

# NEWSLETTER



## WORLD FORUM FOR SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS (WFSLM)

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### 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



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### WELCOME TO THE WORLD FORUM FOR SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS (WFSLM)

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 in the presence of many distinguished guests including Her Excellency Manisha Gunasekera, the High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in the United Kingdom and Rt. Honourable. Bob Blackman MP, and 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 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.

Here are some of the facts regarding the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims as answered by the Chairman Capt. AGA Barrie SLE, P.Eng., and endorsed by the Secretary General Rizwan Wahab, to the questions raised to them.

## 01. Can you please explain the origin of World Forum? And when was it officially launched?

The World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims was initiated as back in 2004 by likeminded Sri Lankans living around the globe to have a unified voice on issues faced by the community locally and abroad. At this time most of the communication was via Email and the ideas were exchanged through mails only and it took long time to come to conclusions in various issues. For an example the issue of the name of the Forum itself took many years and never resolved. As the coordinator of the group, I entrusted the launch of the Forum to Rizwan Wahab, The President of COSMOS, who was acting as the Secretary to the group to launch through COSMOS in UK. It took some time and during the year 2019 COSMOS organized a World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims and launched the World Forum on 18th October 2019 in UK, attended by then High Commissioner for Sri Lanka H.E. Manisha Gunasekara

## 02. How did you get appointed as the Chairman of WFSLM and who are the others appointed along with you to the Forum?

At the Launch of the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims, I was named as the Chairman by virtue of being the coordinator of the group and Rizwan Wahab as Secretary General and the former President of COSMOS Liyas Wahid as the Treasurer. Also, the name of the Forum was confirmed at the launch. But due to administrative requirements of COSMOS, Liyas Wahid stepped down and Haleem Osman was appointed as the Treasurer

## 03. What is the basis of administration of WFSLM?

Even though three of the original group of pioneers were named at the launch to steer the World Forum the Interim Board of Management utilized the members of the group to drive at the

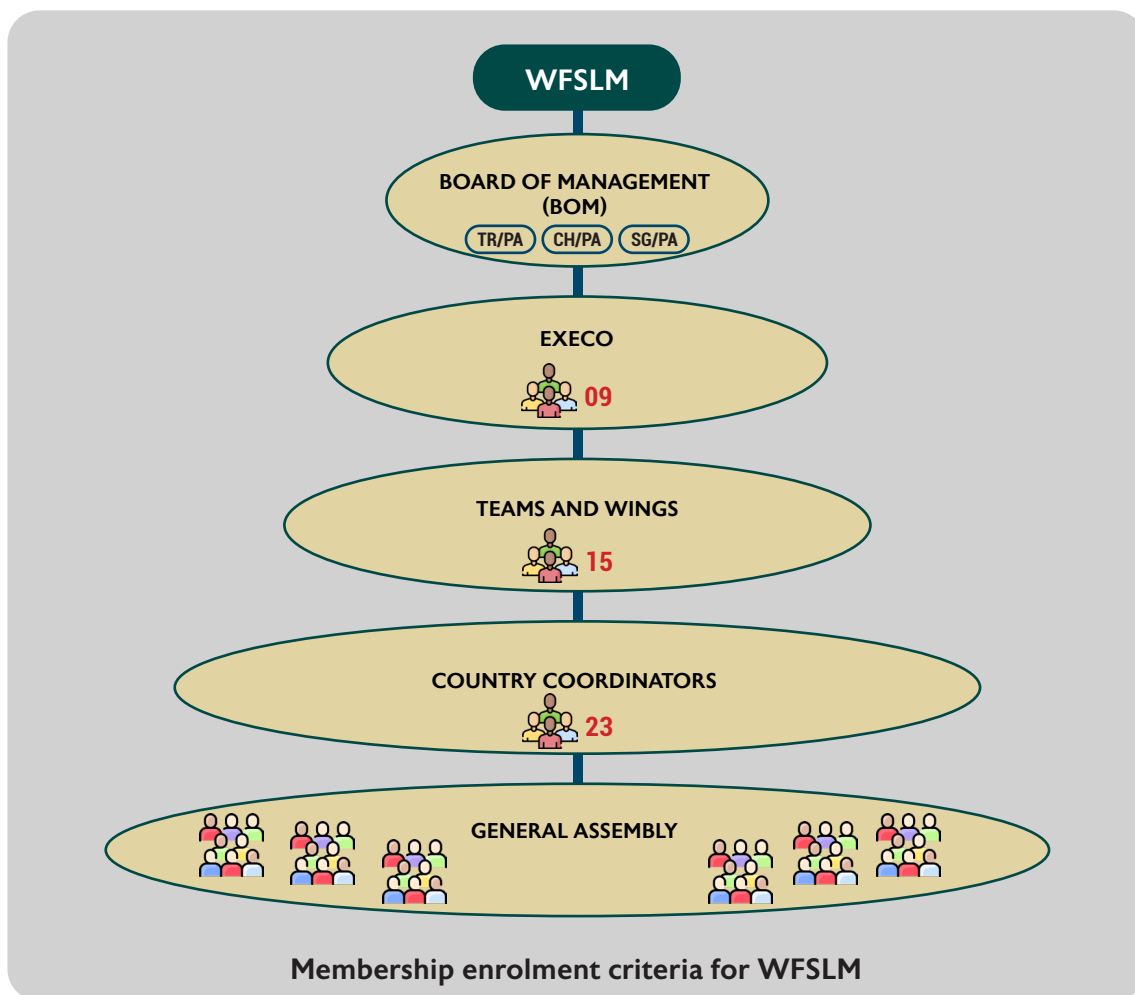
draft constitution and the organization structure to administer the World Forum. Once the basic structure was formed the steering committee was disbanded and the administrative structure consisting of Board of Management, EXCO, Team Leaders, Country Coordinators, Team members and the General Assembly was established

## 04. Can you explain the basis for the membership and the criteria?

Basically the membership is open to any Sri Lankan Muslims expatriates over 18 years of age subject to approval by the Board of Management. However there are many categories of membership such as;

- All Sri Lankan Muslims over the age of eighteen living abroad are eligible to become members, of the General Assembly, if they satisfy the criteria.
- Heads of Sri Lankan Muslim organizations registered in Foreign countries can apply to become associate members however they cease to be an associate member once they relinquish the position but can continue as normal member if they satisfy the membership criteria.
- A dual citizen residing in Sri Lanka is eligible to become a member if they satisfy the criteria.
- A Sri Lankan Muslim of standing can be recruited as co-opted members.
- The spouses of the members irrespective of their nationality are eligible to become members if they satisfy the criteria.

**A Sri Lankan worked in foreign country but living in Sri Lanka are also eligible to become a member if they satisfy the criteria.**



Demonstrates a personal commitment to serve WFSLM at local and global levels, has an impeccable record in the public eye, good standing in their community, self-awareness and a desire to learn.

- Impeachable
- No criminal record
- Minimum 6 hours per month of time For WFSLM activities
- Taking part in WFSLM organised activities in the respective country of domicile and around the world, if appropriate engage in team activities and projects when required/requested by Team Leaders/Coordinators
- Actively participate in WFSLM Chapters in the respective country of domicile
- Work closely and assist the country coordinator.
- Always follow rules and regulations of WFSLM and the guidelines related to the use of main WhatsApp group of WFSLM
- Responsible for his/her own messages/actions -disclaimer of WFSLM applies, aware of WFSLM privacy policy.
- Ensure WFSLM Name is NOT tarnished in anyway by personal or group actions privately or publicly in the country of domicile or around the world - utmost good behaviour, good practice and transparency is the key to becoming a member of WFSLM.
- It is to be understood that WFSLM is NOT affiliated to any political party.
- Complete professionalism is expected from members who join the WFSLM in all matter related to the Forum, groups or subgroups.
- WFSLM maintain zero tolerance on Racism, Hate, Hate Speech, In whatever form or shape.
- WFSLM recognises Gender Equality (gender balance) and it should be strictly followed.
- WFSLM members and aspiring members must adhere to Rule of Law and legal requirements in the the country of domiciled and country of operation or any country in the world on or off shore strictly.
- The above enrolment criteria and conditions are not exhaustive and can be changed, added Or altered as per requirement and need of WFSLM administration.

## 05. What is the Mission and vision of the Forum?

The vision and mission is copied below from the constitution

### Article II – 1.0 - Vision

To provide and sustain a World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims around the world to express, communicate, engage in and promote the pursuit of ideas and activities designed to elevate the condition, welfare and humanitarianism of the Sri Lankan Muslims based on Islamic values and world order.

### Article II – 2.0 - Mission

To improve public understanding and policies that impact Sri Lankan Muslims around the world by engaging Governments, NGOs, Media, Private Organizations and Communities and to bring about change in our condition through Advocacy, Education and Activism with view to transform and benefit both Sri Lankan Muslims and other Communities in the spirit of pluralism and human welfare.

## 06. How do you intend achieving the mission and the vision of the Forum?

Based on present situation we intend achieving the mission and vision through various sub committees. We have established the following Subcommittees and Wings to reach out and serve the need of the community:

- Membership Development
- Public Relations and Media
- Pluralism and Coexistence
- Social and Event
- Education
- International Affairs and Political
- Finance
- Fund Raising
- Legal
- Youth
- Health and well being
- IT wing
- Gender Equity
- Climate Change and
- Monitoring Evaluation

We have drawn the Terms of References and the administrative Procedures for the Team Leaders to achieve the set target and to report on regular basis. The Board of Management and EXCO will update and regularize the requirements with time.

## 07. What are the Priority issues or areas the World Forum will be involved?

As we can see even though the unified or the World Forum was initiated in 2004 it got launched in only in 2019 and in 2022 we have only around 150 members. Hence we will concentrate on building up the membership based on dedication and concentrating on the resolution adopted at the time of launch:

- Improving the level of education and increase the input to local Universities
- Promote tolerance to enhance coexistence so as to live in peace
- Assisting the Government to combat injustice and achieve fair governance

## 08. How much have you achieved in the priority areas?

Even though we have not achieved to our satisfaction but taking the situation we are in for the last two years after the launch of the Forum, due to spread of pandemic, we have reached an appreciable success Alhamdulillah.

- Membership – We have reached around 150 from 20 countries with 10% females and the aggressive drive is on reaching out to around 10 to 15 per month mostly via personal contacts and social media. Hopefully we should reach out to at least one percent of the half a million Muslims living around the globe who are eligible to become members of the Forum.
- Education – We have undertaken a pilot project by offering scholarships to fifty students who appeared for GCE(A) Level examination in the 2021/22. Once we have the results we will analyze the project thoroughly so as to arrive at a proper conclusion to proceed to improve the entry to local universities.
- Tolerance and coexistence have been promoted through seminars and lectures organized by the subcommittee via zoom meetings, to promote peaceful living. The committee is also planning an Island wide Essay competition open to all communities to promote living in harmony.
- World Forum have been taking steps to expose any injustice and working closely

with the authorities to fair governance explaining the access we have to international bodies and Human right Commissions.

#### 09. Do You have any plans to include Sri Lankans in your organization structure?

The primary purpose of the Forum is to serve the underprivileged members living in our motherland hence without a proper footing in the island it cannot be achieved. As some of the pioneers who promoted the idea of World Forum are from Sri Lanka, we will include them as members of the 'Home Wing'.

This will complete our management team to provide assistance to Sri Lankans and to obtain the necessary information on issues of importance for the WFSLM action.

#### 10. What is your general future Plan?

We are generally dreaming very high and may Allah help us to achieve. In bullet form our dreams are;

- Improve the four priority areas – Membership, Education, Coexistence and cooperate with the government to the best level as possible
- Improve the website to be the encyclopedia of Sri Lankan Expatriates
- Document the history of immigrants in each country
- Develop a Directory of Sri Lankans in each country
- Regular newsletter quarterly covering the Sri Lankans living abroad
- Be a regular unified voice of Sri Lankan Muslims in the International arena

#### 11. What is your message to the Sri Lankan Muslims in general and the expatriates in particular?

Be proud to be a Sri Lankan Muslim and promote the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims as it is the only Global Organization harnessing all the resources around the globe to assist the needy in critical issues. Please be a part of it.



Secretary General is meeting up with friends of past JAYCEES, Kandy, 2022

WFSLM is dedicated and committed to save our planet, we want to play our part as Sri Lankans to support in changing and protecting our world.

WFSLM will join other forces to eradicate environmental abuses through exposing, documenting, and making every effort in our power in lobbying politician and companies where possible taking direct action.

The world faces huge challenges, our climate, forests, nature and our oceans are under threat like never before. Our community can make a change with determination and positive contribution.

WFSLM community will strive hard to work towards creating greener and better future for everyone. As one strong powerful body, we together will succeed.

WFSLM will campaign with other world governments, environmental organizations around the world, to strive for a future powered by clean, renewable energy. WFSLM will start at home, to promote among our members, community, and community at large to eat more plant based healthy food, A future where we consume less and reuse more.

Work in a greener economy, A future where we breathe clean air and drink safe water.

A future where we enjoy life on a safe, healthy planet.

A future that's better for us and generation to come.

We must keep the rise in temperature below 1.5 degrees and limit the worst impact of CLIMATE CHANGE. The "Chief of UN Climate Change Panel called their latest report a "code red for humanity" because we are so perilously close to reaching that 1.5 threshold. The UN's IPCC Report on the climate emergency could not have been clearer. It's description of how communities and wild life are already being devastated by fires, extreme floods and droughts prompted the UN Secretary General to say we are facing "code red". It is not too late to avoid the worst impacts of global warming.



Cops 26 conference and world leaders gathering we urge them to agree on the following;

1. Cuts to Fossil Fuels
2. Stop financing climate- wrecking industries
3. Protect and Restore Forests and Oceans
4. Start funding Climate Action for the most vulnerable.
5. Invest in Renewable energy, green homes, public transport and create green jobs.
6. Wealthy countries to support poorer nation

so they can invest in green solutions and adapt to the effects of climate change.

We need to ACT NOW  
TOGETHER, WE WILL BE HEARD

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# WFSLM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND WEBINAR 23<sup>RD</sup> OCTOBER 2021

The Annual General meeting for 2021 was held on 23rd October 2021 virtually through Zoom.

Chairman of the Forum Brother A.G.A Barrie welcomed the guest speakers and the members. Secretary General Brother Rizwan Wahab read out the Annual report and Progress of the forum for the year 2020/21.

Treasurer of the World Forum Haleem Ossman presented the Annual Accounts, 2020/21 of the Forum. Team Leader of Sub Committees and Wings Of WFSLM presented their Annual Progress Report and projects of their teams/ Wings. All presentations were displayed on screen for attendees to view.

An impressive Introductory Video presentation of World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims was shown to the international participants which was well received.

The AGM followed by a Webinar Moderated by Sister Raihana Barrie from Canada

Dr. Ameer Ali from Australia our Guest Speaker delivered his speech on the topic

“Role of Muslim Expatriates to elevate the status of our Community in Sri Lanka”

Followed by a Speech from Dr. Feroz Mubarak from United Kingdom who spoke on

“Sri Lankan Muslim Expatriates Youth contribution to Nation Building”

Both speeches were well received by the worldwide attendees of the Meeting and Webinar.

Soon after, Question and Answer session took place and was managed excellently by the Moderator Sis. Raihana.

The meeting was attended by the members of the Forum and invited guests, supporters and well-wishers from around the World.

Meeting concluded with the Br. Faslur Rahman Mushafique from Qatar, a member of the Youth Wing delivering the vote of thanks and Salawath.



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2021 AT 3:30 PM

## General Assembly Meeting Of World Forum For Sri Lankan Muslims (WFSLM) AND WEBINAR 2021

Facebook Live

[About](#) [Discussion](#)



[Insert link for the video recording of the webinar at the AGM](#)

## OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM PRODUCES GOOD SINHALESE, TAMILS, MUSLIMS, & CHRISTIANS, BUT NOT “GOOD SRI LANKAN”



Dr M C Rasmin's Keynote Speech Delivered at SLMMF AGM

It is my pleasure to have been invited to deliver the keynote speech on the topic of “The Media, and Future of Muslims in Sri Lanka” on the occasion of the 25th Annual General Meetings of Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum (SLMMF).

When this topic was first proposed, I started questioning why it is important to relate the future of Muslims in this country with the media. However, I will not attempt to answer this question here today - rather, I would like to understand the question. My speech today will have a particular on Sinhala - Muslim ethnic relationship. I wish to start by sharing two short anecdotes.

The first is about a “Lead News” story that was published on May 25, 2019 in one of the most reputed Sinhala daily newspapers in Sri Lanka (which is published by a widely recognized media conglomerate). The editor of this newspaper is a veteran journalist. He is also a key member of the Editors Guild of Sri Lanka.

The title of this lead news story was “LKRI00 crores found in the bank accounts of five Zaharan sympathizers from the North-Central province”. (Uthuru medin allu Zaharan Kalli pas denekuge ginumvala koti 100)

The story stated that “Police had spoken to the newspaper and confirmed the fact that there were 100 crores of money in the accounts of the five Muslims suspects who seem to have a connection with Zahran”.

In fact, all five were arrested and subsequently imprisoned for nearly 6 months - some lost their government jobs. They faced severe social stigma in their own communities as well as beyond. The news created a lot of hype.

This development left me extremely disappointed and I noticed that most of my Sinhala friends responded to this news very vocally; probably with the same disappointment which I had. It was during this time that we also heard terms like Muslim Jathika, Muslim Palliya Asala, Muslim Gammana, Islamic Agamika

Siddastana, Islamic Agamika Daham Pasala etc. in the news stories produced by a large number of Sri Lankan broadcast media functions in the Sinhala language. In the same period, military search operations in Muslim villages were dramatized and sensationalized through live broadcasts which portrayed the whole Muslim community as a serious threat to the country's national security.

### Investigation into this Lead News story

During this time, two courageous freelance journalists – Nirasha Piyawadhani and Shabeer Mohammed started working on an investigative story on this lead news story. Let me share some of their findings. It was discovered that one of the suspects out of those five did not even own a bank account. Another person had taken a housing loan, paying the loan from his monthly salary, and he was halfway through completing his house. Yet another person who was a school teacher who had been using a broken chair in place of a commode since he met with an accident – he could not afford to pay for a proper facility.

The suspects were arrested on May 24. The news was published on May 25. The suspects were produced in front of the magistrate on May 27. It is clear that the news was published before a verdict was given and even a basic investigation was completed by the police.

Nirasha Piyawadhani, who led this investigative story, had spoken to the OIC of the police stations. He stated that he did not provide such information and that he was not aware of how the newspaper could have quoted the police. However, the area correspondent who wrote the news maintained that he wrote the story based on the information given to him by the police. When questioned by the Chief Editor, he stated that he could not fact check this news story. I do not want to say what else he said to those young investigative journalists as to why he published the lead news story without confirming its accuracy.



## Pictures of the suspects

I looked at the picture of suspects which was published in the newspaper. All five photos of the suspects appeared with a background in the same exact color. It was later discovered that the photos had been taken by the police at the station.

It is unfortunate that none of the family members of those suspects had the courage to ask the police under what law it was permitted for the police OIC to provide pictures of suspects to a local reporter even before the investigation began.

Finally, all five suspects were released by the court without having further evidence to continue the investigation.

## Let me share my second story

This happened on Darbarey Mawatha in Narahenpita on a Friday afternoon when I got into the Three-wheeler to go to the Jawatta Masjid for my regular prayer. On the way, I saw some fellow Muslim men and children who were walking on the road, probably to the Masjid. I wanted to ask the driver to pick them up too if they are walking to the same masjid that I was going to. Before I could do so, the driver slowed down the three-wheeler and harshly yelled at them and said to me that "It is because of these people we are facing a bad situation in our country", I realized that he was not aware of the fact that I am also Muslim.

He kept on saying "We should not trust the Thambila (Muslims) at any time"

"We should kill these people". "It's the fault of our people who have given them so much freedom". I did not react. When we passed Malalasekara Mawatha (an area close to the Masjid I was traveling to) we met some other Muslims going to the masjid in their cars. The driver continued to express his anger. "See, how they are going; in a few days they will capture our country for sure, that is what they are taught in their masjid".

After some time, we show a few more Muslims walking with little kids.

"These are ISIS people"

I felt extremely uncomfortable, not because what he has been saying to me, but rather

because I was afraid of what would happen if he realizes that I am also a Muslim. I decided that I should get down before reaching the Masjid area, and apparently, I did so.

I prayed and came out of the Masjid. The usual Friday crowd was there. Amongst them I felt someone hold my hand saying "Sir". It was that same driver.

Can you guess what he said?

"When you (sir) left the Three-wheeler, I felt something was wrong; my mind was slightly disturbed; I sensed that you (sir) could be a Muslim. I started following you (sir). My guessing was correct – I found that you were walking into the Masjid. I felt very upset about my conduct. I wanted to say sorry for what happened.

I looked at his face. He repeated "Sorry, sir"

Now, I have five questions for all of us.

1. Based on how the Journalists and the Three-wheel driver acted, can it be considered that this is a problem of just a few individuals?
2. Can we generalize the behavior of the Sinhala Editor, area correspondent, and police OIC to the larger community they represent?
3. Is it fair to assume that people's reaction to one-another, in a certain way, because of their religion?
4. It is fair to assume that all the Muslims and Sinhalese who promote hate-speech are racists?
5. What is the root cause of all these problems?

In my view, it is the system that must be questioned.

Muslims and the Sinhala community have become victims of an invisible political project. It is a project that requires lot of discrimination, hate, suspicion, misunderstanding and intolerance towards a different community for its own survival. The Media does not have much freedom within this political project. It was the same political project that required a new form of anti-Muslim narrative after Easter Sunday terrorist attack.

## Anti-Muslim Narratives

Most media outlets promoted a narrative

that “the Muslims are trying to control the economy and the Muslim population growth is threatening the Sinhalese”. Muslim restaurants were accused of poisoning foods for Sinhalese customers, particularly with sterilization pills. Muslims owned shopping malls were said to be selling clothes with substances that affect the fertility of Sinhalese women.

Muslim people were said to be given too many freedoms in Sri Lanka. Several TV programs were aired to establish that Islam is oppressive towards women; it is promoting extremism and violence and that Islam preaches hate against non-Muslims etc. Muslims are always associated criminal violence and terrorism. If same thing happened in any other community that is not only normalized but also seen as a normal incidence.

### **What is the outcome?**

Anti-Muslim rhetoric, fake news and hate speech against Muslims has become normalized. Muslims are pushed to think that their voice is not heard, not represented or not included adequately in the media. Thousands of young minds from both ends have developed mistrust, misunderstanding and they have lost confidence. A large number of Muslims youngsters are carrying the memory of wounds and destruction Ethnic egoism has become a key factor in all aspect of social life. Moderate voices suppressed. If you even start a coffee shop against Muslims it will have more business – anti-Muslims sentiment is deeply rooted in the minds of young people. But I just wanted to point out none of this is happening organically and or on the will of individuals.

We need to understand the system under which all of this is happening.

### **Inadequacy from the Muslim Community**

Having said that, I also wish to note that the Muslim community as whole has failed to create critical minds with the capacity to resist extremist ideologies. There is no problem in how Islam teaches peace and coexistence co-existence, but there is serious problem in how Islam is being taught at various levels. Muslim religious and civil institutions failed to empower young minds to think and act beyond the bubble and the political project they are living under.

### **Separate Media for Muslims**

I observed that the SLMMF has been lobbying for a separate media outlet for Muslims, but, I have never seen any written strategic plan for such a media outlet. As someone who has studied the growing nature of the media landscape and ecosystem in Sri Lanka in depth, it is my personal view that such a media with religious identity cannot fix all the existing problems. While media is definitely a powerful tool to amplify the voice of minorities, create a positive narrative, resist all forms of extreme expressions and to protect their democratic interest, I am not optimistic about SLMMF’s lobby for a separate media outlet because I fear that a separate media outlet with a separate ethno-religious identity cannot unite the people in dissent.

However, If SLMMF is still adamant in their demand, it will be important to understand that the problem of the poor portrayal of Muslims in Sinhalese media is not entirely about Sinhala Media and the majority of Sinhala people. It is partly because of the political project I described, and an invisible global order that is pushing the agenda of radicalizing Muslim’s youth and several other factors. I do not wish to focus on that in today’s speech.

### **Polarization**

We must not forget to understand that we are already living in a polarized society. Most of the individuals in Sri Lanka are being brought up within a bubble. We know each other but we do not understand each other. Every Muslim child who grows up in a remote area and many in cities as well are brought up with sense of inferiority and victimhood disconnecting them from the mainstream.

Our education system has been producing good Buddhists, good Muslims, good Hindus and good Christians, but not good Sri Lankans. Graduates who study in the same university, stay in the same hostels, for four years, do not understand each other – majority are comfortable in their bubble.

I asked three questions from 45 Sinhala and Hindu students. What is the name of Prophet Mohammed’s (Peace be upon him) father? They said they do not know. But everyone said they have eaten Watalappan from their Muslims colleagues.

I asked can you could cite one teaching from the Holy Quran. Everyone said we do not know. But the majority of them said that they have eaten Ramadhan Kenda. I asked can you tell me one thing about the Haj Festival. Most of them said its celebrated after Ramadhan. Most of them said they have several Muslims friends. I am sure you will find the same response if you ask the same questions from Muslim students too.

We must understand that most of our Sinhala journalists and youth that are supporting anti-Muslim's sentiments are victims of the same oppressive and discriminatory political project and a system that cannot service where peace and co-existence prevails. Racism and hate-speech are not their own choice. We need to resist the system.

## Media Landscape

It is extremely important for the SLLMF to understand the growing news media and information ecosystem in Sri Lanka understood.

A study done by Verité Research together with Reporters Without Borders confirmed that media ownership in Sri Lanka remains in the hands of very few people. More than 75% of the market share of print and electronic media is controlled by less than five people. The same study to some extent highlights the fact that the media in Sri Lanka is predominantly owned by people in power and business. This reality is not unique only to Sri Lanka.

We have a larger network of state broadcasters who are tremendously influenced by the governments in power – and here I meant every government in power.

I wish to refer to two more studies - one, rebuilding public trust written by Nalaka Gunawardena and the second one is the Media Sustainability Index (MSI), published by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). Both the studies observed that the media in Sri Lanka is finding it difficult to grow as a self-sustaining independent enterprise. I am not quite sure if SLLMF or any others lobbying separate media has a viable business plan to complete such a complex market.

## Free Media to a larger extent is not in existence

We are talking about "Free media" in a context where the term "media" has become deeply fluid. I would like to quote Dr Kalinga Seneviratne, a media scholar living in Australia who wrote a publication called the "Myth of Free Media and Fake News in the Post-Truth Era. He argues that free media is a myth and that the Media is no longer capable of protecting the citizens from the abuse of governments. This is a subject that requires a long debate, but we have seen how the media responds at least during vitals such as elections, ethnic tension etc.

Similarly, the truth constructed in our media has become a problematic reality. We know how the media fabricated fiction about Dr. Shafi becoming the judges and jury. At some point, the media reported that the government provided a salary to Zahran quoting some government MPs. This was extensively discussed in the parliament. There has been a discussion in social media on this. The same media stated that this allegation simply was not true. Media Propaganda and disinformation has become a severe threat for "free media".

It is not clear if SLMMF or any others lobbying for separate media have the strategic plan and financial capacity to be "free", "independent", and "Fair" in such a market.

## Why not digital media?

The SLMMF should also take into account the fact that digital media technology, media convergence, social media, and the excessive use of smartphones has changed how media traditionally operates. At present, every citizen with a smartphone has become a media outlet. Media ethics has been massively challenged. However, SLMMF's lobby is not directed towards the digital sphere.

## Issue of Islamic Broadcasting at SLBC

One of the key issues in discussion these days is about the state broadcaster, specifically the Muslim service of SLBC that has lost its potential, capability and commitment to shaping culturally sensitive Muslim minds.

To a greater extent, the Muslim service has become a yet another religious school.

No Muslim in Sri Lanka wanted the state broadcaster to play the Azan five times a day. Playing Azan at the SLBC purely was a political project. Thousands of Muslims were happy about it. They romanticized that Sri Lanka is the first country to play Azan in the state broadcaster.

However, I have learned that there were instances where the programs of other religions were cut off when Azan times came. News that goes for every citizen in this country is cut off when Azan times come. A call for prayer is just played for money before and after the cinema songs. Now, it has become the right of Muslims. However, it is not fair to air Azan at SLBC, and make emotional pride, if that is done disrespecting yet another religion. In a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, each religion and culture should be treated equally despite their political power.

I analyzed the Muslim service program a several months ago – I am not quite sure if you are aware that 95% of the morning programs aired in the Muslims service are sponsored. 80% of the programs are full of religious talk with poor production quality to empower progressive minds. High quality Islamic music, drama, literature, history, culture, and diversity is undermined for money. Last year during the Ramadhan I noticed that the commercials are played for 47 minutes – is not it an exploitation of airtime? The morning program carries a 30 minutes time-check commercial in 2 and half hour air-time.

The Muslim service earns millions of rupees during Ramadhan and other periods, it's unfortunate that the management is so reluctant to pay Rs 1000 per drama artistes and same amount for the writers. Sections that earn zero money are lucky enough to get paid for their dramas.

I agree that SLBC should earn money for sustainability, but why don't it enhance the program quality and increase the commercial rates and still get the money that is required?

There have been two committees appointed to look after the Muslims service. I do not want to criticize any individuals being appointed for the committee, but I am quite sure these committees are capable of doing anything better for the Muslim.

## Conclusion

Let me conclude my speech.

Given the high popularity and influence of broadcast media, it is important to ensure that the media is no longer used to cause communal disharmony.

The SLMMF should re-visit its strategic direction in demanding ethno-religious media. There is no solution in isolation and alienation. It is vital to work, thrive and grow within the same media ecosystem and to work closely with fellow journalists from all ethnic backgrounds courageously, lawfully, professionally resisting extreme sentiments detrimental for national unity. It is important for Muslim journalists to help their fellow journalists to understand the plight of Muslim community treating them as part of the fabric of Sri Lankan diversity. It is high time for Muslim journalists to re-frame the debate and work for the "Sri Lankan Interest" while protecting their own.

In the digital era, SLMMF can think digital – it's cheap, effective, and easy. However, what is important is not to own a separate media, but to produce professional Muslim journalists with the capacity cater to interest of all the people and nation, respecting globally accepted media standards. In my view, this is more essential than investing in yet another old form of ethno-religious media.

Occasional events, facilitations, Ramadhan festivals, masjid openings etc. are small steps perhaps with big impacts. However, what is needed is big steps with sustainable impacts such as providing space for constant cultural learning, exchanges, sharing, and engagements.

Finally, it is high time to reform Muslim service, which is the heart of Muslims community in Sri Lanka, with the participation of Muslim intellectuals.

# APPEAL LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE WFSLM

Assalamu Alaikum Warahamathullahi Wabarakathuhu  
Dear Friends

Ramadhan Mubarak

May Allah shower His blessings in the holy month of Ramadhan

This is a personal appeal letter from the Chairman of the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims to our members and well-wishers. The World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims have been in existence since October 2019, even though the concept was initiated in 2004.

Alhamdulillah since its launch we have grown with over 150 members, 13 Subcommittees and 23 country Coordinators. To date we have achieved:

- Launched the Website and is being maintained
- Promotion Video produced and circulated
- First Newsletter was published
- The World Forum is a registered organization with head office in UK
- Fifty scholarships to GCA (A) Levels students were awarded
- Seminars were held to promote coexistence
- We conduct meetings for all subcommittees every weekend using unlimited zoom facilities
- Taken up issues of the community with local and international authorities
- World Forum Conference took place in London in collaboration with Cosmos (UK) on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2019, with distinguished participants from around the World.
- Represented WFSLM view at the Education Conference held in Colombo on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019
- Represented WFSLM at the human rights online Conference on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020
- WFSLM nominated office bearers attended numerous zoom meetings and conferences during March 2020 to date on issues and concerns Sri Lankan Muslims
- Met members of the community in Colombo of 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022

The cost to maintain and provide services to the community had been through some dedicated members personal contributions Alhamdulillah. And now we appeal to you share the responsibility by your generous contribution In shaa Allah.

As the holy month of Ramadhan is approaching, we are appealing to you to donate and be part of the action and join the dedicated team to serve the community.

As we are a global organization, and we have coordinators in each country to assist you and please contact them for more details. You may contact Br. Haleem Ossman, head of finance subcommittee for your donations and contributions.

Br. Haleem can be reached on +44 7957 362444 or email [finance.sub@wfslm.org](mailto:finance.sub@wfslm.org)

Looking forward for your generous contribution and earn the highest reward in this Holy Month of Ramadan.



Photo courtesy - Daily Mirror

A Tragedy Of expulsions Of innocent peace loving Muslims from their traditionally ancestral homeland Remembered.

A Tragedy Of exodus never to be repeated. The 31st anniversary of this cruel, inhuman episode in the history of Tamil –Muslim relations in Sri Lanka is being widely remembered at present.

Black October' 1990 began in the Jaffna peninsula with the expulsion of Muslims of Chavakachcheri on 15 October and ended with the Muslims of Jaffna town on 30 October. The mass eviction of Muslims on the northern mainland began a few days before it commenced in Jaffna town and concluded a few days after the peninsula was 'cleansed' of Muslims. The tiger organization (LTTE) forcibly expelled the Tamil speaking Muslim people from the Northern Province in an atrocious act amounting to ethnic cleansing. Within a few days the Muslims were chased out of their homeland where they had lived for many, many centuries

The orders for the Muslim eviction came from the rung of the Tigers. This was an LTTE-only military operation, and there is no evidence of civilian collusion; no ordinary Tamils participated in the eviction. Neither was any

reason for the operation ever offered. Did the LTTE, faced with a numerically and politically stronger Muslim minority in the east, simply decide to evict a much smaller and more politically vulnerable Muslim minority in the north? Precise reasons are difficult to establish. What is certain is that this was a decision to remove an entire community, and without any attempt to legitimise the action through popular campaigns.

In Jaffna town, Muslims were summoned to the grounds of Osmania College on 30 October for a 7.30 am meeting. The meeting ended by ten o'clock, with the order that they would have to leave by noon. "They told us that the man coming would say just two sentences," Nachiya, one of the evictees recalls. "Everyone must leave in two hours.' There was no talk. That's all he told us. He was a big guy in the Tigers ... he didn't sit on a chair, and he didn't even stop the motorcycle."

The Jaffna Muslims made their exit through a route carefully laid out by the Tigers, which took them through LTTE checkpoint after checkpoint. At each they were searched and more and more of their possessions removed. Jewellery was taken from the women. The thefts form some of the bitterest recollections of the

Jaffna Muslims. Tareek, a former resident of Jaffna, tells a common tale.

### The story

After the retreat of Indian peace keeping mission from Sri Lanka, Tamil insurgency steadily increased its attacks against government and on all who opposed their cause. Muslims initially supported LTTE cause and joined

October 1990 began in the Jaffna peninsula with the expulsion of Muslims of Chavakachcheri on October 15th and ended with the Muslims of Jaffna town on Oct 30th. The mass eviction of Muslims on the Northern mainland began a few days before it commenced in Jaffna town and concluded a few days after the peninsula was "cleansed" of Muslims.

The bulk of Northern Muslims were then living in the Mannar district. They were sent out. Apart from Jaffna and Mannar, the Muslims of Mullaitheevu and Kilinochchi districts were also sent out. The Muslims in Vavuniya were safer as most of their villages were in the Government controlled areas. More than 50,000 Muslims were expelled from the northern mainland by the LTTE. Together with those of the peninsula the Muslims driven out from the Northern Province numbered around 75,000 in 1990

Mass expulsion of Muslims from the North in was a humanitarian catastrophe. Uprooting a people from their habitat at gun point and driving them away after depriving them of their cash and jewelry was despicable and unpardonable.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) forcibly expelled Muslims at short notice Muslims were sternly directed to leave the places they inhabited for centuries. Muslims were caught between targeted attacks from Tamil militancy and institutional marginalization by government.

Mass expulsion of Muslims was part of ethnic cleansing by LTTE who believed Muslims to be colluding with government to crush Tamil insurgency. The month is called as 'Black October' to On the other hand the UNP govt of the day also exploited and aggravated these feelings.

### End to LTTE insurgency in 2009,

In relocated places Muslims were continued to be subjected to communal violence and social alienation. Right wing Buddhist groups

often targeted Muslims with increasing alacrity. Deprived of all economic means, expelled Muslims are yet end to LTTE insurgency in 2009, efforts were done both by government and the community to return to expelled places. It was easier said than done. Majority of Muslims are still not ready to go back. 2012 census revealed that only marginal number of Muslims returned, expelled Muslims are yet to return to normal life.

### The Present

Tamils and Muslims still harbor bitter hostility against each other, and this causes severe blow to social integration. In an atmosphere of trust deficit, Muslims are afraid of return. Since the eviction, the north has become increasingly insular under the sway of bankrupt Tamil nationalistic politics holding on to the legacy of the LTTE. In this context, the sustained return of Muslims to the north is crucial for its plural future.

### Tragedy of Expulsion

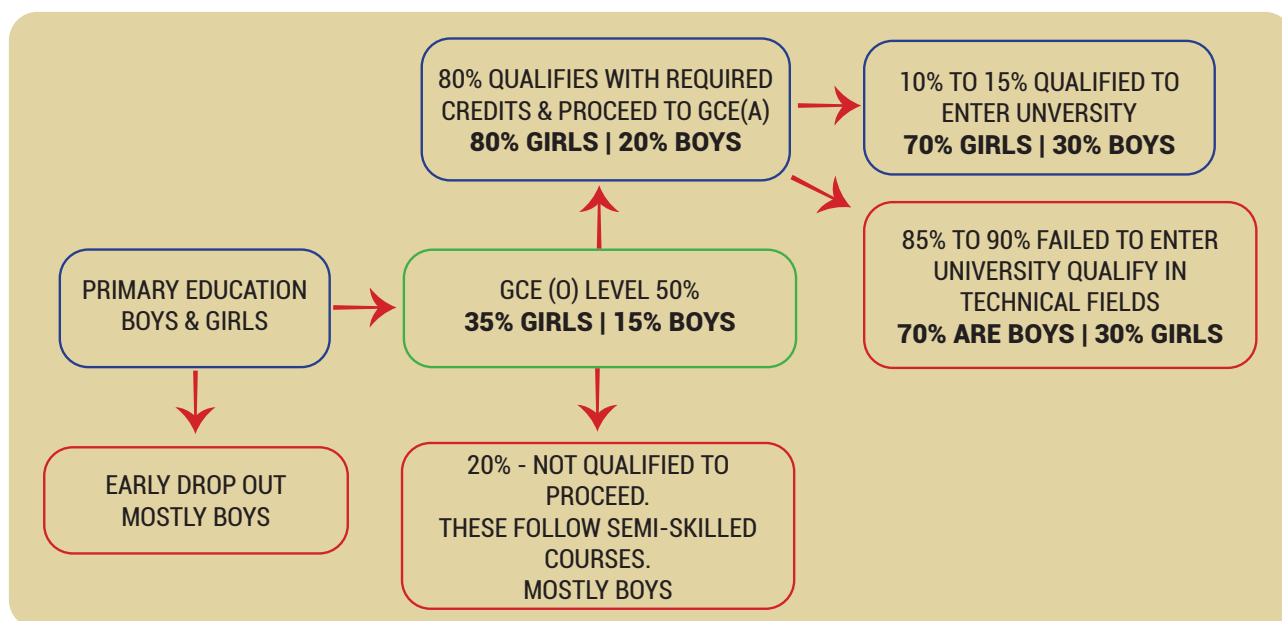
The tragedy of this expulsion was that the Muslims began fleeing the areas they had lived in for generations on the orders of an armed movement. There was no protest, no opposition. Such was the terror and power of the LTTE. Besides the Muslims were few in numbers In an environment where reconciliation is being talked about nationally and globally there is an imperative need for rapprochement between the Tamils and Muslims of the North. A strong sincere hand of friendship should be stretched towards the Muslims. A genuine and humble mass apology should be extended towards the Muslims. A Token apology by the Tamil National Alliance is not acceptable if Muslim are considering a mutual understanding and way forward for both communities.

As we approached the 31st year, after decades, the wounds are open and Muslims are desperate for justice. Trust in politicians eroded in resolving the issues and give solace to the agonized Muslims, the crumbled mutual trust still haunts both ethnic groups and prevents them from complete return to normalcy. As Sri Lanka slips into majoritarian authoritarianism, Muslims is fraught with dangers and insecurity. Indeed, the current context does not bode well for Tamil-Muslim relations and the Country.

- Rizwan Wahab

When the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims was launched in (Harrow, North London) the UK on 19th October 2019 three resolutions were adopted. One of them was to assist promoting Education among the Sri Lankan Muslims.

Accordingly, a study was carried and found that most of the Muslims are following the Tamil Medium in government schools and that the drop out in various phases of education is alarming, as per the flow chart shown below and has to be addressed in an organized manner to overcome the situation.



Then the Education subcommittee of WFSLM considered the following specific issues related to the above facing the SL Muslims:

- Lack of facilities/resources including teachers in Muslim Schools
- Insufficient qualified teachers
- non-school going children
- School dropouts at early stages
- University intake
- Preschool education – namely the qualities and qualifications of preschool teachers
- Proficiency of English of GCE (A level) students

Due to the limited resources available, the subcommittee decided to focus on the following three areas:

- University intake – namely Tamil medium Biological and Physical Sciences
- School drop outs
- Pre-school education

In order to improve the University intake, the education subcommittee, decided to implement a pilot project to improve the entry to local universities in addition to reducing the early dropouts. The project was launched based on the facts that most of the Muslim students follow the education in Tamil Medium. The committee also decided to narrow down the project to Biological and Physical Sciences only.



## Why only Biological and Physical Sciences?

1. Large number of number of students in these streams depend on private tuition classes to improve their grades.
2. Very low rate of enrolment of Muslim students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields compared to their population strength. Less than 5% of Muslim students to these streams.
3. In the year 2018, only around 30% of the students enrolled in STEM streams in GCE (A/L).
4. In the GCE(O/L) 2018, while 32% students failed in Mathematics, 43% got only ordinary pass. Similarly while 30% of the candidates failed in Science and 54% got only an ordinary pass.
5. According to the Evaluation report of the Department of Examinations for Combined Maths subject in the GCE(A/L) 2016, 37.8% of the candidates have failed the subject and 28.54% have obtained only ordinary pass; although one thirds of these candidates are repeaters.
6. Although only high performing students in G.C.E (O/L) are enrolled for Biological and Physical sciences streams they are the worst performers in their A Level compared to students from other streams.

## Why Tamil medium?

1. 'If you talk to a person, in a language which he can understand, then you talk to his head. If you talk to a person, in his own language, you are talking to his heart.' No one can deny that the most of the Sri Lankan Muslims' mother tongue is Tamil whether they live in the South or the North. It is also priceless heritage of our culture.
2. The majority of the Sri Lankan Muslim students in the disciplines have chosen Tamil as their medium of instruction
3. We selected sample of 13 Muslim schools where more than 20 students appeared for Physical Sciences stream for GCE (A/L) for our survey . Out of the 13 schools, only three schools had Tamil and English medium and all others had only Tamil medium only.
4. According to the Department of Examinations data, around 40,000 candidates appear for the subject of Combined Maths and of them around 4500 are from Tamil medium. It is roughly estimated that 25% of the Tamil medium candidates are Muslims.
5. Most of the Tamil medium schools are located in underprivileged districts/areas
6. There are acute shortage of teachers in Tamil medium schools
7. Lack of laboratory facilities in Tamil medium schools
8. Inequitable allocation of other government resources in Tamil, medium schools
9. The UGC has identified that most of such schools are located in underprivileged districts
10. Further, the Tamil medium students/the Muslim community suffered due to the language based standardisation introduced by the government in 1970. So we have to fill the gap.

Hence it was decided to help fifty needy children with tuition fees of Rs 5,000 per student per month.

Applications were called in national Tamil dailies in Sri Lanka and via social media and about 500 inquiries were received. However, only about 100 fully completed applications with required documents and certifications were received. Based on predetermined criteria such as orphans, single parent family, Samurdhi recipients, disability, household income etc., 50 candidates were selected. The pilot project commenced as per details given below:

DISTRICT	NO. OF RECIPIENTS
Matara	13
Trincomalee	11
Ampara	10
Batticaloa	03
Anuradhapura	02
Hambantota	02

Kandy	02
Badulla	02
Matale	01
Colombo	01
Galle	02
Mullaitivu	01
<b>Total number of recipients</b>	<b>50</b>

Total amount paid to the students up to 31st March 2022 is Rs 1,570,000.00. The money was collected through donation mainly from the Forum members and advances by the Team Leader of the Education Subcommittee.

The 2021 GCE Advanced Level exams for the streams were concluded in March 2022 and awaiting the results. Based on the performance in the above exams, the project will be reviewed and a decision to proceed will be arrived to continue in the future, Insha Allah. However, the subcommittee continues to pay for about 16 students who sit for 2022 A level exams in December 2022 since it is not fair to terminate the payment in the middle of their studies.

How we monitored the progress

1. Progress monitoring form and attendance report – need to be signed by the tuition provider monthly before receiving the financial assistance every month
2. Progress and attendance reports by the school principal – monthly
3. Receipts for payment of tuition fee - monthly
4. Direct communication with the students via email and or phone
5. Direct communication with the parent/guardian of the student via telephone
6. Visiting directly, the sample students selected



## SECRETARY GENERAL



WFSLM completed its two years of operation successfully, celebrating with large gathering of members, supporters and well-wishers attending our Annual General Meeting and Webinar in October 2021. We are confidently proud to announce that World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslim is now a fully structured organization as to fit the present need of our community and serve Sri Lankan expatriates and our community and community at large. WFSLM has sprung in six continents, Growth in Quality membership has seen a remarkable increase this year.

The Secretary General and some members of WFSLM Participated in number of zoom meeting and event on behalf of WFSLM, especially the Global Human Rights Online Human Rights Day Conference in December 2021 and Climate Conference, One Country One Law, MMDA and Conference on PTA. The Secretary General also had discussion with visiting Sri Lankan Parliamentarian. It is our fervent desire that WFSLM will and to become a formidable force with one voice to represent Sri Lankan Muslim community Worldwide. We will be the voice for the voiceless and work towards the betterment of all Sri Lankan, " asking ourselves what we can give back to our motherland Sri Lanka rather than what we can get from our country". WFSLM will work closely with all expat's diaspora community and Sri Lankan civil society to bring peace and harmony to all Sri Lankans, WFSLM will stand for the sovereignty of the country and strongly oppose all forms of terrorism and extremism, by individual, groups or state sponsored.

WFSLM is fully aware that Sri Lankan people are suffering from untold hardship with ever rising cost of living, day to day existence has become a nightmare for families, combined with covid 19 it has become more difficult, to redress WFSLM has embarked on short term projects to alleviate poverty and support all communities. As a long-term project, education will be our priority together with supporting civil organization in safeguarding children, abuse of children, disabled and vulnerable in our society, further our gender equality team will come up with projects to empower girls and women.

WFSLM Wil also will work closely relevant authorities and organization. In Relation to Climate Change and environmental issues, we had opportunity of attending Climate Change meetings and conducted a webinar organized by the youth wing of WFSLM. As we all are aware SL is burden with debt and dollar crisis. We as responsible expat community need to find ways and means to give whatever assistance we can offer. WFSLM will embark on a major activity for in 2022/23 to support our motherland. and will be discussed at our WFSLM United Kingdom Chapter Meeting, date to be announced by the Organizing Committee in due course. As for the international affairs we are closely monitoring and working with other interested World and country organization regarding Islamophobia, issues in Palestine, Kashmir and Syria and other countries where Our Brothers and Sisters are affected, Human Rights abuses and violation in Muslim countries are also worrying signal to WFSLM.

Finally, I must impress upon our Team Leaders, World Coordinators, and members to work closely with WFSLM Board of Management and Executive Committee to make our Dream of becoming a World recognized Humanitarian organization which values Human life and welfare. It won't be long before WFSLM will take its rightful place in the World Arena and lead our community.

**- Rizwan Wahab**  
SECRETARY GENERAL  
11th January 2022

7th February 2022

The Secretary,  
Presidential Task Force for One Country, One Law  
P O Box 504  
Colombo

Dear Sir/Madam

Written representations against the implementation of the "One Country – One Law" concept in Sri Lanka by abolition of personal laws.

World Forum For Sri Lankan Muslims is an expatriate organisation with Registered office in London United Kingdom.

World Forum membership covers six continents around the world with membership growing steadily, to represent the Sri Lankan Muslim and non-Muslim professionals, intellectuals, and like-minded people worldwide.

We are involved and support several educational, other humanitarian and charitable projects since its inception working with civil society and other similar organisation and our services are for all communities immaterial of cast, creed or gender.

To assist and support Srilanka WFSLM is also spear heading to promote free direct investments and tourism promotion to our motherland in our member countries.

With reference to Gazette (extraordinary) notification No 2251/30 dated 26-10-2021 and No 2252/56 dated 06/11/2021, I/we hereby make the following representations to the "One Country One Law" Task Force appointed by His Excellency the President.

We believe Sri Lanka is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious country. This diversity is reflected in its personal laws and protected under the Constitution. Whilst there is no question that there must be uniformity in the application of the general, civil and criminal law (Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code etc), personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and succession, are matters that properly fall within the purview of personal laws. We as a community have enjoyed the benefits of these personal laws (whether codified or not) since time ever immemorial; from the time of the Sri Lankan Kings to date, more than 1000 years of existence.

These personal laws have never infringed on the rights of other communities, whilst being protected by the Constitution of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. The culmination of a One Country One Law, which seeks to abolish personal laws (Thesawalamai, Kandyan, Muslim) of all communities, will merely be a cause for contention amongst communities and not a cause of harmony. Undoubtedly, there is an urgent

need for reform of these laws but not a need for it to be abolished.

The Muslim expatriate community have no confidence in the impartiality and competence of the Chairman of the Task Force to examine the issues involved and the relevant laws. He has blasphemed Allah and called him the main perpetrator of the 21st of April 2018 Easter bombing and has also carried a hate campaign against the Muslims since 2009.

We also wish to draw the attention to the findings of The Presidential Commission of Inquiry to Investigate and Inquire into and Report or take necessary action on the Bomb Attacks on 21st April 2019 clearly indicate, that his speeches “contained without any doubt, hate speech” and further was of the view that part of the speeches made, can form the basis for a prosecution in terms of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act No. 56 of 2007. Moreover, they went on to recommend that the Attorney General consider filing charges against him.

In the light of this, we are unconvinced that the purpose of the One Country One Law Task Force can be achieved by such an individual chairing this Task Force.

In view of which, the undersigned on behalf of the world forum, vehemently oppose any attempt to abolish our personal laws in the guise of implementation of “One Country One Law”, and we are convinced that the absolute majority of the Muslim Community will stand in solidarity with us, in emphatically opposing the elimination of all personal laws, especially the Muslim Personal Laws of Sri Lanka.

Thank you,

Yours sincerely  
**- Rizwan Wahab**  
Secretary General  
World Forum For Sri Lankan Muslims  
Please reply to:  
secretarygeneralwfslm@gmail.com

Dr Amjad Mohamed Saleem

Over the last few years in this space of gender and diversity, I have been struck by the attempt by many to contribute to gender parity discussions by suggesting that there are not enough women in the room to call for this. This has been in my opinion a lazy argument of many groups that “we need more women in the room to speak for women’s issues”.

Yet my experiences has been that whilst it is important that we get people from the ‘minority’ (marginalised?) groups to shout louder about getting representation, it is not until their narrative is understood and mainstreamed by the majority that they can actually move the conversation forward. In other words, it is not enough just to get the women into the room to shout but the fact that the men have to shout as well and shout quite loud. This is everyone’s business.

There needs to be an understanding of what inclusion means. An understanding of the spectrum of diversity means that if we push for gender parity, we need to push for equity not just equality with no discrimination and oppression and we need to emphasise inclusive participation. Inclusive participation is about understanding that power imbalances in all societies mean that some people experience more privilege. Those same power imbalances mean that many people experience more violence, discrimination, and exclusion than others. This means getting a better understanding of the intersectionality of identities. Individuals have several **layers** to their identities.

Gender, ethnic origin, nationality or citizenship, age, disability, language, political opinions, religious beliefs, social background, sexual orientation, physical appearance, and color that “intersect” – or are “woven” together. People suffer discrimination against a **combination** of these factors. An intersectional perspective emphasizes the importance of looking at these forms of discrimination **together** and at the same time in order to understand their **compound effects on the individual**.

At the heart of the inclusive participative approach is an analysis of not only how pre-existing inequalities and differences lead to vulnerabilities, capacities, risks and levels of exposure to harm; for different people but how the intersectionality of identities (such as people’s gender, disability, age, ethnic origin, nationality or citizenship, language, religious beliefs, political opinion, social background, sexual orientation, physical appearance and colour) impacts the level of barriers they face in their efforts to meet basic needs, to be recognized and included, and to be safe from harm. Considering these factors and how they interrelate is central to looking at immediate risks and consequences of exclusion and violations, and the causes of those risks.

Thus the central concept of inclusive participation is the emphasis on the equity and dignity of each human being. This paradigm shift in thinking and approach relies on equity which is different to the concept of equality. The latter is based on the assumption that everyone benefits from the same support. This is represented by the diagram on the left.

However equity speaks more to the intersectional approach which speaks to how individuals may need different types of support and approaches based on their varying vulnerabilities in varying degrees in order to benefit from equal outcomes. Thus, equity leads to equality!! For example, working on equal gender rights means that equitable measures need to be taken to ensure those equal rights are met. This is represented by the diagram on the right.

So when we talk about Gender Equity, we are talking about removing the barriers for participation and being innovative about it. In many civil society organisations for example, there is a lack of representation of women at leadership simply because it is not possible for women to attend their responsibilities in terms of timings and other accessibility issues. If we want to improve gender equity, we need to be more inclusive and accessible and that

is the responsibility of men to ensure that this welcoming environment is there. Ideally the scenario from the diagrams is to get rid of the fence altogether as shown below. This is justice and ultimately the end result of inclusive participation and social inclusion. This is where we ensure that rights and dignity are maintained. People are treated equally and equitably based on who they are. An organisation that strives for this has created the correct conditions for engagement. Inclusive participation improves the ability, opportunity and dignity of individuals and groups excluded on the basis of their identity to take part in diverse society.

Diversity is a fact as we are reminded in the Islamic tradition in general where the Qur'anic narrative explicitly states that existence of diversity (e.g. different religions and nations) is God's design that has to be celebrated. For instance the Qur'an states:

“To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what God hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues.

The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute”  
(Q5:48)

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into Nations and tribes, that Ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you.”  
(Q49:13)

Thus Islamic texts clearly call for solidarity and collaborative action as well. Social solidarity in Islam is reflected in the idea of brotherhood, particularly in the concept of the ummah (nation / community) as the following hadith highlights

“The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion & sympathy are just like one body, when one of the limbs is afflicted, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness & fever”

According to Islamic principles, all humans, female and male alike, are equal before God and deserve equal recognition for the value and importance of their lives to society, as well as access to equal opportunities and their God-given rights to fulfil their human potential. Islamic guidance and teaching does not see gender equality as implying that men and women are exactly the same, it is instead a scale to maintain a balance between them. Regardless of the differences and similarities of both sides, each side must be seen as equally important to society. So equality must be maintained in order to encourage the existence of healthy communities with all members able to reach their full God-given potential. Respect for both the rights and dignity of Women and Men is essential, as another hadith highlights:

“Paradise is under the feet of the mothers”

The Islamic ideal of diversity, pluralism, and brotherhood is rooted in the Qur'anic principle of Tawhid and Wihdat al Wujud, (principle of unity of God and all being). Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2003, 31) notes that the term “Tawhid has two meanings ‘the state of unity or oneness’ and ‘the act of making one or integration’”. While the state of unity, oneness and uniqueness belongs to God only, God's creation participates in multiplicity. Therefore to exist in the world is to live in the domain of diversity (Ibid. ).

At the level of diversity and multiplicity, the second meaning of Tawhid signifies integration, connectedness, and unity. The interdependency and interconnectedness of humans is thus a central aspect of this Islamic value and principle.

Throughout Islamic history, the notion of Tawhid encouraged Muslims to integrate both the individual and the society without destroying cultural and ethnic differences. In fact, Tawhid reminds Muslims of the connectedness of all beings, particularly all human communities, and calls on Muslims to work towards establishing peace and harmony among them.

Thus, working on social inclusion matters reduces in reducing inequalities based on

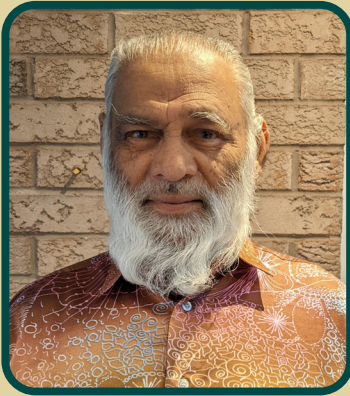
social backgrounds, identities, roles and power relations. Providing inclusive services means giving equitable access to resources for all. This means that everyone has a role to play. It is not only important that we get people from the 'minority' groups to shout louder about getting equitable rights and representation, it is not until their narrative is understood and mainstreamed by the majority that we can actually move the conversation forward. For discussions around gender equity, parity and equality, it means that **both** men and women have to be involved.

Inclusion should not be a simple 'tick box' exercise but an integral and embedded process that takes into account power dynamics, identities, possibilities and vulnerabilities across societies. It requires a more nuanced approach that moves away from equating gender simply with women (and girls). It addresses the complexities of roles played by the varying needs and above all the agency of women in the contexts that they faced alongside a better understanding of the role (and needs of men) beyond just being wielders of patriarchal power over women.

What this means is that we collectively need to move away from the narrow focus and attention on just supporting programs looking at women livelihood, women leadership or sexual and gender based violence as a way of addressing this issue. There has to be a greater holistic understanding of needs and vulnerabilities of gender minorities and also a reflective look on the masculinities and femininities in other related fields like political participation and economic empowerment. There needs to be greater awareness of how gender roles and relations work in each particular context and how gender differences intersect with other identities.

Put simply **"Add Women and Stir" is and can no longer be modus operandi!!!**





It has been a while since we produced the first Newsletter. This is mainly due to the unfortunate circumstances faced by the whole world in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The last quarter of 2021 was the worst, as most of us lost our loved ones, causing immense pain and sorrow. We pray Almighty have mercy on them and give us the strength and courage to overcome the situation. In spite of hardships we faced the dedicated teams of the World Forum worked very hard and achieved all the Milestones for the first two years of operation, as being highlighted by the Secretary General's report.

With pleasure I place on record that the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims is now registered organization having a permanent address at 4B Blake Mews, Kew Gardens, London. TW9 3GA. This was not possible without the dedicated efforts of both the Secretary General and the Treasurer.

The key to success of any organizations is serving the needs in an organized pattern and following up swiftly and efficiently in a professional way and we have set up dedicated teams covering up all the requirements of the community with proper terms of reference so that the essential requisite is achieved. These teams are directed by dedicated, knowledgeable and able leaders with vision and determination. May Allah continue to guide and bless them.

The General Assembly of the Forum consists of members of both gender and all age group varying from twenties to Eighties whereby the teams can be formed with the experienced and the youths to accomplish the best in each field. The Board of Management is looking for more female participation in the future Insha Allah.

Even though we have close to half a million Muslim expatriates living around the globe our membership is still under two hundred hence we urge all the members of the General Assembly to promote and build the Forum so that it becomes the strong voice of the Sri Lankan Muslims abroad.

As part of the future plan we intend on concentrating to increase the membership which will require more involvement of all the members of the General Assembly specially the team members and the Coordinators to utilize the recently produced video and spreading the news among all the contacts so that our membership can be increased concentrating on the youths as they are our future.

I take this opportunity to thank all the members of the General Assembly, the members of the Teams, the Coordinators, the Team Leaders, the Executive Members and the Board of Management for their dedication and determination to take the World Forum of Sri Lankan Muslims to the next level.