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PRG calls on Government of Sri Lanka to urgently conduct an impartial investigation into allegations of manipulation of COVID results to harass Muslims

People's Rights Group (PRG), a rights based advocacy and lobbying group based in the UK particularly dealing with human rights violations in Sri Lanka, expresses its deep concern over reports in the social media that results of the COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Tests conducted by the government health authorities both randomly and selectively in minority dominated areas are being manipulated to generate false positives. PRG has also received reports from the public that, on the basis of such allegedly false positive reports, lockdowns and curfews are being imposed, causing a devastating impact on local economies, livelihoods and lives of minority communities. Such targeted activities if true, clearly constitute serious human rights violations and also State sanctioned discrimination.

Two examples merit mention at this stage. PRG has particularly been apprised of an instance where person was allegedly sent to a distant location forcibly for quarantining, based on such a false positive Antigen test result, only to be brought back after several days when his PCR test result proved otherwise. There was also another reported incident from the Southern Province where a person was deviously "tested positive for COVID 19" although he had only registered for the test and had not even been tested due to shortage of swabs when his turn was up. Alarming, in these instances, the victims happen to be from the Muslim minority community. PRG has also received information of large areas in Muslim majority towns being unreasonably placed under lockdowns based on very few cases that were claimed to have being tested positive for COVID 19.

It is unfortunate that Sri Lanka's COVID response has been marred by rampant human rights violations, thus emerging to be proof that demonization of particularly the Muslims has been normalized. The health crisis has been used to reinforce the narrative that the 'careless and undisciplined' Muslim community has flouted social distancing and curfew laws. The idea that Muslims must be brought in line and not allowed to 'do their own thing' has been gaining force in society for a long time and simply intensified with this pandemic. The extremely discriminatory policy that is in place in Sri Lanka, insisting on cremation of all those who die of COVID-19 is an extension of this same line of thinking. Reports of manipulation of COVID-19 test results only serve to exacerbate those fears, putting the credibility and neutrality of the country's health system in serious doubt.

In this context, PRG calls upon the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to urgently conduct a transparent and impartial inquiry into the process of COVID-19 testing and take all required measures to make amends where needed, in order to restore faith of the people in the health system. PRG also stresses the imperative need for the GoSL to win over all sections of the people in the Nation's fight against the dreadful Covid pandemic, by respecting their religious and cultural rights.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who said, "a nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members." As Sri Lanka stands in its own shadow, PRG fervently calls upon the GoSL to respect the legitimate concerns of the people, irrespective of racial or religious differences. Failure to do so fails humanity as a whole.