

18 July 2014

To:

1. The Honorable Tony Abbott, MP – Prime Minister of Australia
2. The Honorable Julie Bishop, MP - Minister for Foreign Affairs
3. The Honorable Scott Morrison, MP - Minister for Immigration & Border Protection

Dear Sir / Madam,

Request to cancel the Australian visa issued to Ven Galagoda Atthe Gnansara Thero

The Muslim community of Sri Lankan origin in Australia is deeply concerned and alarmed about reports that the General Secretary of the Bodhu Bala Sena (**BBS**) in Sri Lanka, the Ven Galagoda Atthe Gnansara Thero (**Gnansara Thero**) has been granted a visa to visit Australia on the pretext of a 'spiritual awakening mission' based on Buddhism.

We submit that Gnansara Thero does not pass the **character test** as defined in section 501(6) of the *Migration Act 1958 (Act)*. Relevantly, section 501(6) of the Act states, *inter alia*, that a person does not pass the character test if:

1. The person has or has had an association with someone else, or with a group or organisation, whom the Minister reasonably suspects has been or is involved in criminal conduct; or
2. In the event the person was allowed to enter or remain in Australia, there is significant risk that the person would vilify a segment of the Australian community or incite discord in the Australian community.

Gnansara Thero is the active General Secretary of the BBS. BBS translates to 'Buddhist Power Force' and is a racist Sinhalese Buddhist extremist organization based in Sri Lanka. The BBS has established close links with the extremist Burmese Monk Ashin Wirathu. According to the

Economist¹, BBS 'supports militancy against minorities to preserve the dominance of the Buddhist majority' and does so by targeting minorities such as Muslims and Christians. The Terrorism and Research Consortium (**TRAC**) has classified BBS as a terrorist organization.²

Since its formation in 2012, BBS has been instrumental in inciting hatred and violence against religious minorities³ resulting in a well-coordinated series of racial and criminal attacks on churches⁴, mosques⁵ and Muslim owned businesses in Sri Lanka.

On 15 June 2014, a BBS rally escalated into violence⁶ following a virulent hate speech delivered by Gnanasara Thero in Aluthgama, Sri Lanka.⁷ That speech was delivered 3 days following a minor skirmish after an accident involving a motor bike owned by a Muslim youth and a car owned by a Buddhist monk (which would ordinarily have been resolved by the Police). Gnanasara Thero's hour-long speech was filled with racist and anti-Muslim rhetoric.⁸ During his hate speech, which has been recorded and available on Youtube, he declared that 'they keep calling us racist and religious extremists. Yes, we are racists' and, more ominously, 'if one *marakkalaya* (derogatory in context) lays a hand on a Sinhalese that will be the end of all of them'.⁹

After Gnanasara Thero delivered his speech in Aluthgama on 15 June 2014, the extremist Sinhala Buddhist group attacked Muslim houses and businesses in the coastal town of Beruwela, Sri Lanka. Three Muslim persons were shot dead by the violent extremist mob. The violence also spread to Colombo where the Muslim-owned Harcourt Pharmacy was

¹ <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21604601-another-minority-under-threat-buddhist-power>

² <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/bodu-bala-sena>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtelwMMt1t0> , - Press TV "Muslims Under Threat Again"

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLvbl5MLnrs> - al Jazeera English "Sri Lanka shaken by religious violence",

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25716456>, " Sri Lanka Police Identify Church Attackers",

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQkWXDQovGQ> , MP MA Sumanitharan regarding attack on Muslims and churches

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LTk3DDLZyM>, Al Jazeera " Attack on mosque fuels anger in Sri Lanka"

⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14715&LangID=E> UN HCR Navi Pillay

⁷ <https://news.vice.com/article/hardline-buddhist-violence-flares-against-muslims-in-sri-lanka> "Hardline Buddhist Violence Flares Against Muslims in Sri Lanka"

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kThbf-tZ6vw&index=55&list=PLzY7f9iU6XjEi6qCgveyKK6740hqFdWvN> - excerpt of the speech with

English subtitles

⁹ <https://news.vice.com/article/hardline-buddhist-violence-flares-against-muslims-in-sri-lanka> "Hardline Buddhist Violence Flares Against Muslims in Sri Lanka"

attacked. The next day a Tamil Security Guard employed on a farm owned by a Muslim person in Aluthgama was killed by the extremists. Around 176¹⁰ people were injured from the attacks. More than 200 homes and shops were burnt down and more than 2000 people have been internally displaced.

Since the above attacks occurred, several government Ministers and Members of Parliament have delivered speeches in Parliament and issued statements condemning the riots and BBS in particular, for inciting the violence which was triggered by Gnanasara Thero's speech. They include:

1. Rauf Hakeem – MP, Minister of Justice and leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress.¹¹
2. Rajavarothiam Sampanthan – MP, Leader of the Tamil National Alliance.¹²
3. Anura Kumara Dissanayake – MP, Leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).¹³
4. Ranil Wickremasinghe – MP, Opposition Leader and leader of the United National Party.¹⁴
5. Rishad Badhiutheen – MP, Minister of Industry and Commerce.¹⁵
6. Vasudeva Nanayakkara MP, Minister of National Language and Social Integration.¹⁶
7. Dilan Perera, MP Minister of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare.¹⁷

It is also recorded that, at a Press Conference held on 17 May 2014, Gnanasara Thero had specifically threatened violence against the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader and Minister of Justice Mr Rauff Hakeem stating that 'we will slice this *parayah* (derogatory in context) to absolute pieces'. This was in response to an earlier comment made by

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27918343> , "Sri Lanka Moderate Monk Critical of Anti-Muslim Violence Beaten", <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2014/06/who-behind-sri-lanka-religious-violence-2014617174319873584.html>, "Who is Behind Sri Lanka's Religious Violence?", <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14715&LangID=E>) United Nations Human Rights Commission

* Parliament Debate Hansard official report 20/06/2014 Column ref 1166 & 1167 – Parliament of Sri Lanka.

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zkqNJ_xWpM

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbtnO8yNYoU&list=PLzY7f9iU6XjEi6qCgveyKK6740hqFdWvN&index=8>

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10wH_leld20&index=49&list=PLzY7f9iU6XjEi6qCgveyKK6740hqFdWvN

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBxwDxHOooQ&list=PLzY7f9iU6XjEi6qCgveyKK6740hqFdWvN&index=28>

¹⁵ <http://www.asiantribune.com/node/80029>

¹⁶ <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/30966>

¹⁷ <http://www.dilanperera.com/bbsjbs.html>

the Minister of Justice that extremist Buddhist groups had been given powers greater than the Police in Sri Lanka.¹⁸

In a recent interview the His Holiness Dalai Lama addressed the current violence in Sri Lanka and stated that if the Lord Buddha was alive he would have protected the Muslims in Sri Lanka. In stark contrast, Gnanasara Thero, who espouses to be a member of the Buddhist clergy, instead of promoting the teachings of Buddha, has been promoting hatred and violence against the minority communities in Sri Lanka. What could be his hidden agenda in Australia?

For reasons unknown, BBS and Gnanasara Thero have not been charged for the deaths and damages caused by their criminal conduct in Sri Lanka as at date. That does not absolve the BBS and Gnanasara Thero as a group and as a person from their criminal activity and racism that has caused discord and wanton destruction to the lives, livelihood, properties and businesses owned by the minority communities in Sri Lanka. Knowing his background, his actions and his racist views there is a real and imminent threat that, if allowed to enter Australia, Gnanasara Thero will vilify a segment of the Australian community (including Muslims of Sri Lankan origin resident in Australia) and initiate discord in the Australian community. This will breach section 501 of the Act.

The Muslim community of Sri Lankan origin resident in Australia believes that some of the above factors, including the failure to satisfy all the elements of the character test, were the reasons for the US State Department to revoke the 5 year Multiple Entry Visa that had been granted to Gnanasara Thero (as confirmed by the BBS Spokesperson Dilantha Vithanage)¹⁹; his French visa is also revoked; and the UK government has decided to decline an application by the Thero for a visitor's visa. Australia should follow the well-considered lead set by such other countries.


The Muslim community and other ethnic communities of the Sri Lankan diaspora have lived in harmony and close co-operation in Australia. If Gnanasara Thero is granted a visa to enter Australia, we believe that he and his group (BBS) would incite hatred, vilification, glorify violence and bring social discord to multicultural Australia.

¹⁸ <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/video-bbs-threatens-to-slice-hakeem-to-pieces/>

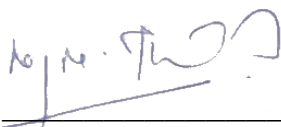
¹⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/30/sri-lanka-usa-idUSL4N0PB2YI20140630> U.S. cancels Sri Lankan hardline monk's visa, Buddhist group says

Gnanasara Thero is responsible for deaths, destruction and racially motivated hate acts in Sri Lanka and is very likely to incite discord within the peaceful community of Sri Lankan origin in Australia. We appeal to the Australian government to follow the precedent set by the US State Department and take immediate action to cancel the Australian visa if it has already been granted, or to deny a visa if it is being processed or if he should apply for one in future.

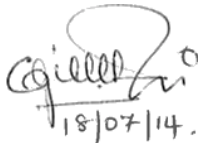
Yours sincerely,



Ubaidur Rahman Mahmood
President, Austra-Lanka Muslim Association Inc (ALMA)
New South Wales



Dr Mohamed Ibrahim Babu
President, Australia Sri Lanka Association Inc (ASLA)
Victoria



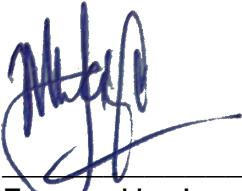
Jeneefar Makbool
Secretary, InsightOz Inc
Victoria



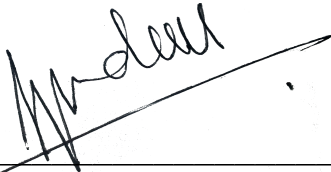
Anas Munaf Yaseen
President, Serendib Community Cultural Association (SCCA)
New South Wales



Nizar Sappideen
President, Sri Lankan Australian Malay Association (SLMA)
New South Wales



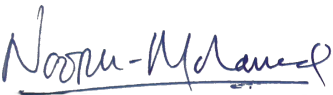
Fauzer Uvais
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