

SRI LANKA: Easter Sunday bomb attacks against churches and hotels: Over 300 dead

Human Rights Without Frontiers strongly condemns the bomb attacks on hotels and churches in Sri Lanka targeting Christians and other innocent civilians. The bombings have left over 300 dead and hundreds more injured.

CNN (23.04.2019) – <https://cnn.it/2Uze9nX> – The first wave of attacks struck during packed Easter Sunday services between 8:45 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.

Suicide bombers struck three churches around the country: St. Antony's, a popular shrine in the capital, Colombo; St. Sebastian's in Negombo, north of the capital, where 102 people died; and the Zion Church, in the eastern port city of Batticaloa.

About the same time, more blasts ripped through three luxury hotels in Colombo: The Shangri-La, the Cinnamon Grand and the Kingsbury, all popular with foreign tourists and the country's business community.

At the Shangri-La, the bomb was detonated just after 9 a.m. at the Table One cafe as guests were eating breakfast.

Later in the day, a blast rocked a hotel in front of the

Dehiwala Zoo in Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia. The final blast struck a private house in Mahawila Gardens, in Dematagoda, during a raid in connection with the earlier attacks, officials said. Three police officers were killed.

It is not clear why Christians were targeted: Christianity is a minority religion in Sri Lanka, accounting for 7.4% of the total population of 21.4 million. According to census data, 70.2% of Sri Lankans identify as Buddhist, 12% Hindu and 9.7% Muslim.

Who were the victims?

BBC (23.04.2019) – <https://bbc.in/2IQ7u6U> – Most of those who died were Sri Lankan nationals, including scores of Christians attending Easter Sunday church services.

Sri Lankan officials said 38 foreign nationals were among the dead, with another 14 unaccounted for. The death toll includes at least eight British citizens and at least 10 Indian nationals.

The mass funeral for about 30 victims took place at St Sebastian's church in Negombo, north of Colombo, which was one of the places targeted in Sunday's blasts. Another funeral service was scheduled for later on Tuesday.

A moment of silence was also observed at 08:30 on Tuesday, reflecting the time the first of six bombs detonated.

Flags were lowered to half-mast and people, many of them in tears, bowed their heads in respect.

Why was Sri Lanka chosen as a target? Islam expert Susanne Schröter answers...

DW (23.04.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2ZtFdcb> – It must be made clear that Sri Lanka is a country where Christians have never been a group with much political significance. Furthermore, the attackers could not latch on to a narrative of conflict between Muslims and Christians, because this conflict doesn't exist in Sri Lanka. This is why what happened was very unusual.

I think that Sri Lanka was chosen because it was an easy target. The authorities were obviously ill-equipped and were not being vigilant, although they had reportedly been warned of imminent attacks.

The brutality of the attacks, and the symbolic timing and location, were intended to elicit the greatest possible international impact. The terrorists clearly achieved this aim and sent a message: "You can use international forces to drive us out of Syria and Iraq, but we haven't been defeated and we are still powerful."

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