

Mr. Heiko Maas  
The Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs  
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany  
Werderscher Markt 1  
10117 Berlin

Through,  
H.E. Manori Unambuwe  
Sri Lanka Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany

11. March 2021

Dear Sir,

**Lack of Consistency of German Foreign Policy and Possible Dangers  
Sri Lanka Resolution A/HRC/46/L.1**

Your country is leading the new resolution on Sri Lanka at the current UNHRC sessions. The Clause 8 of the draft Resolution refers to denial of burial rights to Muslims in Sri Lanka as discriminatory and marginalization of Sri Lanka's Muslim community. It appears that malicious propaganda of some anti-Sri Lanka/anti-Sinhala elements has influenced your Ministry's decision to include that clause. I am sure the German people know well how easily they could be accused of being majoritarian, even in situation they act correct. I as a Sri Lankan citizen, and a former foreign student in Germany see this clause as incorrect and unfair, therefore would like to request you to remove that sentence from the resolution. Burial of Covid-19 infected corpses have now been allowed, anyway. Let me explain.

**Conditions Surrounding the Cremation-only Decision**

If I am informed correct, the decision to cremate all Covid-19 corpses in Sri Lanka was taken by a committee that did not involve politicians. The decision was taken because most people in Sri Lanka use well water for drinking. Water such obtained is not microbiologically cleaned prior to usage, unlike in Germany. I believe that the committee feared that if body fluids secreted by the infectious corpses would contaminate ground water, there would be a chance that it would cause spread of the virus. There was no evidence that it would not, nor there was evidence that it would. One points WHO recommendations, but WHO did not recommend wearing of masks either, at the beginning of the pandemic. Therefore, the magnitude of the risk posed by allowing burial was unknown. According to risk management principals, the safe measure therefore, was to cremate all Covid-19 corpses, to mitigate that unknown risk. This temporary decision was applied equal to all community groups of Sri Lanka, therefore was not discriminatory. Nevertheless, burial of non-Covid-19 corpses were continued to be allowed for Muslims.

The matter was complicated by the expectations of the people who voted the current government to power. The people expected the government to establish rule-of-law and apply it equally to all Sri Lanka's citizens. This demand evolved due to past experiences of certain politicians bending rules to their advantage and certain communities demanding separate laws. The people demanded that the government execute whatever law that has been enacted, equally to all citizens. The Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka traditionally bury corpses. When the new law was enacted, those communities agreed to the cremation-only rule. Muslims too did not oppose it at the beginning, but in the second wave, some Muslim politicians raised voice against it. It was not clear to most of the people why the Muslim community could not agree to cremating the corpses temporarily as people of other religions

also had foregone their religious rites (Buddhist Panshu-Kuula rites were banned). People saw that the government was only applying the law equally! The Muslim political leaders held discussions with leading Buddhist clergy. As a result, the Buddhist clergy made an open appeal to allow the burial of corpses of Muslims who had succumbed to Covid-19, alluding the request to “respect the tradition of Muslims”. Therefore, it is wrong to indirectly accuse Sri Lanka’s majority community as “majoritarian” as referred in the above-mentioned UN resolution. The committee however, held to its decision, based on evidence available to them.

### **Equal Treatment of Muslims in Sri Lanka during the Pandemic**

As soon as Covid-19 crisis erupted the Sri Lankan government initiated a state funded quarantine program for all its citizens. Under this program, all people who had contact with a covid patient were quarantined, with food and lodging provided by the government, at no cost to those who underwent quarantine. Further, all patients identified with Covid-19 were treated at the cost of the state (Sri Lanka generally provides free of charge health care, without having to pay for insurance cover like in Germany, to all its citizens without discrimination). When a Covid-19 patient met with death, the corpses were cremated at the cost of the state too. Sri Lanka’s Muslim community was beneficiaries of all these programs. If Muslim community were denied those benefits, it would be correct to say that they were discriminated. This was not the case.

### **Political Landscape and Propaganda**

Unlike in Germany, Sri Lanka has political parties dedicated to Muslim interests. Some leaders of these political parties were not happy of the cremating decision and portrayed it as “forced cremation” and threatened to take the matter to UNHRC. As Sri Lanka is facing challenging times at the UNHRC in connection with its war with terror group Tamil Tigers concluded many years ago, Muslim interest groups teamed up with powerful Tamil lobbying groups in Europe portraying the issue as “discriminatory” to foreign governments and the UNHRC officials. I am sure you are aware that the LTTE is a fascist organization focused on segregation, that has a mammoth propaganda machinery. It is my plea to you, to refrain from taking wrongful punitive action against Sri Lanka to appease the propagandists but base your decision on proper evaluation of the facts. As Covid pandemic evolved, countries took decisions unique to them. Some countries have been successful than others. If Germany managed Covid-19 as successful as Sri Lanka did, Germany’s number of Covid related deaths would stand around 2000 today as against 70,000. Your office has failed to appreciate such obvious positive factors.

### **Restrictions in Germany not Discriminating its Muslim Community?**

I am not sure how the law relating to the burial/cremation of Covid-19 infected corpses is laid out in Germany. However, I note that cremation as preferred to burial is referred to in Germany’s Guidance book on preventing biological hazards (Handbuch zum Bevölkerungsschutz - Biologische Gefahren I) page 513. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why your office call it discriminatory when Sri Lanka follows a practice recommended in your Guidance book. Further, I understand that Germany has banned certain Islam religious rites too; washing of the corpses is banned and Muslims are forced to place corpses in a coffin as against the usual Islam funeral practice of covering the corpses with a cloth (source: WDR 5 Audiothek, Bestattung in der Pandemie; Melahat Simsek, 06.09.2020). Therefore, your bureaucrats' accusing Sri Lanka government of discriminating Muslims, is unjustified, in my view. How could Sri Lankan people comprehend such inconsistency?

### **Burka-ban and Minaret ban in Switzerland**

It is to infer that your office believes that the temporary cremate-only rule during the pandemic stigmatized the Muslim community of Sri Lanka.

Last weekend Switzerland voted to ban face coverings. The campaign was directed at Burka and Niqab that some Muslim women wear. The campaign slogan was “stop extremism”, though to date Switzerland has not suffered Islam extremism as happened in Sri Lanka in 2019 with the Easter day bomb blasts. In 2009, Switzerland voted to ban the building of Mosques with traditional architecture (Minaret-ban). Critiques of these two initiatives accused the organizers of stigmatizing the Muslim community of Switzerland. The two Swiss prohibitions are permanent while the one in Sri Lanka is temporary. Could you please explain why your office considers the prohibition of burial during pandemic in Sri Lanka to be discriminatory and the prohibition of Minaret and Burka/Niqab to be non-discriminatory? Comparing the Swiss situation, it would be worth to take note that the Sinhala majority community has not imposed clothing rules on its Muslim community, despite Sri Lanka has seen a rise in extremism leading to bomb blasts; if my observations are right, face covering women in Sri Lanka is a parallel development. Further, it would be important to note that Sri Lanka’s Sinhala majority community have been tolerant enough to allow its Muslim minority build imposing, huge Mosques in Sri Lanka and that in almost every town alongside Buddhist temples and Christian churches. The frequency of such Mosques is evidently visible in the Sri Lankan landscape, unlike in Germany. All these epitomizes the religious freedom in Sri Lanka that is enjoyed by Sri Lanka’s minority communities. Therefore your calling that Sri Lanka discriminates its Muslims is unjustified.

### **UN Resolution on Switzerland?**

Your office’s hurriedness to bring a resolution on Sri Lanka at the UNHRC relating to the temporary prohibition of burial of Covid-19 infected corpses and your not expressing similar sentiments relating to Swiss Minaret-ban that has been in existence over ten years, I believe, points to inconsistency in your foreign policy.

However, it appears that your office has now created a precedence that may prompt other nations to bring a resolution at the UNHRC relating to Switzerland, about above matters. I believe that setting such precedence would be counterproductive and unwise for good neighborly relations.

### **Political Agenda**

Let me tell you that there is a strong feeling among the people in Sri Lanka that Germany’s resolution is driven by reasons beyond a genuine interest in human rights. I believe that above mentioned inconsistencies only contribute to confirm such suspicion.

### **Possible Repercussions of Unwise Actions**

Promoting “minoritarian” rhetoric against what is perceived as “majoritarian” may trigger tendencies in Sri Lanka, such as that seen in the German political landscape during the recent times. As someone with long standing deep connections to Germany, I believe it is my responsibility to bring this matter to your notice.

In general, I find that your resolution on Sri Lanka is retributive. No other nation than the Germany knows well the repercussions of such action. After World War I, the nations imposed retributive actions on Germany. What followed is unfortunate history. After World War II, the nations set out to pursue a similar path against Japan. At the San Fransisco summit in 1951, it was Sri Lanka’s representative that pointed out the negative repercussions of a similar route and suggested a restorative path, which the nations then adopted and allowed Japan to progress. In contrast to the above two examples, Sri Lanka was never the aggressor in its war against the LTTE. In reality it freed its people from fascist ideology.

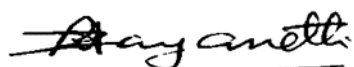
Not only that the UNHRC Sri Lanka Resolutions are based on unsubstantiated false allegations; their authors have deliberately hidden the truth by neglecting due diligence to consider the dispatches from the UK, US defense attachés during the last phase of the war, as recently claimed by UK parliamentarian Lord Michael Naseby. The PoE report is based on unsubstantiated allegations, the OISL report has given impunity to terrorism, by circumventing the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy. Having done all that, they have now picked a non-existing, unfair factor of Muslims being discriminated as described above as further means to vilifying and put in Sri Lanka in difficulty that has already suffered under LTTE’s fascist ideology for so long.

Like Mr. Joska Fischer once stood for truth away from political agenda, I hope you will stand for the truth, not for powerful propaganda. German people know well how powerful propaganda mechanisms can harm humanity. I kindly request you to stand for the truth and to be fair in your judgement.

If you wish, I, as a civil society activist would make myself available to engage with your office.

Thank You!

Yours Sincerely,



Copies:

1. Dr. Mrs. Angela Merkel, The Chancellor of Federal Republic of Germany
2. Heads of Polical Parties of Germany
3. Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka
4. Members of Swiss Parliament
5. Permanent Representatives of UNHRC Member States
6. Media