



Diocese of Colombo



# Church of Ceylon

368/3A, Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07. Sri Lanka  
Tel : 011 – 2696208 / 011- 2684810 Fax : 011 – 2684811  
Email : ps@churchofceylon.com



Diocese of Kurunegala

## **STATEMENT ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS – THE NEED FOR DISCERNMENT**

We view with grave concern the statement attributed to the President's office, which stated that an 'Extremist Group' was responsible for the protests and unrest that occurred on the night of 31st March. We question the motive in rushing to identify parties alleged to be responsible within such a short period of time without stating any credible basis for such conclusion.

The people of Sri Lanka irrespective of race, religion, caste, social class or political affiliation have been left to fight for their survival. They now face extreme hardship to maintain their basic existence. The unprecedented power cuts enforced on a daily basis and the never-ending shortage of fuel has severely hampered the livelihood of our people. Even the small-time barber, tailor, carpenter, baker welder, printer, fisherman, restaurant owner and trishaw driver are unable to earn their daily living. All this while electricity is not disrupted to several VIP residential areas and those in power still being able to obtain diesel and gas to continue their happy living. The Government has failed to respond to these extreme and unprecedented situations and has kept the people totally in the dark on how it plans to navigate these challenging times.

What the country experienced on 31<sup>st</sup> night was the culmination of small-scale agitations and peaceful protests carried out the entire week in several areas of the country, calling on the government to wake up from its slumber. The gathering of protesters that day were desperate Men and Women of Sri Lanka asking for relief in the hope that they will be heard. We condemn unequivocally any destruction of public or private property. Those specifically responsible for such acts of violence have to be identified and brought before the law. However, we also condemn the use of unreasonable force and the arrest of peaceful demonstrators. The salutary gesture of pro-legal representation by a large number of civic conscious lawyers is a testimony to the general sentiments of the people regarding such civilian protests.

We urge the President and the Government to listen to the cries of the people of this country and fulfill their fundamental obligations as a responsible administration. The state is duty bound to lay out its short, medium- and long-term plans for economic recovery as a matter of urgency. The government has to devise a mechanism for immediate infusion of foreign currency to the economy in order to avert a Human catastrophe of an unprecedented magnitude. The suffering masses who have now run out of patience will continue to agitate and react with anger since there is still no sign of light at the end of this tunnel. To be blaming such actions on extremist forces is a dangerous attempt which can orchestrate further unrest with communal and religious undertones. It also means that the government has still not got the message which was conveyed by the people of this country. Protests of this nature require a response of dialogue and engagement rather than suppression. Clamping down an island wide curfew to prevent people from expressing themselves is not the answer to the burning problems of the nation.

We are concerned that the declaration of a state of emergency will be an incentive for the Executive, the Police and Armed forces to act with impunity. We call upon the Police, the STF and our Armed Forces to act with discernment when differentiating between peaceful gatherings of solidarity and



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unruly behavior. All responsible state officials must act with patience at this juncture, as the people are simply responding to a situation that they have been forced into. We hope that the cry of our masses will not fall on deaf ears and that the pain of our people will be seen with open eyes.



**The Right Reverend Keerthisiri Fernando**  
**Bishop of Kurunagala &**  
**Presiding Bishop of The Church of Ceylon**



**The Right Reverend Dushantha Rodrigo**  
**Bishop of Colombo**

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