



**NATIONAL CHRISTIAN EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE**  
SRI LANKA

**Responding to Covid-19 in Sri Lanka**

<b>132</b> Number of people currently affected with Covid-19 in Sri Lanka	<b>29</b> Number of people recovered and discharged in Sri Lanka	<b>05</b> Number of people who have died in Sri Lanka from Covid-19	<b>259</b> Number of people who are under observation in Sri Lanka	<b>166</b> Total number of people tested positive for Covid-19 in Sri Lanka
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\* The above information is as of data obtained at 1000h on 05.04.2020

**INTRODUCTION:**

On December 31<sup>st</sup> 2019, Chinese authorities alerted the World Health Organization of the spread of a pneumonia-like disease which, on 7<sup>th</sup> January was confirmed to be caused by a novel coronavirus, '2019-nCoV' [1].

The disease was found to be spread through respiratory secretions (sputum, respiratory droplets) and contaminated objects or materials such as clothes and furniture, were found likely to carry the highly infectious virus.

**COVID-19 IN SRI LANKA:**

As Covid-19 spread rapidly in China, causing lockdown of many provinces and as the disease spread to other countries, Sri Lanka too implemented certain precautionary measures to prevent and curb the infection if it entered the country. By the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, Sri Lanka had taken measures to screen passengers at the Bandaranaike International Airport for who showed symptoms similar to the Corona virus infection and direct them to quarantine [3]. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January a National Action Committee of 22 persons including medical specialists and military personnel was set up by the Ministry of Health to prevent the spread of coronavirus in Sri Lanka [4].

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 a female tourist from Hubei province China, visiting Sri Lanka was admitted to Infectious Disease Hospital, Angoda, with symptoms similar to that of Coronavirus infection and on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 she was confirmed positive for it. This was the 1<sup>st</sup> reported case in Sri Lanka<sup>[5]</sup>. Subsequently several other persons who were suspected for having the novel Coronavirus infection were tested, however they all were confirmed negative. The Chinese national who was treated at IDH fully recovered and was released on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2020<sup>[6]</sup>.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, the ministry of education declared all government schools to close with immediate effect from the next day till the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2020<sup>[13]</sup>. Private schools and universities also followed this suit.

In the following days, the number of persons tested positive for Covid-19 infection increased progressively. Almost all those tested were either from quarantine centers or were identified to have recently travelled from countries with Covid-19 infection.

As the number of cases increased, the Sri Lankan government declared an island wide curfew from Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March till Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March for certain districts and Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March for others<sup>[16]</sup>. The curfew period was lifted for 8 hours followed by which it was re-imposed in all districts for 3 more days in an effort to minimize social interaction and curb the spread of Coronavirus. Travel between districts too was prohibited<sup>[17]</sup>. 24 government hospitals have been equipped to test and treat those with Covid-19.

#### **NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

The outbreak of Covid-19 spells disaster for Sri Lanka's weak economy. As a result of the curfew imposed by the government, which is currently in effect indefinitely, public life has come to a halt with businesses, schools and all other institutions being shut down in Sri Lanka. The impact of this has been severe. Daily wage earners, the elderly, the differently abled, female-headed households, and in particular, war widows are facing severe hardships to meet their daily needs.

The current crisis, accordingly, has given rise to the need to provide urgent assistance to vulnerable communities. At present, following discussions with the relevant Divisional Secretariats, the NCEASL/ADT has identified 6500 families across the country who require immediate assistance for essential items. The breakdown is as follows:

- Northern Province (Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu districts) - 2250 families
- Eastern Province (Batticaloa District) - 750 families
- Western and North Western provinces (Colombo and Puttalam districts) - 1000 families
- Central Province (Kandy and Nuwara Eliya districts) - 1000 families
- Southern Province (Galle, Matara, Hambantota districts) - 1500 families

Moreover, there has also been a rise in the circulation of rumours and misinformation regarding the crisis on social media, which has resulted in further panic and anxieties among people. It is important, therefore, to sensitise and build awareness among online communities on topics such as misinformation and responsible online behaviour during times like these.

With the declaration of curfew and other urgent interventions made by the government to arrest the spread of Covid-19, the public have often been caught off guard with little knowledge about the laws which govern the decisions made by the authorities. Accordingly, in order to hold the state responsible to the rule of law, and build awareness among the public, it is important to carry out campaigns on the laws related to the current situation which undergird government decisions and actions.

### **PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:**

#### *1. Emergency relief for vulnerable communities*

In order to identify and reach needy families and individuals from vulnerable communities, the NCEASL/ADT will work through its 6 regional offices with the relevant Government Agents, Divisional Secretariat Offices, local police and other local-level networks. For instance, in the Northern Province, the NCEASL/ADT will work with the NGO consortium to reach vulnerable communities in the Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, and Vavuniya Districts, with needy families being identified in coordination with the Government Agent's Office and the relevant District Secretariats. Similarly, in the Eastern Province, the NCEASL/ADT will work with the Government Agent's Office and the District Secretariat to identify families in the Batticaloa District who require support.

In the Central Province, the NCEASL/ADT will work especially among the Estate community in Hatton, Nuwara Eliya and Maskeliya, while in the Western and North Western Provinces, the NCEASL/ADT will work in Negombo, Kochchikade, Puttalam, Wattala, and Jaela areas with a special focus on low-income earning families impacted by the Easter attacks. All these work will be carried out through the NCEASL/ADT's satellite offices in the respective regions.

Activities will include:

- Liaising with the relevant authorities and local networks to locate families needing assistance in the identified districts
- Purchasing and packaging relief packs
- Distributing relief items in coordination with the relevant authorities and local networks

*2. Equipping online communities to be responsible digital citizens, combat misinformation and be aware of laws related to the current crisis*

Over the past few weeks, there has been a rise in misinformation on social media platforms, including the targeting of vulnerable communities, returnees and health-care workers who have been suspected of being exposed to Covid-19.

At the same time, with the imposing of curfew and other emergency measures by the government, there is also a noticeable lack of awareness among the public with regard to the laws governing such actions and decisions by the authorities.

Accordingly, in order to promote responsible behaviour online, it is imperative to raise public sensitivities in relation to digital citizenship during this crisis period. Moreover, since it is important to hold the government accountable and ensure the rule of law, it is also necessary to increase public awareness about matters such as powers of the police in times of curfew and the legal basis undergirding governmental decisions and the extent to which the government can and cannot act during this period.

In response, therefore, the NCEASL/ADT proposes to develop tri-lingual content which will be promoted via social media on digital rights and responsibilities and other topics related to responsible digital citizenship in times of crisis. This will include the compilation of fact sheets on laws related to the current crisis, and informational videos targeting younger audiences with messaging on digital citizenship. In total, the project will aim to produce, promote and disseminate 72 social media posts anchored to the current Covid-19 crisis and in relation to the above topics.

Still more, the NCEASL/ADT will also conduct webinars targeting youth, which will be based on the Digital Citizenship Toolkit produced previously by the organisation. The toolkit comprises the following modules:

**Module 1 - Digital rights and Responsibilities**

**Module 2 - Digital Communications**

**Module 3 - Enhancing Digital Security**

**Module 4 - Promoting Digital Safety**

**Module 5 - Nurturing Digital Well-being**

**Module 6 - Increasing Digital Literacy**

**Module 7 - Advancing Digital Activism**

Accordingly, within the proposed time period of 3 months, the project will organise 6 webinars; 2 each month, on some of the above modules. In order to attract youth to sign up for the webinars, social media promotions will be carried during the project period.

Activities will include:

- 6 webinars on topics such as digital rights and responsibilities, digital safety targeting youth
- Weekly social media campaigns (6 per week) addressing areas such as the need to verify information, how to spot misinformation and fake news online and laws and regulation pertaining to the current crisis situation
- Producing 3 informational videos to engage younger audiences on digital citizenship

### **Engaging faith leaders in the prevention of Covid-19**

Faith leaders are important community actors who can play a vital role in a time of crisis. In a multi-religious context like Sri Lanka, faith leaders command the respect and attention of their respective faith communities. This makes faith leaders influential community leaders who can impact change.

The NCEASL/ADT, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, works with faith leaders across the different districts on the eradication of Leprosy. This includes the formation of a network of 100 faith leaders across the 25 districts comprising a team of 4 members representing different faiths in each. The present crisis has given rise to the need to educate faith leaders on steps that could be taken in the wider community and in partnership with their respective congregants and followers to prevent the spread of Covid-19

Moreover, if faith leaders could also be engaged to collectively reflect on the role that religion could play in tackling the current Covid-19 crisis and empowered to positively impact the thinking and behaviour of their communities, this would go a long way in ensuring healthy and responsible communities who resilient in the face of threats to public health.

Accordingly, through this project, the NCEASL/ADT will bring together a group of 4 faith leaders to compile faith-based reflections on how each religion speaks positively into the current crisis. The purpose of this is to encourage responsible behaviour on part of faith leaders and their respective communities. Still more, the NCEASL/ADT will also work with public health experts to adopt current material in circulation to provide health and safety guidelines and best practices for faith leaders concerning Covid-19, as a part of the proposed booklet.

#### Activities:

- Bringing together a group of experts, comprising a representative from each of the four major religions
- Drafting reflections on how a particular religion speaks into times of such crisis and encourages faith leaders and the faithful to respond
- Adopting health and safety guidelines for faith communities in relation to Covid-19
- Producing a booklet on the role of faith leaders and the role religion can play in the present crisis
- Promoting the booklet through social media campaigns and directly through the NCEASL's faith-based and civil society networks

#### **Health and Safety measures governing the project:**

Since the project will involve the administration of relief to vulnerable communities, the following safety measures will be implemented to ensure the safety and security of staff and all project related workers:

- Obtaining permission and passes from the relevant authorities to engage in relief work during the curfew period
- Familiarising relief workers on safety precautions related to Covid-19
- Packaging of relief items will be carried out under strict sanitary conditions. This includes the use of gloves and face masks and performance of regular hand hygiene
- A strict “contactless delivery” policy to be followed when delivering relief items and the compulsory performance of hand hygiene before and after every exchange with beneficiaries
- No staff members or relief workers with underlying health concerns or current health issues with similar symptoms to Covid-19 will be engaged in distribution or any travel related to the project
- Each relief team to comprise a minimal number of workers and equipped with personal protective equipment and supplies such as face masks hand sanitizers in sufficient quantity.

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- [1] [http://www.epid.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/corona\\_virus\\_report/sitrep-sl-en-24-03\\_10.pdf](http://www.epid.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/corona_virus_report/sitrep-sl-en-24-03_10.pdf)
- [2] [http://www.epid.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/Circulars/Corona\\_virus/advice%20for%20sri%20lanka%20students.pdf](http://www.epid.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/Circulars/Corona_virus/advice%20for%20sri%20lanka%20students.pdf)
- [3] <http://www.dailynews.lk/2020/01/20/local/208890/bia-quarantine-unit-screen-passengers-symptoms>
- [4] [http://www.adaderana.lk/news\\_intensedebate.php?nid=60442](http://www.adaderana.lk/news_intensedebate.php?nid=60442)
- [5] <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/01/28/officials-urge-public-to-remain-calm-following-identification-of-1st-coronavirus-patient-in-sri-lanka/>
- [6] <https://colombogazette.com/2020/02/19/chinese-coronavirus-patient-discharged/>
- [7] <http://www.ft.lk/news/33-Lankan-students-from-Wuhan-released-from-full-quarantine-phase/56-695727>
- [8] <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-to-quarantine-travelers-from-italy-korea-iran-from-march-10-official-56805/>
- [9] <https://colombogazette.com/2020/03/17/over-170-sri-lankans-from-italy-and-korea-evade-quarantine/>
- [10] <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/61290/first-sri-lankan-coronavirus-patient-in-the-country-identified>
- [11] <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/03/12/second-covid-19-case-confirmed-in-sri-lanka/amp/>
- [12] <https://colombogazette.com/2020/03/11/sri-lanka-suspends-on-arrival-visa-facility/>
- [13] <http://www.dailynews.lk/2020/03/12/local/214190/all-schools-closed-till-apr20>
- [14] <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2020/03/15/sri-lanka-declares-public-holiday-due-to-concerns-over-virus>
- [15] <http://www.hirunews.lk/236647/coronavirus-infected-co-pilot-was-at-the-big-match-battle-of-the-blues-at-ssc>
- [16] <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/03/20/island-wide-curfew-will-be-in-effect-from-0600-pm-today/>
- [17] <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-bans-inter-district-travel-curfew-extended-3-days-after-break-61233/>
- [18] <https://www.who.int/srilanka/covid-19>