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இலங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Paths To Peace

April 2016

NPC and Partners Visit Timor Leste

As part of its project Promoting Accountability and Preventing Torture by Strengthening Survivors of Torture in Asia, NPC and its partners Right to Life (R2L), Committee for Investigation of Disappeared (CID) and Human Rights Office Kandy (HRO Kandy) participated in a workshop, regional conference and exchange visit in Indonesia.

The project was implemented in Indonesia, Timor Leste, Myanmar and Sri Lanka by Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) with the financial support from the European Union. The other partners were KontraS (Indonesia), Associacaon Chega Ba Ita (Timor Leste) and Wimutti Volunteer Group (Myanmar).

In Sri Lanka, the project centred on working with partner organisations to provide healing and legal support to victims of torture and psycho-social trauma suffered due to the war. At the national level, the project gave impetus to the Transitional Justice initiative (TJ) by organising well-attended training workshops on TJ.

The main objective of the workshop on “Empowering Survivors, Strengthening Accountability for Torture” was to assess the project implemented over 30 months from 2014 to 2016. The workshop included reviewing timelines and activities and their development throughout the project, identifying the most significant changes as a result of the project and assessing the partnership.

The experiences of the four countries and the difficult task in transitioning from authoritarian rule to democracy were shared during the workshop. How countries in the Asian region continue to deal with mass violations, including torture, and the impact of the conflicts in building societies based on the rule of law were also discussed during the regional conference on “Are Transitional Justice Approaches Effective in Dealing with Mass Torture in Asia? Lessons from the Field, Strengthening Our Approach”.

The group also took part in the silent protest campaign held in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta every Thursday to commemorate victims of human rights abuses and to demand justice for them.

They then visited Timor Leste to study its TJ process and examine the current situation in the country.

At the regional conference, NPC presented a briefing paper on “The Legacy of Mass Torture and the Challenges for Reforms in Sri Lanka” and launched a video documentary on “The Wronged Right” that showcased the stories of victims of torture. Policy makers, members of the diplomatic community, government officials, civil society representatives, activists and torture victims from the four countries participated in the conference.

Learning From Timor Leste

NPC and its partners visited Timor Leste to learn from the experiments of Transitional Justice (TJ) there.

Timor Leste, then known as East Timor, was invaded by the Indonesian army who ruled from 1975 to 1999.

During that period there were revenge killings, internal conflicts, famine, resistance, systematically generated violence and mass violations of human rights. With the reformation in Indonesia in 1998, the United Nations commenced a process to prepare East Timor for independence.



The TJ process in Timor Leste started in 2000 with the establishment of the Timor Leste Commission on Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR). The mandate of CAVR was to establish the truth about human rights violations committed by all sides of the conflict that took place from 1974 to 1999; support the reintegration of those who committed minor criminal offences and other harmful acts through a community based reconciliation process; and assist victims in restoring their dignity.

A hybrid court was established to investigate and prosecute serious crimes and violations of human rights. CAVR produced its final report findings and recommendations that would help to prevent the repetition of human rights violations and to respond to the needs of victims.

The group from NPC and its partner organisations met a judge of the hybrid court who was involved in the judicial process regarding serious crimes, visited the CAVR museum and learnt about the truth commission process, and went to prison cells and torture chambers and spoke to victims' groups.

They heard about the experiences of victims in dealing with the judicial process, community based reconciliation and healing processes and met leading civil society organisations that actively participated in the TJ process to discuss their experiences.

“The main lesson we learnt from our Timor Leste visit was that the country context must be taken into account when devising solutions. In Timor Leste international experts drove the process. They designed a constitution that met all the international ideals but the capacity of the government and society to use the provisions of the constitution was limited. Even in terms of reparations, civilian victims were left out while independence fighters were looked after by the government.”

Thushara Ranasinghe
NPC Programme Manager

Torture Survivors Benefit From NPC Project

NPC's recently concluded project Promoting Accountability and Preventing Torture by Strengthening Survivors of Torture in Asia implemented in Indonesia, Timor Leste, Myanmar and Sri Lanka centred on working with partner organisations to provide healing and legal support to victims of torture and psycho-social trauma suffered due to the war. At the national level, the project gave impetus to the Transitional Justice initiative (TJ) by organising well-attended training workshops on TJ. The project was supported by Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) and funded by the EU.



NPC worked with partners to implement activities in the five districts of Colombo, Gampaha, Trincomalee, Kandy and Vavuniya that included sharing information on police torture and addressing its adverse effects on victims and their families, highlighting issues of victims and their families affected by the war and documenting stories of victims affected by police torture and by the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

Other activities included an information dissemination workshop on the Victim and Witness Protection Act, a campaign to highlight the plight of those who disappeared or were extra judicially killed and an event to bring together victims' families for a commemoration on International Human Rights Day. NPC also produced a 25 minute photo documentary highlighting the stories of torture victims.

A two day training workshop was held in Colombo to share information on the TJ process with the public. A group of 52 members from Civil Society Organisations, the donor community, government institutions, the armed forces and police attended the training and have since entered into a working relationship with NPC to promote TJ mechanisms.

Two legal cases relating to police torture filed last year continued to be supported. In addition, NPC helped sustain three on going legal cases in relation to victims incarcerated under the provisions of the PTA.

A country briefing paper was produced highlighting Sri Lanka's current status in relation to torture, the legal framework, cases and examples, and a set of recommendations was given.

"We have been working with NPC since last year. Doing this project helps in our work to create awareness of police torture through public meetings and other events. NPC is strengthening our capacity to file court cases and provide relief to victims in the form of legal advice, trauma counselling and meeting medical needs."

U. L. A. Joseph
Executive Secretary
Citizens Committee Gampaha District

IMPACT Reaches Polonnaruwa

An introductory meeting was held in Polonnaruwa for the establishment of a new District Inter Religious Committee (DIRC) under the Initiating Multi-level Partnership Action for Conflict Transformation (IMPACT) project supported by Misereor.

Six other DIRCs have already been set up in Anuradhapura, Badulla, Hambantota, Kalutara, Ratnapura and Kurunegala.

NPC has set up nine other DIRCS over the past four years.



During the three year IMPACT project, working with the new DIRCS, NPC will create awareness within communities throughout the country of the requirements to progress from post-war to post-conflict development by explaining the principles of Transitional Justice (TJ).

The meeting was organised in collaboration with Sri Lanka Human Development Foundation of Polonnaruwa. Thirty people participated, including 11 religious leaders representing the four main religions.

NPC Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera explained the mandate of NPC and the reasons for establishing DIRCs. He described the elements of TJ and NPC's role in supporting the process. After Assistant Programme Coordinator Rasika Seneviratne explained the project, views and suggestions were gathered from the participants about proposed TJ and reconciliation mechanisms.

The response from participants was very positive. A post meeting questionnaire showed that the majority of them agreed that truth, accountability, reparations and institutional reforms were necessary.

At the end of the meeting, the Polonnaruwa DIRC was established.

Also under the IMPACT project, a one day workshop on pluralism, good governance, democracy, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission and TJ was conducted for Kurunegala DIRC members.

The first monthly meeting of the Anuradhapura DIRC was also held where Project Consultant Henry de Mel discussed identification and prioritisation of issues related to the project, how to do monitoring and other relevant issues.

"This project has a good objective. We need to work with the government sector. When the governments change, leaders change so different policies come and go and there are no national policies. Core values have deteriorated. All the communities should work together for the well being of all the people of this country. Together we can do it."

Buddhist Monk from Polonnaruwa

Women Still Sidelined in Political Decision Making

When Parliament converted into a Constitutional Assembly for the first time on April 5 it was with the aim of enacting a new constitution. Accordingly, seven deputy chairpersons and 21 steering committee members were elected by the Constitutional Assembly.

However it is disappointing that only one of them, a deputy chairperson, is a woman. Not one of its 21 members of the steering committee, which is responsible for coming up with the draft constitution is a woman.

The Prime Minister informed Parliament that appointments for sub committees would be carried out after receiving the report from the Committee on Constitutional Reforms Public Representation before end April. No objections were raised by the joint opposition when appointing members for the Constitutional Assembly.

While there is a recognition in Sri Lanka today that a peaceful and just society requires multi ethnic and multi religious representation in decision making, there is still no recognition that men cannot, and should not, seek to represent the interests of the entirety of society, when more than half of the population of Sri Lanka are women.

Women have different priorities to men, and men and women together comprise a good society. The politically advanced societies with the highest quality of life, such as found in Northern Europe, have close to 50 per cent representation of women in political decision making. Those countries have seen their government policies and priorities change with the increase in the number of women who are decision makers.

The exclusion of women from decision making in Sri Lanka at the highest levels through what appears to be a bi-partisan consensus in the Constitutional Assembly is not a positive sign for a transformation of the polity or its governance. It comes at a time when the government has ensured a 25 per cent quota for women in local government through a reserved list for women who will be elected outside of the open list of candidates which will entail a 25 per cent increase in the number of local government members.

However, the government has also stated that no similar quota will be provided at the parliamentary level and that the expectation is that increased women's representation in higher levels of governance will take place through the upward mobility of women from the local level.

The National Peace Council sees the need for civil society to encourage more and more women with qualifications to come forward for public life.

We also see a need for the government to use, as a living and active policy, every opportunity for affirmative action in favour of women, such as in the constitutional reform process and the Constitutional Assembly.

In Sri Lanka it is necessary that public pressure ensures that higher levels of representation of women in governance, reaching to 50 per cent, include the Constitutional Assembly and the sub committees it sets up.

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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.

Recent Arrests In North Re-creating Past Fears

The discovery of a cache of weapons used by the LTTE in the north last month has led to security concerns that the LTTE is seeking to regroup. In the aftermath of this incident there have been many arrests including former LTTE cadres who had failed to surrender to the government at the end of the war nor gone through the required rehabilitation process. It is reported that there have been over 23 arrests in the past month. This has led to opposition parties to claim that national security is under threat by the LTTE and those who continue to support it. On the other hand, these arrests, and the manner in which they are taking place, are creating a sense of fear and foreboding amongst the people in the north.

The National Peace Council is concerned about reports from the north, which indicate that legal procedures have not been followed in the case of many of these arrests. One of the most feared features of the previous government was its utilization of security forces personnel to take away those it perceived to be threats, enemies or suspects in what became known as “white van abductions.” Although the new government recognized the flawed nature of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which has lower protections for suspects, and pledged to review and repeal it, the law remains in force and security forces continue to use it.

The present government won two successive national elections last year on the votes of ethnic and religious minorities who had become the focus of governmental impunity and virtually unanimously voted against the former government. The government has also committed itself to a process of transitional justice in which the truths about the past will be ascertained, accountability for war crimes and human rights violations will be ensured which include the wrongs of all sides, and there will be institutional reforms so that the past does not recur.

The National Peace Council calls on the government to remain committed to its pledge to move forward in accordance with internationally accepted standards in a manner that will heal the wounds of the past and rebuild trust between the ethnic and religious communities and the state. We also call upon the TNA, as the main representatives of the Tamil people, to strengthen the confidence of the general population in its commitment to democracy by dissociating itself from the LTTE and its acts of violence and terror even as it continues to fight for the political rights of the Tamil polity in the country.

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