

Incident Reports – 2011

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 period covered by this report was marked by an upward trend in the utilization of the Circular issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (in November 2008) to arbitrarily close down places of worship. The reduction in the number of violent attacks to close down places of worship may be due to this factor.

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.

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Pastor assaulted

**Corner Stone Church
Neluwa (Galle District)**

05th January 2011

The pastor and his family returned home in the night and were surprised by a man who had broken in to the house through a window. The intruder shouted threats at the pastor to stop conducting worship services and began assaulting the pastor. The cries of his family alerted neighbours to the scene, including the landlord of the pastor. The man assaulted the elderly landlord as well and escaped amidst the confusion. A complaint was lodged by the pastor at the Neluwa Police station on the same day at approximately 9.45 p.m. Complaint number MCR37/10C173/62. The landlord too lodged a complaint at the same Police station. The Police arrested the intruder. He was released later with a severe warning, after he apologized to the pastor and to the landlord.

Christian house owner questioned by village youth on prayer gatherings

**Assembly of God Church
Elpitiya (Galle District)**

16th January 2011

At approximately 10.30 in the morning while a worship meeting was in progress, a group of youth arrived at the premises and questioned the owner of the premises. He was questioned as to the nature of the gathering and the activities of the pastor who was conducting the worship. It is believed that the young men are members of the young Buddhist Association in the village and that they carried out their questioning on the advice of the Buddhist monk from a nearby temple.

Church ordered to stop construction

**Assembly of God Church
Norachchulai (Puttalam District)**

18th January 2011

The ongoing reconstruction process of the Church was interrupted by a mob that arrived at the building site in the morning and shouted threats to stop construction. This church which was burned down on three previous occasions was being reconstructed with approval from the local government authorities as well as the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The pastor was instructed verbally by the Divisional Secretary (assistant government agent) to stop construction with immediate effect. He refused, on the grounds that the church had obtained all necessary approval to proceed with the construction. The pastor was later issued a letter dated 18th January 2011 by the Divisional Secretary, formally requesting that he stop construction.

Night attack destroying windows Assembly of God Church Middeniya (Hambanthota District)

23rd January 2011

The windows of the building were broken by a group of attackers during the night, while the pastor and his family were inside. In July 2008, they faced an arson attack carried out during the night, which caused damage to the building.

A complaint was lodged with the Police.

Christian family celebrating child's Birthday celebration harassed by monk Assembly of God Church Galkulana (Anuradhapura District)

20th February 2011

A Christian family was celebrating the Birthday of one of the two daughters in the family at their home. The father of the family Priyantha Perera is a soldier attached to the Sri Lanka Army and a long standing resident of Galkulana. The family also invited their pastor and his family to attend this simple family celebration. While they were all gathered at Mr. Perera's home, at approximately 3.00 p.m. a Buddhist monk followed by a large group of about 30 people forcibly entered their home. The monk assaulted the pastor and accused him of conducting Christian worship. Mr. Perera and his wife and daughters were threatened by the mob not to engage in Christian worship activities. During the melee, a valuable camera and video equipment owned by Mr. Perera which was in the house was forcibly taken in to possession of the monk.

The incident was reported to the Police. All efforts by Mr. Perera to recover the stolen property through the intervention of the Police failed.

The family's membership with the village death donation society (*maranadhara samithiya*) has been terminated as per the advice of the monk, stating that non-Buddhists cannot be part of the society. The family has been ostracized by the village.

The pastor too has come under pressure and function under threat.

Abduction of 3 Pastors
Batticaloa (Batticaloa District)

22nd February 2011

According to reports from Batticaloa, at approximately 2.30 p.m. 3 Pastors from Batticaloa were asked to report to the office of the Chief Minister of the Eastern Province and proceeded to the office. Their families became concerned as they failed to return home by evening or even the next day. Following their disappearance, the relatives of the pastors lodged complaints at the local Police Station on the 24th February.

It was later reported that the pastors had been taken to the Intelligence Unit of the Sri Lankan Army Headquarters in Colombo and taken back to Batticaloa on the 25th of February. At the time of their disappearance, the pastors were engaged in the distributing of flood relief in the area which was severely affected by floods. While being kept in Colombo, they had been interrogated as to how they received funds for the distribution of relief supplies.

Church stoned
The Christian Fellowship Church
Ingiriya (Kalutara District)

07th March 2011

While the Kalutara Pastors Fellowship meeting was going on, at approximately 1.00 p.m. an unidentified group of men hurled stones at the Church premises interrupting the meeting. The roof of the building sustained damage.

Pastor threatened with death
The Christian Fellowship Church
Ingiriya (Kalutara District)

08th March 2011

At approximately 1.00 a.m. there was a knock on the door of the pastor's home. Two persons issued verbal threats and warned him not to open the door, that they would kill him.

The Police were informed of the situation immediately and a complaint was lodged at the Ingiriya Police Station subsequently. (CIB2 370/80)

The pastor faced threats in 2001 as well.

Pastor assaulted

**Assembly of God Church
Medirigiriya (Polonnaruwa District)**

16th March 2011

Four Buddhist youth from the area approached a Christian boy wanting to know more about Christianity. The boy referred them to his pastor who agreed to meet with the four youth and share about Christianity. Neither the pastor nor the boy from the church was aware that this was a trap set by the four youths. On the 16th March, the pastor met the four youth at approximately 4.00 p.m. at the home of the Christian boy and began sharing about his faith. A mob of about 20 people entered the premises began to assault him severely. The injured pastor on his way back was further humiliated by a Buddhist monk and others who stood by the roadside and taunted him. They threatened him not to return to the village.

The pastor sustained injuries to the head and was experiencing hearing difficulties. He was admitted to the Polonnaruwa hospital for treatment.

Church property set on fire

**Church of the Foursquare Gospel
Aarachchikattuwa (Chilaw District)**

5th May 2011

The church was in the process of constructing a building in a property owned by the church. During the night, the shed set up at the site for the workmen was burnt down, reportedly on the instructions of the chief Buddhist monk in the area.

On the 10th of May 2011, a public protest was held agitating against the A.G.A. - to deny permission to construct the building.

Christian family threatened with eviction

**Assembly of God Church
Galkulana (Anuradhapura District)**

8th May 2011

A Christian family was visited by a group of men led by a Buddhist monk, demanding that they observe *sil* (Buddhist religious ritual). If they failed to comply, the family was threatened that they will be evicted from their home. The family lodged a complaint with the Thirappane Police, for future reference. Entry number 312/90 I.

Mob surrounds and stops worship service
Prayer Tower Church
Mahawewa, Marawila (Puttlam District)

5th June 2011

During the early hours of the morning, the church was desecrated with human excrement thrown on the altar by unidentified persons. This was discovered by the pastor and others who arrived later. They cleaned and disinfected the church in time for their morning worship service.

According to the pastor, the service commenced as usual with about 300 worshippers. At approximately 10 a.m. they received information that a mob was on their way to disrupt the service. Immediately a few members of the congregation made their way to the Marawila Police Station to seek assistance. Within half an hour a mob of about 200 persons carrying placards forcibly entered the church premises and began shouting threats. Seeing the mob gathering outside, a lay leader walked towards them to speak with them. He was beaten and left bleeding from the nose. They continued to shout and demand that the service must be stopped. A congregation member who went to alert the police arrived at the scene with police officers.

Unable to control the mob, the police requested the pastor to stop the service and leave the church with the congregation. Seeing that some of the protesters were armed with clubs and fearing for the safety of the congregation, the pastor complied. The mob clapped and cheered claiming victory as the last members left the church, compelled to vacate their own premises in the presence of the police.

A complaint was filed with the Marawila police. The police referred the incident to the Magistrates Court, on the grounds of a breach of peace. The hearing is scheduled for the 25th of July 2011

NOTE: The Magistrate issued an order allowing the church to continue functioning in consideration of the submissions made by the church that they will not use any sound amplification during services except for the Scripture message.

Threats to stop Worship service
Assembly of God Church
Haguranketha (Nuwara-Eliya District)

18th June 2011

During the night, an unidentified group of persons caused damage to the temporary building where the worship services were being held.

The pastor had been threatened by a Buddhist monk on several previous occasions to stop all Christian activity and worship.

During 2008-2009 the villagers threatened the pastor not to enter the village or preach and his house was stoned on several occasions.

Church ordered to stop worship services

**Kings Revival Church
Dehiwela (Colombo District)**

8th July 2011

Two Buddhist monks and an Urban Council official arrived at the premises and asked the pastor to stop the worship services.

A letter was also received by the owner of the building used by the church (who is a board member of the church) from the Divisional Secretary to refrain from having worship services without permission from the Religious Affairs Ministry.

Pastor assaulted by Buddhist monk

**Mount Carmel Church
Keviliyamaduwa (Ampara District)**

10th July 2011

At approximately 3.30 p.m. the pastor attended a meeting held in the village with regard to land distribution, convened by a senior Buddhist monk. At the meeting the pastor was assaulted by the Buddhist monk and others. Later the attackers followed him to his home and continued to verbally abuse him and members of his family. He was also kicked by the Buddhist Monk while he was near the entrance to his premises. The pastor who sustained injuries to his arm and severe pain from blows to his stomach was admitted to the Ampara hospital for treatment. The police at the hospital have recorded a complaint at the Ampara police.

Five families attacked during the night

**House of Prayer
Dehiwinna, Bandarawela (Badulla District)**

19th July 2011

During the early hours of the night, at approximately 8 p.m. the homes of the five Christian families in the village were attacked by a mob of about 50 persons. The attackers threw rocks and stones at the houses damaging roofs and broke windows with clubs and rocks. The mob shouted threats that Christians will be chased away. Some of the families fled in to the jungle with their children and hid until the attack abated. A grocery shop built with wooden planks belonging to one family was broken in to and demolished. Some goods were also stolen. The owner of the shop was caught and beaten up by the attackers. He was hospitalized and received treatment for injuries. The affected families left their homes and sought safety in another home.

A complaint was made to the Attampitiya Police Station and the police sent a patrol to the area on the subsequent nights. No arrests have been made and the police say it was not possible to recover any fingerprints from the crime scene.

There are reports of plans to force these Christian families to renounce Christianity or leave the village.

**Church broken in to
Prayer Tower Church
Mahawewa (Chilaw District)**

1st August 2011

At approximately 6.30 p.m. unidentified persons had broken in to the church. Christian books and literature were stolen from a cupboard.

**Pastor threatened to stop worship services
National Gospel Church
Nivithigala (Rathnapura District)**

7th August 2011

At approximately 4 p.m. the pastor received a telephone call from his landlord asking him to come to the nearby temple. Arriving at the temple, the pastor was met by a group of about 20 Buddhist monks who asked him to stop worship services and to vacate the premises he was occupying. He was further told that this is a Buddhist village and there is no room for Christians to live in this area. He was threatened to leave Nivithigala. Fearing violence, the pastor made arrangements to move from the rented premises he was occupying. The church has about 100 members and the pastor has served in the area for 10 years.

**Pastor abducted
Kithusevana church
Dummalasooriya (Chilaw District)**

8th November 2011

It was reported that the pastor serving in this area was abducted by a group of unknown persons while the pastor was in Colombo. He had been released later in Nuwara-eliya and was not physically harmed.

**Mob led by Buddhist monk attacks Christians
Rukmalgama (Colombo District)**

20th November 2011

At approximately 6.15 p.m. a mob of about 15 persons led by a Buddhist monk forcibly entered the premises where a group of Christian men, women and children were engaging in worship and prayer. They assaulted the pastor, workers and members of the congregation and humiliated them by pouring cow dung on them. The mob also caused damage to furniture and other property. The Buddhist monk threatened the pastor and members with death and arson if they did not stop meeting together for worship.

A complaint was made to the Kottawa Police on the same day. They were asked to be present for a Police inquiry the following day (21st). However, when the complainant arrived at the Police station they were told that the Officer in Charge is not available and were asked to come the next day (22nd). On the 22nd, they were again asked to come on the following day (23rd) since the parties against whom the complaint was made were not present that day.

23rd November 2011

On arrival at the police station on 23rd November 2011, the pastor found several Buddhist monks present there with a large crowd and a lawyer to represent them. The Assistant Superintendent of Police for the Homagama South division took up the inquiry. He advised the Buddhists against resorting to violence and all those against whom the complaint was lodged were allowed to leave. The pastor was instructed by the Police to discontinue worship gatherings.

Arrests and threats forcing closure of Christian drug rehabilitation centre

Sahanayata Maga Drug Rehabilitation Centre Keppetipola (Badulla District)

20th November 2011

The drug rehabilitation Centre run by the Smyrna Church was threatened with a public protest on the 20th of November 2011. Leaflets were distributed asking all shops to close down and display black flags. Approximately two weeks before this, two young boys who are being rehabilitated at the Centre were falsely accused of two separate incidents of robbery in the area and taken in to Police custody. One of them was released on bail, pending trial. The other still remains in custody pending trial. In the mean time, the true culprits who carried out one of the robberies have been identified. The Centre has since closed down temporarily, to prevent any more inmates from being arrested under false accusations.