SRI LANKA

Following the end of the civil war in 2009, attacks on both Christians and Muslims have risen – largely carried out by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists. However, during the period under review there have also been increasing attacks on churches by Hindu extremist groups in Eastern Province. Ninety attacks on Christians were recorded in 2017, with 67 between January and September 2018 alone. Discrimination against Christians included assaults on churches, denial of burial in public cemeteries, and refusals to enroll Christian children in school.

Some of the most notorious attacks occurred after the beginning of the Sinhalese New Year. On Palm Sunday 2019 – which coincided with New Year itself – a nationalist mob surrounded the Methodist Church in Anuradhapura and made “murderous threats” to Bishop Asiri Perera and his congregation, pelting the building with stones and firecrackers. But by far the worst attack occurred a week later when Islamist extremists targeted Christian Churches with bomb attacks on Easter Sunday.


JUNE 2017

Government minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakse threatened to debar human-rights lawyer Lakshan Dias unless he retracted the claim that 195 anti-Christian incidents occurred from 2015 to June 2017. Mr. Dias made the statement on a TV talk show on June 14th. Mr. Rajapakse said: “He is a traitor... He is eagerly waiting to grab an opportunity to create unrest in the country.” Dias received a police summons in response to a complaint.

JULY 2018

50-60 villagers carrying sticks and rocks surrounded Harvest Mission Church in Kiran, Batticaloa District during their Sunday service. Among the attackers were members of local government agency Korakallimadu Grama Niladhari. The mob said that they would attack the congregation if they did not halt their religious activities within 15 minutes. The attackers left after the pastor stopped the service.

APRIL 2019

More than 300 people, including at least 45 children, were killed and more than 500 people injured in bomb attacks on three churches and hotels across Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday. Explosions hit St Anthony’s Church, Kotahena; Katuwapitiya Church, Katana; and Zion Church, Batticaloa. Islamist group Daesh (ISIS) affiliates claimed responsibility for the attacks.