



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE IN SRI LANKA

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CBCSL urges Govt. to implement LLRC Recommendations

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka has made a fervent appeal to the Government towards implementation of the Recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation. The full text of the statement is given below:

Much has been written and discussed since the publication of the Report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL) is conscious of the important ministry of reconciliation Jesus has entrusted to his disciples. Jesus in his well-known Sermon on the Mount exhorted his disciples: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). St. Paul writing his second letter to the Corinthian Community exhorted: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor. 5: 18-19).

CBCSL wishes to look at the Report of the Commission mindful of this biblical imperative and invitation to be peacemakers and agents of reconciliation in this post-war society of Sri Lanka. We believe that it is not incorrect to state that the most unfortunate experience of war was the result of thousands of missed opportunities. Hence, it is our great responsibility to clinch yet another vital opportunity God places before us. In this connection the Report states in its Preamble: "Sri Lanka now faces a moment of unprecedented opportunity; Rarely does such an opportunity come along without equally important attendant challenges (p.1). It states further: "The recommendations of the Commission could nevertheless constitute a framework for action' by all stakeholders, in particular the Government, political parties and community leaders" (p. 2).

CBCSL acknowledges that every document formulated within given historical circumstances necessarily contains limitations. Hence, no document can meet all the expectations and answer the needs of everyone. However, the LLRC Report, particularly its recommendations, does contain much potential and hope for the future. We believe that it still does provide the nation with a good basis and a point of departure for the challenging and arduous task of national reconciliation. The Report highlights the hope it encompasses in these words saying that "the work of the Commission proceeded acknowledging a clear need to heal the wounds of the past and to make recommendations to reconcile the nation by recognizing all victims of conflict, providing redress to them and thereby promoting national unity, peace and harmony" (Article 1.7, p. 6).



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Hence, the CBCSL wishes to urge the government to do all that is in its power to take a serious look at the recommendations contained therein. Let us not permit yet another valuable opportunity to pass us by. We believe that many of its recommendations have the potential to contribute to healing of wounds and bring about harmony and reconciliation and thus also counteract mounting international pressure. Hence, our earnest plea is to implement the potential recommendations as early as possible since peace and reconciliation are the most vital and urgent needs of the present moment. We believe that serious and honest efforts to implement its recommendations would contribute much for the forging of national harmony and unity of our beloved country.

We wish to earnestly urge that the government come up with some symbolic gestures and acts that would lead the nation towards harmony and reconciliation. Permit us to identify some of the recommendations. The report needs to be disseminated to the masses. It would be necessary to have the report, particularly its recommendations, translated into the two official languages of the nation. Moving beyond the Sinhala only position, we need to address seriously the issue of the language. Let all that concerns good governance be implemented. Illegal armed groups need to be disarmed. We also urge that the government address the painful issue of the missing persons and present a list of those who are still in custody as it always helps anyone to know if and when his or her loved ones are no more. The government is duty bound to give an account as to what happened to those who are not in custody. People's right to legitimate information needs to be respected. We need to recognize that grieving over the loved ones lost is a legitimate and a deep-seated need of all human beings. Once recognized, we would enable people to look to the future and move on in life.

We are also urged to recognize our failures. The report states that "both the government and the public had failed to utilize the potential of the promotion of creativity of arts, for the betterment of society" and that we need to recognize how much art could contribute to promote understanding among the communities. We "need to identify the linguistic and cultural commonalities and affinities in establishing a Sri Lankan identity and be mindful of the fact "Sinhalese and Tamil cultures had very rich roots, and that there must be a cultural renaissance through art, drama and music ..." (Articles 9.272,9.273, p. 385).

Mindful of our own distinct role as Religious Leaders and of our responsibility to do everything that is within our purview, we also urge the government to appoint a responsible body of persons who would carefully monitor the intended process of implementation. We wish to join all those men and women of goodwill and together with them we earnestly exhort the government to do all within its power to implement urgently the recommendations of the Commission and thus contribute to the greatly needed harmony and reconciliation of our beloved nation.

+ Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith
President CBCSL

+ Bishop Norbert M. Andradi, OMI
Secretary General - CBCSL