

## **INTERVENTION**

Yamini Ravindran, National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL)

### **Agenda item # 3**

#### **Minorities and the exercise of police powers**

Thank you, Mr. Chair

My name is Yamini Ravindran, representing the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, which is affiliated to the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) which holds ECOSOC status.

Let me begin my intervention by noting Article 4 (1) in the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which mandates minorities should be treated equally before the law.

For that reason, we agree with the provisions in draft recommendations number 26. The right to equality before the law is guaranteed under Article 12 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka. However, in reality, the police force do not treat minority victims as equal when dealing with them on matters pertaining to the law. For instance, when police complaints are lodged by religious minority victims, the victims are often blamed for the attack. Minorities who lodge complaints against mob attacks have also been victimized by police officers who in turn file cases against them for disturbing the peace in their communities. As a result, perpetrators as well as victims, are made equal parties to incidents of violence. Furthermore, police officers refuse to file cases against perpetrators. Notably, this trend has increased since the end of the ethnic war in 2009.

In August 2015, when a police complaint was filed by a member of the minority ethnic Tamil community, the Officer-in-Charge made the victim believe that she was signing a document validating the violence, whereas it was a withdrawal of the complaint. Moreover, since police officers function mostly in the majority Sinhala language, ethnic minorities, especially those speaking the Tamil language, are often made victims of police bias. In addition, there have also been instances where detainees from minority communities were victimised owing to acts of police brutality and misconduct.

Mr. Chair, while we commend the government of Sri Lanka on passing new legislation such as the Act on Protection of Victims of Crimes and Witnesses, we stress the importance of its implementation becoming a reality. We are hopeful that under the new government, the situation of minorities would improve over time.

In conclusion Mr. Chair, we urge the forum to include in its report recommendations on police inaction and suggest mechanisms that states could implement when the police force violate the rights of minorities. Mostly importantly, we also urge the forum to highlight police inaction as a chief reason behind the creation of a culture of impunity within criminal justice systems around the world. We stress the importance of including draft recommendations 28, 31 and 33, 43, and 49 in the final document in addition to recommendation 26.

Thank you.