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தில்ங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Paths To Peace

October
2023

Respecting Diversity to Build a Pluralistic Society

In South Asian culture, cultural identity has the power to unite or divide people. In Sri Lanka, mutual understanding of other people's culture, religion and language are key for peace building.

NPC's Plural Action for Conflict Transformation (PACT) team organized a visit for students from Ensalwatte Sinhala Vidyalaya to Ensalwatte Tamil Vidyalam in the Matara District so that both communities could understand each other's cultural aspects.

The Sinhala students learnt about Hinduism while attending the nawarathri festival. They are Buddhists and only speak Sinhala while the Tamil students do not speak Sinhala. Yet language was no barrier to communication.

While not being able to communicate verbally, using body language and making gestures the students shared thoughts and experiences in their unique way. The Tamil children taught the Sinhala children how to make pongal for the pooja and create a kolam in front of the hall. "We haven't had an opportunity to engage and communicate with Tamil people before. They are very kind," said a child from the Sinhala school.

The event showed that respecting diversity of ethnicity, religion and culture helps to build a pluralistic society. Relationships between children of different ethnicities, religions and languages represent the key to building reconciliation and a sustainable peace.



Kandy Women's Political Participation Gains Momentum

Super Group women leaders and peer group leaders under NPC's Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) project organized an awareness programme in the Kandy District on women's political participation for over 100 local women leaders.

The project aims to create a more inclusive and equitable political environment, empowering women to take their rightful place in the decision making processes that shape their communities and their country.

NPP MP Dr. Harini Amarasooriya, who spoke at the event, emphasised the urgency of reshaping the existing political culture. She stressed the need for a broader, more inclusive discussion that encouraged ideological shifts to enhance women's political participation.

"Our society is evolving and it's high time that our political landscape evolves with it. We must foster a political environment that values the diverse perspectives that women bring to the table," she said.

SJB MP Rohini Kaviratne highlighted the commitment of the female parliamentarians' committee to advocate for women's political rights across party lines. "Regardless of our political affiliations, as female parliamentarians, we share a common goal to create an environment where women's voices are heard, respected and engaged in to shape the future of our nation," she said.

The event brought together women leaders from various backgrounds and affiliations and was a testament to the determination of the women to play an integral role in the region's political landscape.



Unleashing the Spirit of Religious Freedom

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A three day training programme was organized by NPC's Action for Religious Coexistence (ARC) project for 79 youth participants from 14 districts to raise awareness of the concepts of coexistence and religious freedom.

Participants gained insight into Sri Lanka's modern history, especially the political upheavals that followed the country's independence, that triggered the emergence of corrupt and impunity filled governance. The pursuit of political agendas anchored in nationalism and religion undermined the principles of pluralism, good governance and the rule of law.

NPC's Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera spoke on the challenges that had faced Sri Lanka since independence, highlighting the lack of accountability and the current economic collapse while underscoring the urgent need to address these issues.

Participants engaged in an Out Bound Training (OBT) programme, which promoted team building and camaraderie.

Participants were able to communicate with each other despite linguistic differences. Amid the sounds of Sinhala and Tamil, the two official languages of the programme, there was a mutual understanding that transcended words. They had conversations sharing thoughts, observations and anecdotes, which was an example of the power of communication and harmony, building bridges and relationships among young people from diverse backgrounds.

Assistant Manager of the ARC project, M. Uwais, led a practical session on reconciliation where he presented the idea of reconciliation by using the butterfly as a metaphor. This strategy involved people in a way that was thought provoking and motivating.

Participants noted that young people lacked the support and encouragement needed to realise their full potential. This programme gave them the chance to interact with people and express their thoughts and opinions. What united the participants was a common aspiration: to advocate for religious freedom and coexistence. They understood that this goal could only be attained through collaboration and commitment.



A Community Built Road Transforms Lives

School children in the village of Kebethikollawa in the Anuradhapura District are now able to travel easily to their school after the construction of a new road between the village and Kebethikollawa Model Primary School. There used to be a narrow foot path through the middle of the chena cultivation land, which flooded during rainy season.

The road was made after a meeting facilitated under NPC's Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) project

Community police, religious leaders, community organizations, local government officials, families and youths took matters into their own hands to arrange the construction the 500 metre road, which is used by over 600 people including school children, teachers and villagers. School vans, trishaws and motor bikes are also able to use the road.

The initiative is a reminder of the successful achievements of common goals in civic space when people work together to solve the community based issues that last beyond a single day.

Book Launch on Fake News, Disinformation and Propaganda

A panel discussion followed by a book launch on Fake News, Dis-Information and Propaganda in International Relations was organized by NPC in cooperation with the Nepal-based Consortium of South Asian Think-Tanks (COSATT) with funding from Konrad Adenaur Stiftung (KAS) in Colombo.

The background on the book was given by Dr. Nishchal N. Pandey, Convener of COSATT. Andreas Klein, Director, Political Dialogue Asia Programme, KAS, Singapore explained the rationale for the project. This was followed by an outline of fake news and disinformation in the regional context by Dr. Mallika Joseph of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace, New Delhi.

The speakers made the point that the papers in the book point to the challenge of dealing with fake news, disinformation and propaganda through a multi-faceted approach that combines media literacy education, fact checking initiatives, technological solutions, and international cooperation to promote transparency, critical thinking and responsible information sharing.

Fake news refers to fabricated or misleading information presented as genuine news. It can take the form of false headlines, manipulated images or even entirely fictional stories.

The proliferation of fake news is often driven by the desire to generate web traffic, earn advertising revenue or manipulate public opinion. In international relations, fake news can be used to shape narratives, distort facts or advance strategic objectives.

However, legislation to tackle the problems of disinformation, which involves the deliberate spread of false or misleading information to deceive or manipulate others, needs to be carefully assessed so that it does not lead to an erosion on the rights to free expression and to receive information.

Unlike fake news, disinformation campaigns are often sophisticated, coordinated efforts aimed at achieving specific political, economic or ideological goals. Disinformation tactics can include the creation of fictional personas, the use of social media bots to amplify certain messages or the strategic release of selectively leaked information.

In addition, there is propaganda, which is the systematic dissemination of information, ideas or narratives to shape public opinion and promote a particular agenda. These methods are employed by governments, political parties and other organizations to influence perceptions, mobilise support and advance their interests.

Propaganda often employs emotionally charged language, appeals to patriotic or ideological values, and seeks to create a sense of unity or shared purpose. Propaganda can be used to demonise adversaries, justify military actions or build alliances by promoting positive images of a country or its leadership.

The key note addresses were followed by a panel discussion on Sri Lanka's experience with fake news, disinformation and propaganda in international relations. Prof. Prathiba Mahanamahewa, Rector, Sri Pali Campus, University of Colombo, Prof. N. Selvakkumaran, former Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo and presently member of the Public Service Commission and Ambassador Javid Yusuf, Director, NPC made presentations followed by discussion.

The situation in Sri Lanka with regard to the Online Safety Bill was delved into with most of those who expressed their opinion opposing the threat it posed to freedom of expression.



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Our Vision: A just and peaceful Sri Lanka, in which the freedom, human rights and democratic rights of all peoples are assured.

Our Mission: To work in partnership with different target groups with an aim to educate, mobilize and advocate the building of a rights conscious society of people that work towards a political solution to the ethnic conflict, reconciliation and equal opportunities for all.

International Community Must Intervene in Israel and Palestine Conflict

The ongoing war in Israel-Palestine is in some crucial ways similar to what took place in Sri Lanka a decade and a half ago. The same basic features are to be seen—terrorism, unimaginable atrocities, including the bombing of a hospital in Gaza and a massacréd at a music festival in Israel, military confrontations on land, sea and air, and in the last phase, a problem of civilians trapped in the battleground of epic proportions albeit with greater intensity and brutality and on a bigger geopolitical and international canvas.

Gaza has a population of more than two million on whom Israel has issued an exit order. Hamas, like the LTTE, will not permit those people to leave the killing fields even if they want to. Unlike in the Sri Lankan case, with the world's attention being focused on Gaza, the question of disproportionate use of forces common to both, and the horrors of bombardment of areas of civilian inhabitation will generate more opposition. Also, Israel will not be able to physically eliminate the Hamas fighters in the way the Sri Lankan army eliminated the LTTE fighters. After they were encircled by the numerically larger Sri Lankan army, the LTTE fighters had nowhere to go. The Israeli security forces cannot encircle the Hamas fighters who have neighboring Arab territories to go to.

Many of the Palestinians may support Hamas, as indeed many Tamils supported the LTTE's fight for a separate Tamil state. But even those who supported the LTTE were not combatants, and needed to be treated as civilians. The same applies to the Palestinians. The international community and humanitarian organisations need to do their utmost to ensure that civilians are protected by both Israel and Hamas so that they do not add to crimes against humanity perpetrated by both sides during the past several days.

The National Peace Council sees the need for de-escalation as urgent. The right to exist of Israel and Palestine needs to be guaranteed. Until the political issues in Israel-Palestine are settled by political means the conflict will remain and escalate with international human rights sanctions being added to complicate the solution even more. What needs to be done immediately is to have the UN Security Council take steps to establish a ceasefire to end the war and in the longer term to reach a negotiated settlement. We urge the Sri Lankan government to use its good offices to this end.

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