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WFSLM Newsletter - May 2021

Welcome to the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims (WFSLM)

Purpose of WFSLM:

- To provide platform for Sri Lankan Muslims worldwide to speak in one voice.
- To empower youth by developing and training them to become leaders of tomorrow.
- To focus on gender equality
- To build and reinforce the foundations of a pluralistic, democratic, and prosperous society in Sri Lanka
- To stand against all forms of racism, hate crime and extremism
- To assist in the development of socially conscious, cohesive communities, and support the welfare of all Sri Lankans

How to keep up to date:

- Website: <https://worldforumforsrilankanmuslims.org/>
- Twitter: [@WFSLMORG](https://twitter.com/WFSLMORG)
- Instagram: [WFSLM_2021](https://www.instagram.com/WFSLM_2021)
- [WFSLM Newsletter](#)
- Subscribe to [WFSLM HERE](#)

The idea of uniting all half a million Sri Lankan Muslim expatriates under one banner was born in 2004 in an email thread and started to take shape in 2014 after the Aluthgama incidents. The need and the urgency to form a united world body of Sri Lankan Muslims was conceptualized by a few community leaders. After discussion and deliberation among a group of like-minded Sri Lankan Muslims living across the globe. The World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims (WFSLM) was launched at a gathering in Harrow, Middlesex, United Kingdom on 18 October 2019. The ceremony was graced by Her Excellency Manisha Gunasekera, the High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in the United Kingdom and Rt. Honourable. Bob Blackman MP, with the presence of a large gathering of Sri Lankan expatriates of all communities and delegates from across the world.

WFSLM was established as an alliance body to bring together all overseas Sri Lankan Muslim organizations and individuals to have a unified voice in matters concerning the Muslims living in Sri Lanka. As an independent, apolitical body, it will harness all available resources of the Muslim diaspora and



Picture from the launch of the WFSLM, London, October 2019

strengthen the collective voice to build and reinforce the foundations of a pluralistic, democratic, and prosperous society in Sri Lanka.

We encourage our youth to actively get involved in all our activities and foster an environment and create opportunities to thrive and share responsibility and our vision in the service to humanity. WFSLM embraces diverse range of perspectives, knowledge, skills, expertise, experiences, talents, abilities and continually strengthening our standing in the global arena. We as a world forum have the vision for our people to grow with us in socio, cultural and economic spurs in pursuit of sustainable peace.

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UN Human Rights office gets mandate to document Sri Lanka war crimes

The UN Human Rights Council on Tuesday 23rd of March 2021 adopted a resolution giving UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet a mandate to collect and preserve information and evidence of war crimes committed during Sri Lanka's long civil war, which ended in 2009.

The erosion of judicial independence, marginalisation of minorities and impunity in Sri

Lanka came up for criticism in the resolution, which received 22 votes in favour with 11 against, including China and Pakistan, and 14 abstentions, including India.

The resolution, which was brought by the UK on behalf of a core group of countries, expressed particular concern that the island's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has

“exacerbated the prevailing marginalisation of and discrimination against the Muslim community”.

It also highlighted “accelerating militarisation of civilian government functions”, “the erosion of the independence of the judiciary”, and “increased marginalisation” of Tamil and Muslim minorities.

UNHRC – Forced Cremation in Sri Lanka



Protesters took to the streets to push for a change in policy

Sri Lanka's previous requirement to cremate anyone who dies from Covid-19 goes against public health guidance and discriminates against the Muslim and Christian communities in particular noted the Human Rights Watch. The government's spurious argument that burial in accordance with

Islamic tradition poses a public health risk stigmatizes, oppresses, and causes immense distress to a vulnerable minority.

Sri Lanka on Friday 26th of February 2021 ended forced cremations of people who have died of coronavirus, after visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan urged Colombo to respect the funeral rites of the island's minority Muslims.

The government first banned burials in April over concerns – which experts said were baseless – that the practice could contaminate groundwater and spread the virus.

The policy was decried by members of the South Asian nation's Muslim community who constitute 10 percent of the 21 million population.

While health minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi did not give a reason in her announcement reversing the ban, official sources said Khan had raised the subject with both President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa during his trip earlier this week. Many of the expat organisations including WFSLM had used Khan's visit as an opportunity to call attention to the Sri Lankan government's disregard for Islamic burial customs and carried a mock coffin. The 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation had also raised the forced cremation policy at the United Nations in Geneva this week.

We encourage and endure our youth to actively get involved in all our activities and foster an environment and create opportunities to thrive and share responsibility and our vision in the service to humanity.

WFSLM Organisation structure

WFSLM has been initiating a number of committee's to help advance its aims and objectives.

The **WFSLM committees** initiated to date are:

- Education led by Jazal Marzook
- Events led by Mubarak Ali
- Finance led by Haleem Ossman
- Gender Equality led by Zaida Tokhi
- Membership Development led by Azward Sulaiman
- PCT led by Kaleel Rahman
- PIR - lead tbc

- Public Relations and Media led by Ziard Deen

These committees are supported by a number of wings that have been created to enable progress. This **WFSLM wings** include:

- Health and Wellbeing led by Dr. Kamal Nazer
- IT led by Samoon Ramees
- Legal - lead tbc
- Youth - lead tbc

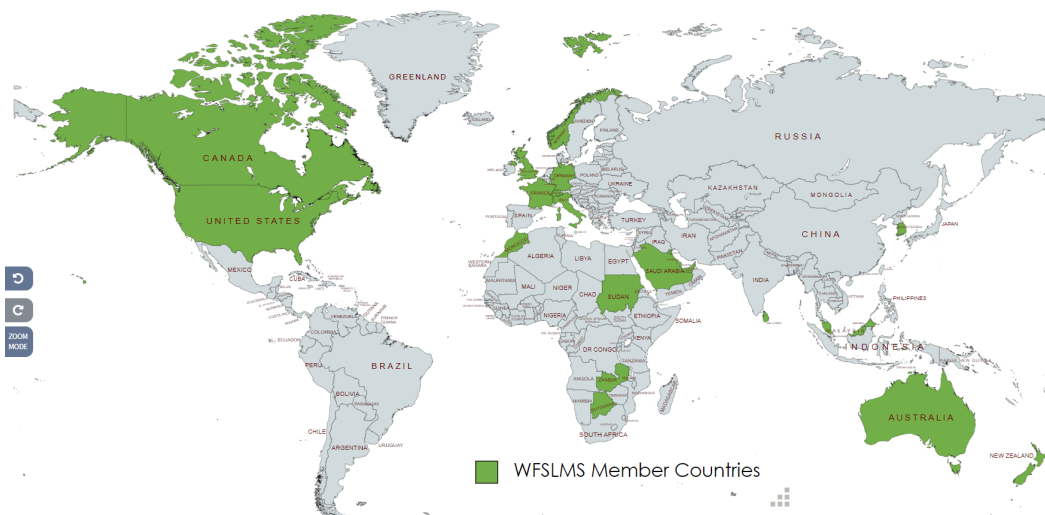
Membership of the WFSLM continues to grow across the world and in order to help sustain support locally a number

of chapters and regional chairs have been stood-up. The **WFSLM Chapters** currently include:

- Australia led by Dr. Kaleel Rahman
- Canada led by Aga Barrie
- United Kingdom led by Rizwan Wahab

The **WFSLM Regions** are:

- Asia,
- Africa,
- Europe
- Oceania
- North America



Why a Gender Equality Subcommittee?

Islamic scriptural texts and the rich Prophetic traditions clearly and eloquently point out that all humans are equal before God. However, today the actualities of women's lives in many Muslim communities do not conform to these principles. Sadly the notion of equality has not been reflected in the lived experiences of many women in our societies. Most women have suffered gender injustice, bias, discrimination and inequality at least once in their life.

Therefore the Gender Equality subcommittee of the WFLSM was set up, with the sole aim to provide a platform whereby women in such situations can be educated and empowered to take their rightful place as equals in the society.

When women are given opportunities incredible things happen! That's where we come in. Our aim is to empower women to achieve greater gender equality in society, by:

- Establishing functional and dynamic women's organizations in Muslim communities.
- Enabling women to collaborate and work co-operatively in community development projects.
- Enabling women to access training, up-skill themselves and become financially independent.
- Improving educational opportunities for women
- Creating more awareness and promote good health in women and families.

Currently, we are engaged with the members of a successful women's organisation and a team of co-opted members in Sri Lanka, in initialising a pilot project to help a group of underprivileged women in the Eastern Province gain financial independence.

We will keep you informed as we progress. So keep your eyes open and ears to the ground for more news as we progress!

Ziada Tokhi (Gender Equality team)

Ramadan Mubarak from WFLSM

In the blessed month of Ramadan, We at the WFLSM want to wish you four weeks of blessings, 30 days of forgiveness, and 720 hours of enlightenment.

This year is the second Ramadan affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. We ask that you adhere to the safety precautions set-out in your local areas and look after each other.

This is a challenging time for everyone, particularly the Muslim community dur-

ing Ramadan, as it is testing our Iman (faith). Islam encourages us to reflect upon tribulations as "signs" from Allah (swt). The pandemic continues to challenge humanity's technological, industrial, and economic advancement; but Muslims are rising to this challenge.

A Turkish Muslim scientist has led the way to develop vaccines for treatment. This shows that, as a community, by turning to Allah (swt) in recognition of our vulnerability, He offers openings to

help us overcome crisis.

Although the coronavirus emergency has understandably dominated our present focus, we should continue to support the vulnerable and needy within the Muslim and the wider communities during these times.

May Allah (swt) continue to guide us all throughout Ramadan and endow us with courage that will help us triumph over the adversities of life.

Make this your best Ramadan Ever!

EAT SUHOORI

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "The Suhoor is a meal of blessings, so do not leave it, even if one of you just takes a sip of water, since Allah (swt) sends mercy and His angels seek forgiveness for those who take Suhoor." (Ahmad)

STAY UP AFTER SALAAT UL-FAJR TO MAKE DU'A AND DHIKR UNTIL SUNRISE

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "He who performs the Fajr prayer in congregation and remains seated in the same place while engaging in dhikr until after sunrise and thereafter performs 2 raka'ah (units) voluntary prayer, he will obtain the rewards of one Hajj and one Umrah." (Tirmidhi)

PRAY SALAAT AD-DUHA

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "Whoever regularly prays the two raka'ah of Duha, his sins are forgiven even if they are as numerous as the foam of the sea." (Tirmidhi) The time for Salaat ad-Duha begins approximately 15-20 minutes after sunrise. Two raka'ah (units) are the agreed upon minimum number to be offered, the maximum number differs.

PRAY TWO RAKA'AH SUNNAH OF SALAAT UL-FAJR

Just after the adhan, and before the fard prayer, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said of this prayer: "It is more superior than the world and everything within it." (Muslim)

PRAY SALAAT AT-TAHAJJUD

The Prophet (pbuh) said: "The best prayer after the obligatory prayers is the prayer which is performed in the last part of the night". (Muslim)*

GIVE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN IN CHARITY

"The Prophet (pbuh) was the most generous of people, and he was most generous during Ramadan," (Bukhari)

MAKE DU'A IN THE LAST THIRD OF THE NIGHT

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "As it is in that time that Allah (swt) looks for those who are seeking his help and forgiveness." (Bukhari)

Sri Lankan Cabinet approves proposed ban on burqas in public



Sri Lanka's cabinet has approved a ban on full-face veils worn by some Muslim women, saying that they pose a threat to national security.

Sri Lanka's cabinet on Tuesday 27th of April 2021 approved a proposed ban on wearing full-face veils including Muslim niqabs in public, citing national security grounds,.

The cabinet approved the proposal by Public Se-

curity Minister Sarath Weerasekera at its weekly meeting, Weerasekera said on his Facebook page.

The proposal will now be sent to the Attorney General's Department and must be approved by parliament to become law. The government holds a majority in parliament and the proposal could easily be passed. Weerasekera has characterized veils which cover the body and face worn by some Muslim women as a sign of religious extremism and said a ban would improve national security.

The Cabinet's approval of the proposed burqa ban comes despite the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief saying it would violate international law.

Ahmed Shaheed tweeted that a ban would be incompatible with international law and the

right to free religious expression.

Pakistani Ambassador Saad Khattak also tweeted that a ban would only hurt the feelings of Muslims.

Last month, Weerasekera also announced government plans to ban more than a thousand madrassa Islamic schools that he said were flouting national education policy.

'Nobody can open a school and teach whatever you want to the children,' he said at the time. The government's moves on burqas and schools follow an order last year mandating the cremation of COVID-19 victims - against the wishes of Muslims, who bury their dead.

Sri Lanka arrests Muslim leader over 2019 Easter attacks

Sri Lankan police on Saturday arrested a prominent Muslim lawmaker and his brother over suspected connections to the Easter Sunday suicide bombings in 2019 that killed 269 people.

Rishad Bathiudeen is a former Cabinet minister who currently leads an opposition party in Sri Lanka's Parliament. He and his brother, Reyaj Bathiudeen, were arrested in the capital for allegedly "aiding and abetting the suicide bombers who committed the Easter Sunday carnage," said police spokesman Ajith Rohana. He said the brothers have not yet been officially charged but were arrested based on direct evidence, as well as what he called circumstantial and "scientific" evidence.

Two local Muslim groups that had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group have been blamed for the six near-simultaneous blasts at two Roman Catholic churches, a Protestant church and three tourist hotels. Both Muslims and Catholics are minorities in Sri Lanka, where Buddhists make up 70% of the population.

Before his arrest Saturday, Bathiudeen wrote on Facebook that police were outside his house "since 1:30 a.m. today attempting to arrest me without a charge. ... They have already arrested my brother. I have been in Parliament, and

have cooperated with all lawful authorities until now. This is unjust."

Rushdhie Habeeb, a lawyer representing Bathiudeen, called the arrests politically motivated and said, "No reasons for the arrest had been given at the time of their arrest by those who conducted the midnight raid."

In his statement, Habeeb said the purpose was to "punish the political leadership of the Muslims, which had nothing to do with 21/4, for the dastardly acts of some Muslim youths who were widely alleged as having been used as pawns by foreign powers."

The arrests came amid growing demands for justice by Sri Lanka's Catholic leaders and community, including during a commemoration held Wednesday on the second anniversary of the attacks.

Most of the people connected to the groups accused of carrying out the attacks have been arrested, but Archbishop of Colombo Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith has insisted the bombings couldn't have been planned by the leader who committed suicide in one of the attacks.

The government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who came to power later in 2019 after promising to determine the truth behind

the attacks, is under pressure to find the mastermind.

His government accused an Islamic cleric arrested soon after the attacks of being the organizer, but the claim has not been accepted by the Catholic Church, which suspects there was larger foreign involvement.

Ranjith, the archbishop, has said a presidential commission that investigated the attacks focused on failures by those in political power at the time to prevent the bombings, instead of on finding the people who were directly responsible.

A power struggle between the then-president and prime minister, which led to a communications breakdown and a resulting lapse in security coordination, is said to have enabled the attacks, which occurred despite prior foreign intelligence warnings.

WFSLM View point – Secretary General – Rizwan Wahab

WFSLM has come a long way in a short span of time since we launched in Oct. 2019. As we all aware it was launched officially after many years of deliberations by dedicated and interested expats from around the world. Her Excellency Manisha Gunesekera Former Sri Lankan High Commissioner to United Kingdom and Hon. Bob Blackman MP, officially announced the formation of WFSLM, in the presence of a large gathering of Sri Lankan from all ethnicities and dignitaries, professionals and intellectual from many organisations and countries. The launch was followed by the World Forum for SL Muslims Conference in London Marriott Hotel, with participants from around the World, with world renowned speakers as panelist. Council of Sri Lankan Muslim Organisations (COSMOS) UK played a major role in the launch and the Conference. Our sincere thanks go out to the COSMOS UK President and his team.

During this 18 months, WFSLM achieved its planned strategy by structuring and creating a viable and workable system for its members. We established Teams and Wings, among them are the Youth Wing and Gender Equality Team which are our core base of WFSLM as all are equal before Allah. We are proud to mention that WFSLM has now spread its wings to 20+ countries with coordinators appointed to those representing countries around the world.

With modern technology and social media which is the norm of the day, WFSLM is equipped with resources and personnel from around the world we will not leave no stone unturned. Our membership has grown to, over 100 with dedicated and committed individuals who pledge to serve our community locally and globally. WFSLM has created a platform for our membership to fulfil our aim and objectives has stipulated in our constitution.

WFSLM has a purpose of uniting all Sri Lankan Muslim expatriates from across the world to come under the umbrella of WFSLM, united as one voice of Sri Lankan Muslims. We aim to maintain the Sri Lankan identity whilst giving back to our motherland our expertise, knowledge, skills and experiences by way of various projects and activities in Sri Lanka together with humanitarian services. To embed and spread pluralism and coexistence for all to live in peace and harmony. WFSLM will endeavor to take our place in the world arena with other world recognised organisation, Insha'Allah with the blessing of Almighty and the dedication and untiring efforts of our Leader AGA Barrie with over 5 decades of service to the community and to forged ahead with our ambitious programmes in the coming years. Stay home, Stay safe.



WFSLM–Youth Wing Established!



We are delighted to announce the formation of the WFSLM Youth Wing with its inaugural convened on 25th of April 2021.

WFSLM Youth Wing will focus on promoting and ensuring young people's democratic and social rights; encouraging their social and political participation at all levels in community life; and offering opportunities for personal and social development through leisure activities, voluntary engagement and non-formal education. WFSLM will focus on creating

opportunities for youth to discover and express their abilities and skills by empowering them in their decision making. Making youths aware in media and education and raise their issues and social difficulties and rescuing them from cruelty/violence and protecting their rights. Some of the objectives for the wing include:

- To develop and to co-ordinate special programs and activities in the field of non-formal education
- To develop and to support the meeting, intercultural exchange in member countries of WFSLM and the active participation of Youth
- To promote actions of information, seminars, studies, training courses and research in the practice and policy of non-formal education
- To organise in partnership with the members workshops, seminars, training courses and conferences for workers, directors, policy makers, politicians and scholars in relationship to non-formal education

- To develop these practices and policies by taking into account the policies of (non-formal) education and of youth at the local, national and European level

Secretary General for WFSLM noted that “Young people aren’t just the leaders of tomorrow – they’re making huge changes to the world around them, right now. Whether it’s through social media or ‘hashtag’ activism, writing online or in their paper about a cause, or taking part in a protest, there are many ways that young people can ‘be the change’ and make a difference to the world.”

Chairman for WFSLM noted that “The importance of the youth wing cannot be understated in making the WFSLM sustainable going forward. I hope the attitude, strength and imagination of the youth to help push the boundaries of the WFSLM to great achievements going forward. “

If you would like to find out more or would like to get involved with the youth wing, please get in touch via our email: wfslm.yw@gmail.com.



WFSLM is beginning to develop its reach across the world and has the ability to reach numerous audience . With that we want to build a sustainable advertising network that yields you the maximum return on your investment. Each Advertisement is closely worked on with our clients to understand the needs and understand how it matches against the values of WFSLM.

We are currently offering this opportunity without any charge and would like to focus on businesses/ organisations/ charities that would like to get their message across to Sri Lankans living across the world.

Please contact the WFSLM for more information:

WFSLM Office 4B. Blake Mews, Kew Gardens, London, TW9 3GA, United Kingdom

Email: info@wfslm.org

Message from the Chairman– A.G.A Barrie

Alhamdulillah, I am pleased to pen a message to the first News Letter of the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims, which is to be released in the Holy month of Ramadhan. May Allah accept all the hard work by the team and reward them immensely.

We are in the second year of operation having completed the first year very successfully, achieving most of the goals. It was not easy, despite many obstacles, mainly due to COVID -19 situation but by the grace of Almighty and hard work by all of you, especially the Secretary General and the Team Leaders we were able to achieve almost all the milestones.

The Newsletter is to be released once in three months

condensing and summarizing the news and the articles appeared in the website www.wfslm.org for the period under review.

One of the ventures undertaken by WFSLM that excites me and personally involved is to complete the history of Sri Lankan Muslims migration to various countries after the independence in 1948. First immigrant to United Kingdom was supposed to be in 1952 while Canada in 1966 and the country coordinators are expected to collect the information to compile this record. Please be involved and extend the cooperation to identify the early settlers to gather the information.

As we have over half a million Sri Lankan Muslims are living



Chairman A.G.A Barrie speaking at the launch of WFSLM in London

across the globe, it will be a major asset to the community to harness the resources through the World Forum and provide the necessary services, to the community, in an organized manner, through the sub committees and the wings of WFSLM.

Once again I thank the Media Team for releasing the long awaited News Letter and the members of the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims for the support rendered.