



MUSLIM PUBLIC  
AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Dear Ambassador Sam Brownback,

We write to you regarding the religious freedom atrocities in Sri Lanka, where the government has mandated cremation of people who are suspected to have died from COVID-19.

The Sri Lankan government originally justified the decision by baselessly claiming burial processes would “contaminate the groundwater”. An oversight committee of regime “experts” upheld the forced cremation policy without a reasoned justification, then later backtracked allowing burials under specific conditions. International calls to suspend this policy were rejected by Sri Lankan Health Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi, who excluded any “social, religious, political or any other personal reason” from consideration to suspend the forced cremation policy.

Forced cremation is a forbidden practice in the faith traditions of Islam and Christianity. This exceeds WHO guidelines, which highlight no such need for cremation of those who pass away due to COVID-19. Sri Lankan authorities have executed dozens of forced cremations, all of which are drawing the ire and protest of Muslim and Christian minorities. The most recent incident occurred on December 9, when the Sri Lankan government denied a Muslim family their Islamic funeral rites by forcibly cremating their 20-month-old baby. Afterward, Sri Lankan Muslims joined Christian groups in a legal case opposing the cremation policy. In an affront to religious freedom, the case was dismissed by the Sri Lankan Supreme Court. Muslims comprise nearly 10 percent of the 21 million Sri Lankans, but have been profoundly marginalized throughout this process.

We ask that the United States initiate an independent investigation into this policy, its formation, and the harms that have resulted therefrom. The United States must remain an ardent defender of religious freedom, both at home and abroad.

This is a serious concern that maligns core American values and is causing grief and suffering among an already marginalized community. We thank you for your consideration and efforts on this issue and hope to remain abreast of actions from your office as the situation develops.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Salam Al-Marayati".

Salam Al-Marayati  
President, Muslim Public Affairs Council