographs and videos of the entire scene. The pastor was forced under duress to promise that they will not return to the village. When they were being led in to the town, two Policemen who were on the road intervened and took the beleaguered Christians to the Police Station, dispersing the mob. A complaint was lodged at the Bulathkohupitiya Police station; complaint number CB2183/15.

Church attacked by mob
Living God prayer center
Thirupenthurai (Batticaloa District)

02nd May 2010

The church was attacked by the same mob which carried out attacks on 19th February and 7th March 2010. This attack which took place around 12 mid night caused damage to 20 concrete pillars. A complaint was lodged at the Batticaloa police station.

Arrangements were made through the peace committee to grant compensation.

Church set on fire
Mahimaya Yesusta
Rajagahawatta (Chilaw District)

3rd June 2010

At approximately 3 am, the modest church built using woven coconut leaves was set on fire, destroying it completely.

Church demolished and incumbent pastor attacked
Calvary Christian Church
Rajagiriya (Colombo District)

24th June 2010

At approximately 4.00 P.M. the Church was demolished by the officials of the Urban Development Authority who arrived at its premises with a group of about 100 police officers including the O.I.C.s of the surrounding police stations using Backhoe equipment. The demolition took place amidst a strong protest led by the congregation. The incumbent, pastor Thiruchelvem who opposed the malicious action was assaulted by the police in public.

When the Urban Development Authority and the police were questioned by the pastor and the congregation about the demolition they alleged that it was an unauthorized construction.

The pastor has been paying taxes to the municipal council of Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte under the registration number 429/19A.

The Church was established in 1985 and a permanent building was constructed for the congregation in year 2008 upon the authority of the President's secretariat. At present there is a congregation of approximately 150 families.

Pastor and wife mobbed and doused with engine oil

**Church of the Foursquare Gospel
Radawana (Gampaha District)**

25th July 2010

The pastor and his wife, who were on their way to a Church member's house at approximately 10.30 a.m., were accosted by four men at a lonely junction. The men surrounded them and questioned them about the church ministry, verbally abusing the couple. The mob turned violent after a while, assaulting the pastor and his wife with their fists. They doused the beaten pastor with a bottle of engine oil, threatening him to stop his ministry. The pastor was admitted to hospital for treatment for minor injuries. A complaint was lodged at the police station. However, no arrests were made.

1st August 2010

Meanwhile, the police requested the pastor to be present at the police station on the following Sunday (1st August) upon a complaint lodged by a local Buddhist monk. At the Police station, he was questioned as to the validity of the church. A letter was given through a lawyer, clarifying that there is no legal requirement for registration of churches in Sri Lanka and further that the Church of the Foursquare Gospel is incorporated under an Act of Parliament.

Prayer service disrupted and pastor threatened by mob

**Assembly of God Church
Bulathkohupitiya (Kegalle District)**

8th August 2010

At approximately 9.45 in the morning, while the pastor and his congregation were at prayer, a group of persons including his neighbor entered the premises and demanded that they stop worshipping. The prayer service was abandoned amidst the threats.

Threats followed by act of arson destroys church property

**Assembly of God church
Bulathkohupitiya (Kegalle District)**

24th October 2010

During the Sunday service, 3 men who positioned themselves in neighbouring premises disrupted the service by shouting threats at the pastor and congregation.

Last week of October 2010

An unidentified gang entered the premises while the pastor was away and set fire to chairs and mats which were used by the congregation for worship services.

Pastor threatened and assaulted by mob**Church of the Four Square Gospel
Kalutara (Kalutara District)****10th October 2010**

At approximately 10.25 in the morning a mob of about 35 people led by 6 Buddhist monks entered the Church premises and prevented the congregation from taking part in the Sunday service. They shouted threats at the pastor and assaulted him. The pulpit, musical instruments and the furniture were destroyed by the mob.

A complaint was lodged at the Kalutara North Police station. Complaint number CIB I 09/116.