

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT (18 AUG 2021) ON THE
PROHIBITION OF
OPEN PYRE CREMATIONS

We the undersigned representatives of the Hindu Community wish to make the following statement to the media and the National Community.

Today, the Hindu Community speaks in one unified voice.

We, unequivocally and without reservation, call upon the Minister of Health Mr. Terrence Deyalsingh MP and the Chief Medical Officer Dr. Roshan Parasram to immediately take all/any necessary steps to remove the ban on open pyre cremations for Covid-19 decedents.

The prohibition is culturally and religiously insensitive. It is harsh, oppressive and disproportionate. It has imposed an arbitrary and disproportionate financial burden on persons who must spend an extra eight to ten thousand dollars per crematorium use, over and above the traditional cost of final rites. This prohibition was enacted without consultation and is directly repugnant to the collective conscience and identity of the Hindu Community.

We dutifully accept and recognise that restrictive measures may be necessary to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus. We appreciate and thank all religious cohorts for the sacrifices which they have made to protect the health of all citizens and wish to assure that the Hindu Community will continue to do its part. However, any measure which interferes with religious beliefs and entrenched cultural norms must be properly justified and supported with a compelling scientific basis.

It is therefore telling, that despite at least four separate written requests by the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS) asking for the basis of this prohibition, the Minister of Health and the Chief Medical Officer have remained silent. Indeed, their silence has become deafening to the Hindu Community. It was most unfortunate that even when we were invited to consultations, which the Minister and the CMO failed to attend, their representatives failed and/or refused to provide us with the scientific reasons for the prohibition.

Respectfully, it is either that the Minister and the CMO have no justification for continuing this prohibition or they do not think it important enough to explain to the Hindu Community why they have implemented and continue to enforce this prohibition that has caused so much additional grief and hardship to Hindu families. In either case, such conduct is inconsistent with the high standards of accountability and transparency expected of public office at this time.

Perhaps the Minister and the CMO are unaware, but it was once illegal in our country to conduct open pyre cremations and Hindus were reluctantly forced to bury their dead. Through unity, struggle and resilience our community was able to earn the statutory right to cremate our loved ones in accordance with religious and cultural beliefs. A fitting simulacrum of this struggle was succinctly expressed by Parliamentarian Victor Bryan who piloted the Cremation Act of 1953 when he acknowledged that the legislation was intended to "*regularise the situation in deference to the wishes of an important minority in this community*".

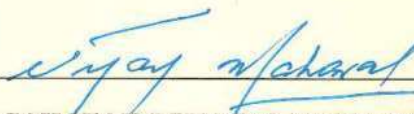
This historical anecdote is not meant to romanticise the issue but rather to demonstrate that a decision to ban open pyre cremations, without proper justification, not only alienates the current generation of Hindus from their core

beliefs and identity but it also further tramples upon the legacy of our ancestors who fought for this right.


As long as this oppressive policy is in effect, Hindu families will be obligated to pay exorbitant sums for the disposal of their dead, arguably in a way that no other sector in the society is mandated to do. Since all other sectors in the country continue to practice their last rites as per their custom, Hindus are now asking for a restoration of their similar rights. The alternative to open pyres is indoor cremations which is turning out to be an expensive substitute, devoid of the religious merit for which mourning Hindu families continuously aspire. We have yet to see how indoor cremations are deemed safer by comparison to open pyres. Without scientific evidence, there is no justification for banning open pyre cremations.

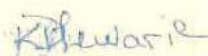
It is to this end that we all call on the Minister of Health and the Chief Medical Officer, with a united voice, to forthwith remove the prohibition on open pyre cremations of covid 19 victims (with appropriate observance of all other health protocols) thereby mitigating inter alia the exorbitant costs (for indoor cremations) which Hindu families are mandated to bear as a result of such a ban.


We all look forward to an urgent response on this issue of grave national importance.

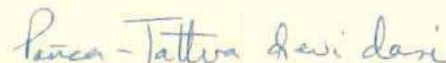

THE SANATAN DHARMA MAHA SABHA

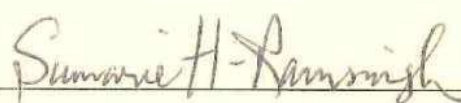

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