



1st edition - 30 June 2012

**ISBN 978- 955- 1274-54 -2**

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Cover Design - Kolitha Dissanayake

Layout - Niroshana Upendra

Photographs - National Peace Council

Published by - National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

12/ 14 Purana Vihara Road Colombo 06

Tp - 0112 818 344

Fax - 0112 819 064

Email - npc@sltnet.lk

Web - www.peace-srilanka.org

Printed by - C&I Creations

73 / 1 Pirivena road

Boralessgamuwa

Sri Lanka

**Collection of success stories -** Rasika Seneviratne  
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This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of National Peace Council (NPC) and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

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in border villages**

K. Wijedasa  
Journalist, Lake House  
Anuradapura DIRC

**We had an opportunity to meet the needs of  
a neglected school**

M. Kamardeen  
Vice Principal, Thorayaya Muslim College  
Kurunegala DIRC

**Observation visits to the South made a  
positive attitudinal change**

Daphne Thuram  
Mannar DIRC

**Children got a clear understanding of inter  
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# The Role of Inter Religious and Civil Society Leaders in Building a Resilient Society



**Jehan Perera**  
Executive Director  
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Even today, as the three year mark has passed since the end of the war, much remains to be done to heal the wounds of war within the hearts of individuals and within the psyche of communities. The war has ended but the conflict that divided us remains. Experience in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the world makes it evident that when the path of hatred and violence is taken there is no natural end, only constant escalation. Stopping this vicious cycle requires a conscious act of will and a strategy for de-escalation. It requires rationality to see that the course of hatred and mistrust is hurting everyone, including one's own community. It requires a vision of a process of justice and reconciliation that will lead to the good of everyone. And it calls for faith that people and institutions, once thought to be given and unchangeable, will in fact change.

The evidence of positive relations and the desire for such positive relations between the ethnic communities exists both out of Sri Lanka and within it too. It gives reason for hope that the basis for unity and joint problem-solving exists. What is lacking is the political leadership that shows the way forward to people. Most people want to interact with members of other communities and show them that they bear them goodwill. They like to prove to themselves and to the world that they are not chauvinist or do not discriminate against others. These feelings are strengthened by religious teachings that stress universal values. "No one is an outcaste by birth", "Remember you were once strangers in the land", and "The world is one



Inter religious leaders in discussions with head of the Media Center for National Security and the Secretariat for Non Governmental Organizations, Mr. Lakshman Hulugalla



family”, are some of those teachings that echo in the consciousness of the masses of Sri Lankan people.

Two years ago I was part of a small team of less than ten people who set up inter religious groups in twelve districts of the country, half in the north and east, and half of them in other districts. It was slow and hard work at the beginning. We did not know the religious clergy in many of the districts and they did not know us, so it was difficult to get them to come for meetings and to commit their precious time when their own religious duties kept them busy. It was discouraging to travel for hours to a distant area and find that only a handful had turned up for the meeting. But soon the value of those meetings spread by word of mouth. The religious clergy in a district who knew of each other, but had never had an opportunity to spend time with one another, now found that opportunity and began to value it.

Two years later, these inter religious councils have done a great deal of work together to improve their understanding of one another and of their religions. They have begun to understand the nature of the political problems that separates the ethnic communities and makes their political leaders see each other as opponents instead of partners. So far the mutual acts of good will and assistance are at the micro level. Civil society groups, which are usually small and with limited resources, tend to act at the micro level. But they give a hint of what a more powerful entity, such as the government, could do at the macro level if it has the desire to be an agent of change. Governments have the capacity to act at the macro level in a way that civil society groups do not have.

Among the many stories of change that come from the two years of work that are given in this publication, three stand out. In one case the army decided to move out of a high security zone. But when they withdrew, they were to leave behind a Buddhist shrine at which the soldiers had worshipped. There were concerns among the returning Tamil community that with the passage of time the shrine would be neglected, the jungle would overrun it, and that it may even be vandalized, as there was going to be no more Buddhists left to look after the shrine once the army withdrew. They feared that this could lead to misunderstandings and problems in the future. So the inter religious group met with the army commander of the area and explained the problem to him.

The Buddhist monk in the group took the lead in this. The result was that the army agreed to take the shrine away with them when they withdrew.

A second example of a helpful intervention was during the scare caused by the so-called grease devil. In one area there was a major confrontation between the military and civilians. The inter religious council went as a delegation to the hospital where many civilians lay injured, to sympathise with them. The Buddhist monk with them who had good connections with the government and with the military took the matter up with senior officials to ensure that the problem did not escalate any further.

The third example is the manner in which the inter religious representatives of the 12 districts negotiated with each other regarding a statement that they wished to present to the entire group. They were conscious of both the need to be truthful with regard to their aspirations, as well as to temper what they said so that the entire group could accept it. Once again they showed, on a micro level, what is necessary to be done at the macro level by the large political actors.

Prior to joining the inter religious councils, the clergy of different religions did not work together, even though they knew of each other and bore no ill will towards each other. The missing element was leadership to bring them together and to keep them together. Where the basic relationship is positive and there is willingness to deepen it, a little bit of outside facilitation or leadership can make a huge difference. If small civil society organizations with so little power can achieve positive results on the ground in overcoming ethnic differences, we can only imagine what the Government can achieve. If the Government leaders of our country show this same pragmatism in providing leadership to overcome the ethnic conflict, the people will surely ensure that those political leaders will achieve the great objective of winning the peace after war.

It would be opportune to conclude with the words of Thich Nhat

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Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk who was in the forefront of his country's peace movement during the days of the Vietnam War in the 1970s: "We may be clear about the need for change in our country. But we need the courage to express ourselves even when the majority is going in the opposite direction. We should be supported by our loved ones and by our colleagues who agree with us. A change of direction can only happen when there is collective awakening. Individuals and small groups can spark a change in consciousness." The work of the Inter Religious District Councils highlighted in this publication demonstrates without doubt that bringing love and healing to the lives of people will never cease and micro efforts that transform the lives of individuals will also have macro impacts that transform the life of society.

**“The evidence of positive relations and the desire for such positive relations between the ethnic communities exists both out of Sri Lanka and within it too. It gives reason for hope that the basis for unity and joint problem-solving exists. What is lacking is the political leadership that shows the way forward to people.”**

## Meeting the humanitarian needs of women and children affected by war through inter religious coexistence and community response



Inter religious leaders present problems of war affected people to head of the Media Center for National Security and the Secretariat for Non Governmental Organizations, Mr. Lakshman Hulugalla



**Saman Seneviratne**

Project Coordinator, Inter Religious Project  
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

The National Peace Council was established in 1995 as a cooperative effort of religious leaders and lay intellectuals. At that time there was the need for an organization that could get involved with the divided ethnic groups to bring a sustainable peace. NPC has conducted several programs with the advice of religious and community leaders to build unity, brotherhood, cooperation and peace among the various ethnic groups. From its inception, NPC has contributed much through community activities to bring trust and understanding among community groups and various religious leaders.

NPC has explained its views to leaders who participated in its programs at national and international level. Although we are a people who have diverse ethnic identities and religious practices, we also have common aspects - we are Sri Lankans living in the same land sharing common resources with each other. Therefore we must stretch our hands to our fellow citizens who expect brotherhood, unity and peace. There is a saying that "Peace is better than war, but it is also enormously difficult." Real peace is a tireless stream of spiritual actions and concepts. It requires generosity, trust and sincerity. All religions preach nonviolence, social justice, equality, brotherhood, love, kindness, compassion, tolerance and honesty. Therefore our religious leaders can explain these teachings to the people and guide them to live as a community in unity, cooperation and peace.

With the ending of the war, attention is focused on saving people who were affected in one way or another and on building a resilient community

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that is returning to normalcy. For its part, NPC launched the project “Meeting Humanitarian Needs through Inter Religious Cooperation and Community Response” in 2010. The main objective was to meet the humanitarian needs of women and children affected by war through the cooperation of religious leaders and community activists. To achieve this, District Inter Religious Councils (DIRCs) were established in the 12 districts of Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Galle, Matara, Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara. The representation of members in 12 DIRCs is given below:

| District   | Representatives   | Buddhists | Christians | Islamic | Hindus | Total | Male | Female | Youth |
|--|-------------------|-----------|------------|---------|--------|-------|------|--------|-------|
| Jaffna   | Religious Leaders | 1         | 8          | 3       | 5      | 64    | 26   | 38     | 18    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 0         | 16         | 7       | 24     |       |      |        |       |
| Vavuniya   | Religious Leaders | 2         | 11         | 7       | 10     | 62    | 23   | 39     | 25    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 5         | 8          | 5       | 14     |       |      |        |       |
| Mannar   | Religious Leaders | 1         | 3          | 4       | 5      | 16    | 32   | 24     | 23    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 1         | 20         | 8       | 7      |       |      |        |       |
| Trincomalee  | Religious Leaders | 2         | 7          | 5       | 2      | 64    | 15   | 49     | 18    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 10        | 3          | 27      | 8      |       |      |        |       |
| Ampara   | Religious Leaders | 5         | 3          | 4       | 3      | 69    | 23   | 46     | 30    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 15        | 10         | 19      | 10     |       |      |        |       |
| Batticaloa   | Religious Leaders | 0         | 3          | 6       | 3      | 52    | 17   | 35     | 14    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 0         | 9          | 11      | 18     |       |      |        |       |
| Anuradhapura                                       | Religious Leaders | 11        | 3          | 2       | 1      | 64    | 22   | 42     | 23    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 28        | 6          | 7       | 6      |       |      |        |       |
| Polonnaruwa  | Religious Leaders | 7         | 2          | 4       | 1      | 59    | 25   | 34     | 26    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 21        | 6          | 11      | 7      |       |      |        |       |
| Kurunegala   | Religious Leaders | 3         | 11         | 3       | 1      | 57    | 23   | 34     | 30    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 6         | 23         | 7       | 3      |       |      |        |       |
| Puttalam   | Religious Leaders | 7         | 3          | 3       | 1      | 64    | 37   | 27     | 20    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 32        | 7          | 7       | 4      |       |      |        |       |
| Galle  | Religious Leaders | 6         | 7          | 3       | 0      | 74    | 30   | 44     | 25    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 41        | 5          | 8       | 4      |       |      |        |       |
| Matara   | Religious Leaders | 7         | 2          | 2       | 1      | 62    | 24   | 38     | 27    |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 37        | 8          | 3       | 2      |       |      |        |       |
| Total no. of religious and CBO leaders in 12 DIRCs | Religious Leaders | 62        | 65         | 46      | 30     | 193   |      |        |       |
|  | CBO Leaders       | 196       | 131        | 120     | 107    | 554   |      |        |       |
|  |                   |           |            |         |        | 747   | 297  | 450    | 279   |

Following this three Provincial Inter Religious Councils (PIRCs) were established as given below:

- Southern Province Inter Religious Council that includes representatives of Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Galle and Matara DIRCs
- Eastern Province Inter Religious Council that includes representatives of Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara DIRCs
- Northern Province Inter Religious Council that includes the representatives of Jaffna, Vauniya, Mannar and Puttalam DIRCs

In order to have a dialogue with national level political and religious leaders, a National Peace Secretariat was established in Colombo on February 23, 2011, with the participation of religious leaders who represent national and district levels. On several occasions representatives of the Secretariat and PIRCs discussed problems of war affected people with national level and district level political leaders, government officers and various other officers. They identified initial steps to be taken to solve these problems (See Annex 2 and 3). The DIRCs also tried hard to solve problems of the people in the same way.

The main objective of the project was “to build peaceful relations among the ethnic communities that can contribute in building a resilient society in the post war context.” To meet this objective it was expected to achieve the following results:

- Result 1 – Relationships built to facilitate dialogue and create mutual understanding between religious communities and religious leaders at district and provincial level.
- Result 2 – Capacity strengthened of religious communities, including women of faith and youth, to provide leadership on conflict mitigation and reconciliation issues.
- Result 3 – Religious communities enabled to identify, implement and monitor humanitarian activities, focusing on caring for conflict affected

women and children.

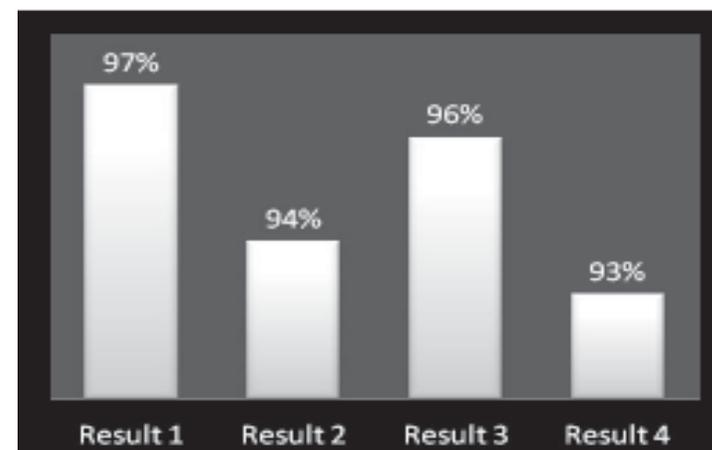
- Result 4 – National awareness raised about the humanitarian experiences and practices of different religious communities in Sri Lanka.

To confirm that we have achieved the expected results, we have published selected success stories in this booklet. They were selected from 248 stories.

| Nos. | District Inter Religious Council | No of people interviewed | No of selected success stories |
|------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1    | Jaffna                           | 19                       | 3                              |
| 2    | Vavuniya                         | 18                       | 2                              |
| 3    | Mannar                           | 22                       | 4                              |
| 4    | Puttalam                         | 23                       | 4                              |
| 5    | Anuradhapura                     | 18                       | 3                              |
| 6    | Polonnaruwa                      | 23                       | 4                              |
| 7    | Batticaloa                       | 17                       | 2                              |
| 8    | Ampara                           | 21                       | 3                              |
| 9    | Trincomalee                      | 22                       | 4                              |
| 10   | Galle                            | 23                       | 5                              |
| 11   | Matara                           | 24                       | 5                              |
| 12   | Kurunagala                       | 18                       | 3                              |
|      | <b>Total</b>                     | <b>248</b>               | <b>42</b>                      |

The results achieved are shown in percentages in the bar graph. To confirm the results, several assessments were conducted with the cooperation of the officers of NPC and outside officers.

Achieved Result as Percentage



The positive achievements of the project are summarized as follows:

- Through meetings, workshops and exchange observation visits, opportunities arose for inter religious community members and various civil society activists to understand the special needs, cultural values and religious beliefs of each religion and community. This has built better relations among them.
- The various activities conducted by DIRCs and Provincial Inter Religious Councils (PIRCs) from their initiation helped to analyze various humanitarian problems faced by vulnerable war affected women and children and also problems of other people.
- Successful attempts were made by DIRCs to solve identified needs of war affected people by directing them to Government representatives and other organizations for necessary solutions.

As Sri Lankans all of us must work to remove suspicion, fear and distrust that prevail in the post war context in order to create a prosperous country. We must stop violence. We have to build a society that listens to and understands the needs of others.

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We must explore ways and means to save vulnerable women and children who have been affected by 30 years of war. We must work to solve problems of the people and to alleviate their mental anguish. It is our duty to design and create an environment that protects the rights of all. Through this we can avoid the potential for future ethnic conflict.

As a partner in society, the responsibility of the DIRC is to direct the attention of relevant authorities to problems, and to build a resilient society. As the last step of the project, NPC held a National Inter Religious Convention in Colombo on June 16, 2012, to direct the attention of both the rulers and ruled to our experiences and attempts, which can be used to create a sustainable peace.

**There is a saying that “Peace is better than war, but it is also enormously difficult.” Real peace is a tireless stream of spiritual actions and concepts. It requires generosity, trust and sincerity. All religions preach nonviolence, social justice, equality brotherhood, love, kindness, compassion, tolerance and honesty.**

### People who provided guidance, courage and strength to speed up a difficult project to an effective end



**Rasika Seneviratne**  
Assistant Project Coordinator  
Inter Religious Program  
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Religious teachings have guided people along the proper path. Religious leaders play an invaluable role in explaining the virtues of non violence, social justice, brotherhood, tolerance and humility. Therefore with the objective of closely working with religious leaders to build better understanding and relationships among and between religious leaders and communities, NPC established 12 District Inter Religious Councils (DIRCs) in 12 districts. This was a difficult and challenging task because we faced various problems and issues in dealing with certain regions and events.

Some argued that building and creating coexistence was not a task for NGOs. Others argued that this program was an effort to implement part of a foreign agenda. Initially, DIRCs were established in the Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mannar, Anuradhapura, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Polonnaruwa, Ampara, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Galle and Matara districts. Through the programs, conducted with the 747 religious leaders and civil society activists who were involved with these religious councils, mutual understanding among them improved greatly. As a result, they identified issues and humanitarian needs faced by war affected people and took necessary measures to direct the issues and proposed solutions to the relevant authorities.

We are grateful to all resource persons and translators who cooperated with us. We can never forget the contributions made by partner organizations and DIRC coordinators who enabled the DIRCs to function effectively. Among

the inter religious leaders and civil society activists, there were some who played an important role. As a result of their contributions, there were significant quality improvements in each DIRC. If not for the commitment of the religious leaders and civil society leaders of the 12 districts, this program would not have been such a remarkable success.

The political representatives of respective provinces, government officers and private organization officials made a great effort to provide solutions to some of the issues directed to them by Provincial Inter Religious Council members. If not for the interest of these officers, the DIRCs may not have been able to continue their efforts. Apart from the religious leaders selected to the National Peace Secretariat from DIRCs, several others representing different sectors contributed a great deal to this cause. National level NGO representatives and other religious leaders are among them.

On occasions where the humanitarian needs of war affected women and children were forwarded to national level political leaders and government officers at higher levels, their cooperation helped to increase the effectiveness of efforts made by the National Peace Secretariat and DIRCs. We appreciate that they spared their time to listen to the religious and civil society leaders.

At the last phase of this program, the three PIRCs adopted declarations at their provincial conferences that included the current humanitarian problems of each area and the solutions that could be taken. At the National Convention in Colombo, a similar declaration was adopted unanimously depicting their unity and cooperation. These declarations were published in three Sinhala, Tamil and English newspapers. As this is something more than a simple event, it is our duty to thank them all.

We extend our special thanks to the team who made this project a reality by drafting the project report and forwarding it to the European Union. They include Mrs. Regina Ramalingam, the Former Chief Executive (Operations) NPC; Dr. Jehan Perera, Executive Director; and Members of

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the Board of Directors and Governing Council including the former and the present chairmen. We appreciate the support given by the Administrative Manager and Finance Manager of NPC and their staff to make this project a success. A special commitment was made by Mr. Saman Seneviratne as the project coordinator and Mr. Ranjeewa Perera, Mr. Thyaga Chandana, Mr. C. Manimaran and Mr. Shakir Mohammed as field coordinators to implement this project efficiently and effectively. We are very grateful to the European Union, which considered this project as a timely need and provided us with necessary funds to implement it.

In most cases it is not easy to assess projects that are implemented to bring attitudinal and behavioural changes. Even so we believe this booklet that includes success stories on the attempts made by DIRCs will bear witness to the fact that we have achieved the fourfold results given in the project report. We thank all religious and community leaders who forwarded stories on their work at local levels. We hope they will excuse us for not publishing all the stories since space in the book was limited.

We are grateful to the translators who translated this book into Sinhala and Tamil and to Mr. Laknath Gunathilaka, who was with us as an intern, for voluntarily contributing to the English translations. Also special thanks go to Mr. K.W.H.A. Somaratne, who did the proof reading very carefully. We thank Mr. Kolitha Dissanayake, a student of Sripali Campus, for designing the cover page and Mr. Niroshana Upendra of the Media Unit NPC, for the page designing. We thank Mr. Thushal Withanage and Mr. Rukmal Silva of the Media Unit NPC for their support. Also we extend our thanks to Miss S. Tharshani and Mr. Rohitha Wickremarachchi for page designing in the Tamil text, Mrs. Pushpa Ranjinee for coordinating the translation of articles into Tamil.

We thank Mr. Jagath Liyanarachchi Attorney at Law, Mr. S. Sivagurunathan and Mr. Hilmy Ishak who provided us guidance in preparing the manifesto. Finally we express our gratitude to members of the Board of Directors and other officers who encouraged us in field activities by joining us, and to all religious leaders who advised us, contributing to making this project a success.

Also we thank the unnamed people who cooperated with us in all sectors of the project.

## Spiritual roots that led to conflicts and challenges



Presenting facts on implementation of the language policy to Hon. Minister of Languages and Social Integration, Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara



**Ruki Fernando**  
Human Rights Activist

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” (Margaret Mead)

The potential of inter faith efforts to promote reconciliation and respond to the needs of marginalized and oppressed persons and communities has often been acknowledged, including in the final report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). Thus, it is important to document some such efforts, including positive results as well as past and ongoing struggles, that may not have yielded the expected results. These, along with challenges that may not have been addressed, are likely to serve as inspiration and encouragement for more efforts.

An example of positive initiatives in the direction of peace building at the community level is the work undertaken by District Inter Religious Councils (DIRCs) that were established by the National Peace Council from 2010 to 2012 with the broader aim of responding to humanitarian needs of communities and individuals and promoting reconciliation. The leadership and determination of those who persevered in their efforts when results and successes were not assured serve as an inspiration to us. If not for their patience and convictions we may not have been able to read about positive results and struggles, and may be much further away in addressing challenges that remain.

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What follows in this book are stories of people who did not give up even in difficult circumstances. In general the stories show positive results of inter faith initiatives undertaken in responding to concrete needs of particular communities, while bringing about attitudinal changes among DIRC members. Reading through the stories leads us to reflect on the efforts of those trying to be peace builders. Even when actual positive changes on the ground and in lives of people were not clear, we could look at the involvement of DIRC members itself as a success. Thus, this was a reflection about stories of struggle, as much or even more than successful results.

The collective inter faith nature of the efforts and the ability to work with and on behalf of religious and ethnic communities that were not one's own made these struggles significant. It was also about inner changes many DIRC members have narrated, and who they became in the process of their work. It would not have been easy for those focused on their own religion to open themselves to teachings and traditions of other religions. These efforts gave an indication about the potential for inter faith groups to address serious problems that affect individuals and communities in their own districts and the country as a whole.

### Discussions with policy makers

A key activity undertaken by DIRC members and representatives of the National Peace Secretariat was to meet with policy makers and influential people and bring to their attention problems facing various communities. Given the challenging environment and controversial nature of some issues raised, this was the area where the DIRCs' initiatives have led to fewer immediately visible results on the ground, but in which the initiatives themselves were a measure of success.

Among the significant achievements was the handing over of lands occupied by the military in Jaffna for more than 10 years to their owners. This was based on an initiative of the Jaffna DIRC. At the same time, the DIRC appealed to the military to remove a Buddhist statue, citing the fact that all residents were Hindus and no one would be worshipping the

statue, which may be neglected. The military agreed to remove the statue.

After robberies of antiques from Hindu Kovils were brought to the attention of the Governor of the Northern Province by the DIRC, a mobile police patrol provided security to Kovils. In Mannar, based on complaints by DIRC to the Government Agent and the Divisional Secretary, police took action to curb the harassment of women by youth who were purchasing alcohol from a local wine store.

Among people the DIRC and National Peace Secretariat members met were the Director General of the National Youth Services Council, Director of the National Child Protection Authority, Minister in charge of National Integration and Languages, an opposition parliamentarian, Director of the NGO secretariat and head of the Media Centre for National Security, Governor of the Northern Province, Chairman of the Eastern Provincial Council, former President of the Business for Peace Alliance and members of the European Parliament.

Some of the issues DIRCs and the National Peace Secretariat raised in these discussions were:

- Lack of a national youth policy
- Lack of follow up of plans in relation to youth who had been rehabilitated
- Problems related to resettlement of displaced persons in the North and East
- Compensation for those killed and disappeared
- Lack of livelihood support for war widows
- Restrictions on NGOs in the North
- Problems related to language rights, including the sending of government circulars and communications in Sinhalese and singing of the national anthem only in Sinhalese
- Lack of transparency in development initiatives in the North and non-involvement of people in the area in planning
- Problems regarding security for civilians in the North
- Problems related to High Security Zones in the North
- Lack of interest of the business community in humanitarian problems
- Problems related to protection of children, including the inefficiencies of officials, deficiencies in child protection centres and non reporting

of cases related to child abuse to relevant institutions

The officials committed themselves to take action on some of these issues and to direct others to relevant authorities but except in the two cases cited above, actual results were not known.

### Other local efforts

There were several stories of DIRCs attempting to grapple with immediate problems faced by individuals and communities in their own district. These initiatives included:

- Conducting of a mobile service to provide birth certificates and national identity cards to a community that had been deprived of them for generations
- Legalizing marriages
- Negotiating with the District Secretariat to provide books to children who had not been going to school due to poverty
- Ensuring that children who were not going to school started going to school
- Provision of scholarships and school materials to poor children
- Provision of material support to Sinhalese and Tamil residents of an elders' home by the mosque in the area
- Provision of facilities to 50 small traders
- A Maulavi organizing a blood donation program in a mosque for the first time

Initiatives in their own districts enabled children and adults, including DIRC members, to visit different places of worship, learn about other religions and appreciate the positive roles of clergy. One Christian DIRC member narrated how she had started to read materials on Buddhism and the Koran. Another teacher reported that children were given assignments to study other religions.

### Conflict resolution and awareness raising programs

Conflict resolution was an important part of the inter faith initiative. A Hindu Kurukkal said he had called on an Islamic Maulavi to intervene to resolve tensions between the two communities. They were colleagues on a DIRC. DIRC members in Puttalam prevented tensions from escalating when a man known as the grease devil was assaulting people. One member of a DIRC who joined training on conflict resolution used the knowledge to conduct programs for community based organizations while another participant said it helped in his work on a mediation board.

One DIRC identified awareness raising on human rights and child abuse as a key issue in the district. It organized an awareness raising program on human rights and child abuse. Another DIRC noted that there were many teenage mothers and conducted an awareness raising program for students.

### Cross regional initiatives

Several DIRCs visited other districts and distributed material support to communities including books to schools, scholarships for students and flood relief. Some knew about requirements in advance and collected goods to be donated before visiting, while others sent materials after coming to know of needs during a visit.

One of the more challenging efforts was by a Southern Sinhalese journalist who published an article about problems faced by people in the East based on his visit there as a member of the DIRC. He also published an article about the visit of a Northern DIRC to the South. According to the journalist this was difficult because the state media was reluctant to publish such stories, and so it was a significant achievement.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

### Symbolic actions

Several members of DIRCs stressed the symbolic importance of clergy of different religions meeting, even if it was only for the purpose of coming together. In one district, the Catholic tradition of taking the statue of Mother Mary to houses of devotees was extended to Hindu and Buddhist houses. Places of worship of one religion opened their doors to people of other religions and on several occasions, people participated in rituals of other religions. In another district, a “dansala” (a Buddhist tradition of providing free food and drinks to passersby held in May or June) was organized by a Christian group. Clergy of one religion going to a place of worship of another religion was considered significant and in some areas, this was reported as the first time it had happened.

Muslim and Sinhalese students participated in functions of a Tamil school and they appreciated each other’s performances. The symbolism of Buddhists in the South contributing to needs of Tamils and Muslims in the East was significant. Some were impressed by the hospitality offered by clergy and people in the regions they visited, while another DIRC member cited the exchange of souvenirs as a symbol of inter religious harmony. People in a Muslim village invited a Buddhist monk to stay with them.

### Attitudinal changes

Attitudinal changes in DIRC members – both clergy and laity – appear prominently in many of the stories narrated. One Tamil Christian priest from the North said that he realized that other communities had also suffered during the war and member of a Southern DIRC said he saw the real situation and problems faced by people in the North when he visited as part of an inter faith group. Many DIRC members, both clergy and laity, highlighted the friendships across religions and regions they made in their inter faith journeys. One member of the Galle DIRC reported that he attended family functions of a fellow DIRC member in the Northern district of Jaffna. Another DIRC member in Vavuniya revealed that for the first time, she was able to participate in the wedding ceremony of a

Muslim family through the friendships she developed being part of the DIRC.

One DIRC member revealed that he had not liked clergy of another religion after he had witnessed an incident in which a clergyman used violence. But his interactions with clergy of that religion through inter faith initiatives made him change his attitude. He realized that incident was an exception rather than the rule, and that other clergies of that religion did not engage in such acts. On the contrary, they displayed compassion towards people who were suffering, irrespective of religion.

### Contextual assessment of inter faith initiatives and challenges ahead

The years 2010 to 2012 were a post-war period in Sri Lanka that saw the passing of 18<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution, which further strengthened powers of the Executive Presidency and compromised independent institutions set up to ensure checks and balances on rulers and address grievances of citizens. It was also a period that saw the continued polarization of Sri Lankans along ethnic lines, as indicated in election results. People in the North continued to complain of militarization, occupation of land by the military, restrictions and harassments, discrimination, lack of support and facilities for displaced communities to resettle, and attempts at cultural domination, while a crackdown on dissent, police torture, land grabbing and corruption were reported around the country.

It was in the context of these socio-political-economic ground realities that there arose a need to assess the successes, struggles and challenges for inter faith initiatives in Sri Lanka. Overall, the DIRCs appear to have been successful in undertaking several humanitarian initiatives in terms of providing material assistance and services and undertaking symbolic actions. Although they have ventured to address structural problems and those related to government policies and practices, the real challenge is the level of commitment and involvement and also following up on discussions held with authorities. Principled common positions taken by inter religious groups on critical issues affecting the citizens would go a long way in dispelling suspicions and prejudices about some religious leaders speaking, acting and sometimes

being silent based on political considerations rather than religious values and teachings. The DIRCs, particularly clergy, could play an important role in sharing inter religious perspectives with officials and authorities.

While DIRCs and the National Peace Secretariat met a number of officials at provincial and national level and raised a number of concerns, following up on commitments and promises made and monitoring actual changes on the ground in terms of policy and practice remain a challenge. The DIRCs have won the support of local government officials, politicians, military and the police. However, if the DIRCs address critical issues, including structural and policy matters, they may have to challenge the authorities about practical problems faced by people due to their policies and practices.

All communities have their own stories of suffering during the war, and their own opinions on the importance of seeking forgiveness to move forward. The attitudinal changes, charitable and symbolic actions undertaken and good relations built so far should provide a solid foundation for the DIRCs to transform these efforts into actions that address root causes and consequences of the ethnic conflict and structural problems leading to injustice and oppression of particular people and communities. The litmus test of inter religious initiatives would be when DIRC members were able support the people and take actions in their favor, even if it put them on the wrong side of politicians, Government officials, military, police and perhaps even be marginalized by their own religious community.

“The goal ever recedes from us  
The greater the progress the greater the recognition of our unworthiness;  
Satisfaction lies in the effort not in the attainment  
Full effort is full victory.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

**One of the more challenging efforts was by a Southern Sinhalese journalist who published an article about problems faced by people in the East based on his visit there as a member of the DIRC. He also published an article about the visit of a Northern DIRC to the South.**

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

### A way to minimize ethnic and inter religious conflicts



#### **Maulavi Abdullah Mahamood Alim**

Principal, Hameedia Arabic School  
Chairman, All Ceylon Islamic Organization  
Co-Convenor - DIRC Puttalam

A police officer was killed in Puttalam as a result of the grease devil incidents. This caused a conflict among the Sinhala and Muslim communities because several Muslim people were suspected of the killing. We discussed the situation with Defence Secretary Mr. Gotabhaya Rajapaksha and the Inspector General of Police, as well as the District Secretary and the senior police officers.

We, as the religious leaders, informed people through our places of worship to be calm. This paved the way to settle the clash peacefully. As we requested, the Defence Secretary provided necessary protection to the town. We intervened, paying money to the Puttalam Police for losses incurred by the police station and as redress to the family of the police officer who died. With the help of D.I.G Pujitha Jayasundara we were able to settle this problem peacefully. In another incident, with the intervention of the DIRC, we settled a dispute between a Tamil and a Muslim that could have turned violent in Udappuwa area of Puttalam. A Tamil person who had attacked a Muslim, hid in a Kovil. Some Muslims who knew where the man was entered the Kovil and damaged its windows, which angered other Tamils of the area.

I discussed the situation with the Kurukkal of the Kovil and avoided any further violence. This showed that if we conducted peaceful negotiations with relevant parties, we could settle difficult issues. The interventions of religious leaders were vital.



Handing over a message about humanitarian problems faced by people in the Northern Province to the Bishop of Mannar, Rev. Rayappu Joseph



## A social mission to understand the thinking and aspirations of the people



The inaugural meeting of Inter Religious Council in Jaffna



**S. Tharmaraj**  
DIRC Jaffna

In 2000, land in the Ariyala area in Jaffna was acquired by the Army. When the people wanted it back after the war, we had discussions with government officials and the military to formulate a plan to return the land to the owners. However progress was slow and people were worried. We approached religious leaders to address the problem and we were able to obtain a resolution through their efforts. We held extensive discussions and were able to gain the support of relevant Government officials to speed up the resettlement process.

In May 2012, the military handed over the land and property to the owners. After visiting the area, religious leaders noticed that a Buddha statue had been left behind. They explained that since the people were Hindus, there would not be anyone to take care of the statue. They said this could develop into a potential conflict between the two communities. When we told this to Army officials, they agreed to remove the statue. The Army also promised to hand over some remaining land to its owners soon. Here the Army acted according to the wishes of the people. Some houses had no doors and windows. When one woman visited the house where she had lived, it was not there. She became alarmed and scolded the people around her. The Army officers explained that people had lost not only houses but also their lives and even loved ones. They advised her to be satisfied with what was left. The returnees were not happy about the shifting of the Army camp to another location and the DIRC will discuss this with the Army on another occasion.



## Case Studies in Reconciliation

### Increased the awareness of child abuse and domestic violence



**Ven Buddhiyagama Chandraratne Thero**  
President, Vanni Cultural Foundation  
Co-Convenor-DIRC Puttalam

The Puttalam DIRC identified several problems faced by women and children victimized by the war, and directed them to the relevant authorities. The identification of such problems were an important function of inter religious councils.

I brought the problems of child abuse and violations of human rights to the attention of the Puttalam Community Studies Centre, which is affiliated to the Human Rights Research Institute of the University of Colombo. The Centre organized workshops on securing legal aid for cases of violence against women and child abuse and on civil law.

In another event, over 100 Sinhala, Muslim, and Tamil children from the Puttalam district participated in an art competition.

Through the program we were able to improve the awareness of civil society activists and to build a formal network among them. The children who participated the art competition told us that the program improved their knowledge of human rights.

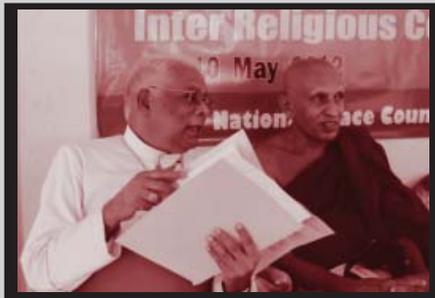


Discussion with Mr. K.A. Bais, the Mayor of Puttalam





A gift from Mr. Neil Daluwatte, DIG Southern Province, to the religious leaders of the North



## Building trust of the people of the South in the religious and civil leaders of the North



### Fr. Thamilnesan

Co-Convenor  
DIRC Mannar

We achieved positive changes through the DIRC established in the Mannar district by NPC with support of European Union. A change has also taken place in me on a personal level.

Through DIRC activities, especially meetings of the National Peace Secretariat, we exchanged ideas and got to know each other. We were able to understand problems of particular regions. We were able to develop personal contacts with leaders of other religions and civil society leaders. This kind of unity is important for developing a peaceful environment in the future.

Our members of DIRC visited the Southern Province. We selected nine religious and civil society leaders, who agreed to go despite being afraid that people in the South would not respect them. But they returned with changed views, saying they had been treated kindly.

The visit opened our eyes to the problems and aspirations of the people in the South, and also to their goodwill.

### Inter religious values pave way for national unity



#### **Chaminda Dahanayake**

Member, Pittabaddara Pradheshiya Sabha  
DIRC Matara

The Matara DIRC implemented a mobile service to issue identity cards, birth certificates and marriage certificate in the Pittabaddara Divisional Secretary area.

When we visited the estate areas we realized that some of the people, even with grandchildren, had not registered their marriages. They could not get birth certificates. In one case, an elderly Tamil couple wanted to file for divorce but found they had not been married. The committee intervened and managed to reconcile the couple so they no longer wanted a divorce.

With the mobile service, we were able to address these long-standing problems with the help of Government officials and civil society leaders. I would like to thank the OIC of the police station, District Secretary, Grama Sevas and civil society leaders for their cooperation.

Since we held the mobile service at the Pittabaddara temple, we gained the trust of the Tamil community and brought about a better relationship between the temple and the people.

The people were able to get welfare benefits, send children to school and travel without fear with the relevant documents.



The Pittabaddara Divisional Secretary and the OIC of Pitabeddara Police station sign as witnesses at a wedding



## This program made inter religious coexistence a reality



Discussions with Major General G.A. Chandrasiri, Governor of the Northern Province, about the humanitarian problems of the people of North



### **Ven Migahjadure Sirivimala Thero**

Chief Prelate, Jaffna Naga Vihara  
Co-Convenor- DIRC Jaffna

Several people in Navanthurai village in Jaffna had been assaulted by a man known as the grease devil and admitted to hospital. The DIRC discussed the matter on several occasions and thought about ways to settle the problem. When Father Praveen and I went to the hospital to see the victims, we realized that they were terribly afraid. They cried, saying they were scared and asked us to save them. Returning to the temple, I held discussions with Army officials and asked them to provide security to the village. I called a coordinating secretary of the President and told him it could be a serious issue that would disturb peace in the area. Minister Susil Premajayanth called me to ask about the situation and when he came to Jaffna, we were able to tell him the objectives of the DIRC. He promised to strengthen security in the area.

On 15 November 2011, we met Major General G.A. Chandrasiri, the Governor of the Northern Province, and handed him a letter citing the problems faced by people in the North and how to address them. I was able to mediate at this meeting. The Governor said he would consider the concerns presented to him in our letter, although some of them were beyond his purview. He said he would take immediate action to address the issues he could solve and direct the others to relevant authorities. A smuggling ring operating in the North was robbing religious artifacts from Hindu Kovils. We brought this to the attention of the Governor and were able to get a mobile police division to patrol the Kovils in the night. Following the discussions with Jaffna DIRC, the Governor directed that inter religious committees should be formed to gather information on women and children. NPC informed me about this. The news is on a web site. A printed copy was given to our committee members.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

Helped all irrespective of race or religion during floods



**Thammanawe Buddhika Maniyo**  
DIRC Anuradhapura

Through the Anuradhapura DIRC, we collected dry rations worth over Rs. 70,000 from donors for flood relief efforts in Batticaloa. We handed them over to the Batticaloa DIRC for distribution to the affected people. Ven. Gunananda Thero handed over the rations to the group who represented Batticaloa DIRC. The incumbent priest of Sama Vihara and Guru Superior Mariyakada Subadra Meniyo also participated this event.

One flood victim told me, “We had the wrong idea of Buddhist leaders. We are very grateful to you for helping us when we are suffering. We will remember this always.” This lady got hold of me and kissed me. She said that we should always be united. I agreed with her and promised to visit them again to help. I was extremely happy that we were able to alleviate their fears and give them a sense of reassurance.

On another occasion we held a meeting in the Horowpathana area targeting war affected women and children. We told them that we had come to help them and to discuss their needs. Most people were members of the Muslim community and when they realized that we were there for a good cause, they invited me to stay and even offered to build me a place to live.



Representatives of the Southern Inter Religious Council give financial aid for a house built for a war affected family in Horowpathana Yaan Oya village





Women participate in the self-employment workshop held with the assistance of the Manjanthuduwai branch of the Peoples Bank



## An opportunity to empower war affected women



**Siva Sri Sivapalan Iyar**  
Co-Convenor- DIRC Batticaloa

Members of the Batticaloa DIRC gathered information on war affected people through workshops. We prioritized their needs and discussed them with different institutions. Manjanthuduvai is a village badly hit by the war. Many women were widows.

They wanted self employment opportunities and proper guidance to restart their lives. We prepared an action plan and selected an enthusiastic group of women. Then we conducted a workshop on gardening and made arrangements for financial support.

The Manager of the People's Bank Branch in Kattankudi, Mr. A. Alagurajah, is an active member of our DIRC. On his recommendation we secured loans for six sewing machines for the women. We continuously guided and monitored them as they built up their businesses. Now they have become entrepreneurs with good incomes.

Our people were suffering greatly during the floods of 2011. When we informed NPC, it told the DIRCs to help us. DIRC members from Anuradhapura came here with a group of youths to help even though people in Anuradhapura were also victims. People who received that assistance still talk about it. The significant thing is that a group of Sinhala youth came here for the first time with humanitarian aid for people in Batticaloa.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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Ven. Gunaananda Thero of Anuradhapura told us that he could not sleep well until he had brought the aid to our people. We are very happy about one community coming forward to help another community after understanding their needs.

**Manjanthuduvai is a village badly hit by the war. Many women were widows. They wanted self employment opportunities and proper guidance to restart their lives. We prepared an action plan and selected an enthusiastic group of women. Then we conducted a workshop on gardening and made arrangements for financial support.**



The inauguration of the Eastern Province Inter Religious Council



Conducted several programmes to raise awareness among school children



**N.P. Kalupahana**  
DIRC Ampara

According to the action plan we prepared at the workshop on “Awareness and Needs Assessment” under the DIRC, we conducted an awareness program for the students of Hingurana Vidyalyaya. The Public Health Officer and police officers of the Traffic Division participated as resource persons. The objective was to educate children on prevention of dengue and how to stop road accidents by following traffic rules.

Road accidents had increased. Children did not know the traffic rules. The workshops were successful and there were requests for more to be held. The Public Health Officer agreed to conduct free medical camps for elders with the support of the DIRC. Afterwards, a shramadana was organized by villagers to clean the area, as dengue was spreading and some people had been hospitalized.

### Shared experiences of Northern visit through National Newspapers



#### **W.J.T.S. Kaviratne**

President, United Journalists' Association  
Southern Province

I learned a lot from the exchange visit to the Eastern Province. I realized the problems faced by victims of war and recent floods, and I collected information relevant to me as a journalist. However, I had no opportunity to publicize the information I collected. The real situation in the Eastern Province is quite opposite to what is portrayed by southern journalists.

We had a discussion with about 25 widowed women who had joined together to run a small rice mill. This program is supported by Caritas AHED. When we visited Kinniya, we came across children who walked six kilometers to attend school. We were able to meet the community and discuss their problems and although we wrote the story, this part was omitted when it was published. If such visits could take place regularly, there would be better relations between the people of North and East and those in the South. I appreciate that NPC is the only NGO that is engaged in facilitating these visits. The program has already been effective in narrowing the gap between North and South.

I published two newspaper reports, one on our trip to the East and the other on the visit of people of the North to the South. It was difficult because the government media does not want to reveal problems of people of the North and East in their newspapers.

However I am happy I was able to publish two reports about the exchange visits. Publicity about exchange visits can play an important role in improving



Representatives of the Northern Inter Religious Council give sweets to the Balapitiya Divisional Secretary, Chairman of the Pradheshiya Sabha and the Opposition Leader of Pradheshiya Sabha



understanding among the people of the North, East and South. Unfortunately some journalists have had to leave the country because they wrote about the actual situation in the North and East. I have faced some challenges but sustainable peace can be built by the media and I am doing my best to make a contribution.

**It was difficult because the government media does not want to reveal problems of people of the North and East in their newspapers.**

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

The knowledge gained on conflict resolution was useful on many occasions



**Sivasri A.J. Raviji**

Kurukkal  
Co-Convenor- DIRC Ampara

For many years, people from the North have travelled to Kataragama on the roads that run along the Eastern coast. One day when I was at home I received a call from another DIRC member to say that people in the Paalamunai area had attacked a group of pilgrims. I immediately called my Muslim friends and asked them investigate. I joined them, along with another Kurukkal.

We discussed the incident with both communities and settled the situation. If not for us, it would have escalated. We were able to mediate through contacts made in our DIRC and the relationships we had built up. We had discussed collectively about how to mediate a conflict at the workshop on “Conflict Sensitivity and Peace Building”. The pilgrims thanked us for letting them move on without any further trouble.

I am happy about the results we obtained through mediation and I have been encouraged to intervene to solve such conflicts in the future. If we do not settle minor issues at local level they can escalate into national problems.



The inauguration of the Eastern Province Inter Religious Council





Handing over the resolution of the Southern Province Inter Religious Council on the humanitarian needs of the women and children affected by the war to the Hon. Opposition Leader of the Southern Provincial Council, Mr. Siri Andrahennadi



These programs have built a wonderful unity among the religious leaders



**Ven Manapaha Dhammaransi Thero**

Co-convenor  
DIRC Kurunegala

People of all communities live in the Kurunegala district. There have been no conflicts here, even during the 30-year war. People carried on with the business of living. However, there was no special relationship, no mutual trust or understanding among the communities or among different religious leaders. In such a context, the DIRC was established and I am happy to be a member representing Buddhist leaders.

Through the DIRC, a good relationship has been built up among the clergy and among the different community activists. Every month clergy and community leaders meet to discuss problems in the area and the welfare of the people. We understand the meaning of true peace and unity. Any worshipper can go without hesitation to a Buddhist or Hindu temple, mosque or church. I was the only Buddhist monk at the prize giving of the Thorayaya Muslim Vidyalaya. The staff, students and parents were happy about my presence.

A strong relationship among the clergy of different religions is vital for sustainable peace in the country. DIRCs have established a solid base for this difficult task. Through such groups we can solve problems that arise periodically. It is the responsibility and duty of all religious communities to work towards this goal.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

# Mutual trust and relations among us have improved greatly



**Makkal Cader**  
DIRC Mannar

The DIRC has improved our mutual trust and relationships. Before the war, for over 100 years, Tamils and Muslims of this area had a cordial relationship. However 30 years of war dealt a heavy blow to the goodwill that existed between the Muslim and Tamil communities.

All of us are now forced to accept this situation. Even after the war, Tamils and Muslims are not friendly toward each other. In such a context we started the Mannar DIRC and launched our programs to unite people. NPC played a vital role to bring coexistence and peace between people of the two communities. It means that our hatred towards each other has gradually diminished. Thanks to NPC, we Tamils and Muslims can talk with each other with smiling faces.

On occasions when divisions arose, we got involved in various activities to bring about unity. We have collected 60 active members of various religions and communities as members of our council. This is a special victory we achieved and a big change from earlier on. We have added 20 to 30 more new members. It is great to have them.

Our ancestors used to say that Mannar was ruled from Jaffna. During the time of war, this was true but today Mannar can be administered from Mannar itself. Therefore we must protect this new environment. Finally I request that we must settle remaining issues by strengthening our DIRC.



Inter religious leaders discuss humanitarian problems with former UNP National Organizer, MP Mr. Ravi Karunanayake





Presenting problems of war affected children to Chairperson of the National Child Protection Authority, Ms. Anoma Dissanayake



We gained a lot of experience through inter religious programs



**Deepal Edirisinghe**  
DIRC Anuradhapura

We gained a great deal of knowledge and experience from the workshops organized by the DIRC. At one workshop, we realized that children in the area faced many challenges. In the Anuradhapura district, there were 1,643 underage mothers between the ages of 13 and 18. To address this situation we held a series of programs targeting school children.

We had a program at the Kahatagollawa Vidyalaya in Kebitigollewa , which is in an area affected by the war. We received assistance from NPC and SLFI to provide the children from low income families with books and stationery, and to conduct counseling sessions. Mr. H.G.H. Kulatunga, a owner of a private company from Colombo, provided books and stationery while Mr Vijayanatna Ukwatta, a senior lecturer from SLFI, volunteered to assist us.

As a follow up, we held a street drama and a discussion on the impact of the conflict at the same school. The children appreciated our program, giving written evaluations.

We focused on conflict sensitivity and peace building, with special emphasis on youth. We organized a camp for the youth of Anuradhapura on these two themes. They realized that it was necessary that we should live together in unity and avoid conflict.

### The value of field visits



**Sr. Rita**  
DIRC Vavuniya

As a member of the Vavuniya DIRC, I went on several field visits that gave me an opportunity to understand other people and appreciate their differences.

I talked to others about some of their painful experiences and shared my thoughts with them.

I realized that we had negative stereotypes that were not correct. I came to understand that there were people who shared the desire for coexistence, human rights and mutual understanding. I have shared my experiences with other people.



A gift from representatives of the South to religious leaders of the North



We got a clear understanding of the problems faced by war affected people



Former Asst. Superintendent of Police of Puttalam Mr. Sugathadasa addressing religious leaders from the South



**Chanuka Karunaratne**  
DIRC Puttalam

There are border villages in the Puttalam district with many people who have been affected and internally displaced by the war. These villages have been neglected by the authorities.

At the DIRC we were told of an elders' home that was in a terrible condition. We wanted to help the home so we spoke to members of the Grand Mosque in Puttalam, and were able to raise funds through its trust fund, thanks to Maulavi Abdullah and treasurer Mr. Musamil. It is important to deal with such issues by going beyond religious and ethnic boundaries, setting a good example for national and ethnic unity.

We also celebrated Human Rights Day in 2011 at Bandaranaikepuram Vidyalaya in Vanathavillu with the participation of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim religious leaders. This was a significant lesson to the children that they live in a diverse society.

As a Buddhist, I had never worked with other religious leaders. Through the DIRC, I was able to understand the cultural significance of other religions. I went on a field visit to the North and East, and learnt about the post war difficulties faced by people there.



## Case Studies in Reconciliation

### We were able to confirm the religious unity of Mannar District



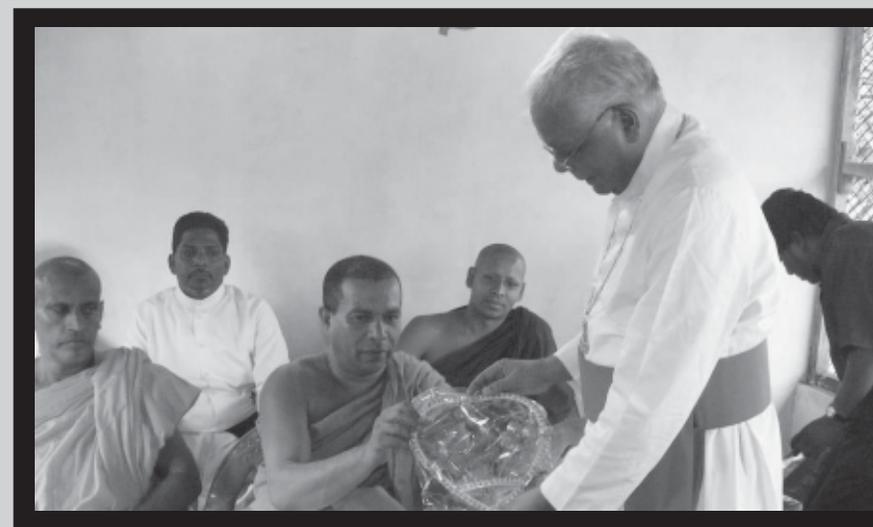
**S. Thayalarajan**  
DIRC Mannar

As a member of the Mannar DIRC, I was happy that we were able to provide relief to over 100 war affected people, who were also flood victims. We brought their plight to the attention of various organizations, which then provided school books and stationery for children living in welfare camps.

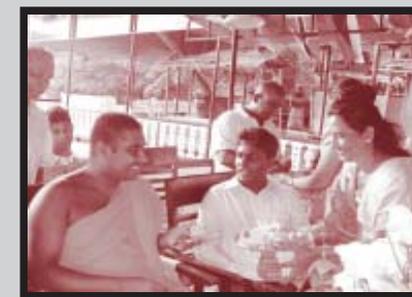
We also brought several issues to the attention of relevant authorities. For example, a wine store in Mannar sold alcohol to young men. While under the influence of liquor, they harassed young women passing the shop. The DIRC informed the District Secretary and Divisional Secretary of the area, who in turn told the police. After the police took action, the matter was resolved and the women could walk by in peace. In another matter, donkeys that had been let loose were blocking roads and causing accidents. They disturbed school children on the roads. We informed the Pradheshiya Sabha, which built a fenced area for the donkeys.

We also had opportunity to discuss with a group of EU MPs about problems faced by people in the North. They agreed to submit them to the Government. The meeting was attended by members of civil society and religious leaders, including Sr. Nicola from DIRC Vavuniya.

We have been able to foster relationships among religious leaders, which has paved the way for religious coexistence. For example, various religious leaders attended the ordination of Manoharan Kurukkal. When he died they participated at his funeral. We have strengthened religious unity in Mannar.



Bishop of Mannar, Rev. Rayappu Joseph, hands over a gift to Southern religious leaders





Inter religious leaders participating at the Inter Religious National Conference, 16 June 2012



## We were able to support the poor people in the border villages



### **K. Wijedasa**

Journalist, Lake House  
DIRC Anuradhapura

I am a member of the Anuradhapura DIRC. The work carried out by the DIRC has led to an improvement in inter faith dialogue and coexistence. This was evident when we went to Horowpathana for an activity with 12 religious leaders from the area. People who attended were amazed when they saw Buddhist monks together with Hindu and Christian clergy assembled at the gathering. They told us they thought Christian groups wanted convert people to their religion. However we explained our motive was service. A Muslim person said he was happy to see Buddhist monks helping the Muslim community.

Members of the Buddhist community said it was the first time they had seen two Christian clergymen coming to a temple, and that they no longer felt Christians and Buddhists were different.

A Hindu priest said that, despite the terrible experiences of the war, he was hopeful of forging friendships to help each other and work towards peace building. I felt that these programs fostered religious unity while respecting leaders from different religions. If this attempt could be continued, it would be a great help to empower the people.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

We had an opportunity to meet the needs of a neglected school



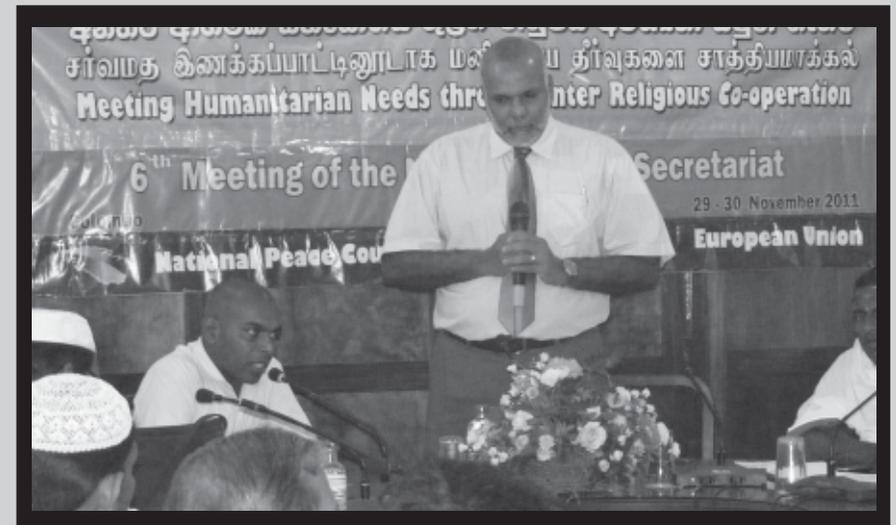
### M. Kamardeen

Assistant Principal  
Thoradeniya Muslim School  
DIRC Kurunegala

I went to the East with the DIRC. I visited a poor Muslim school in the Trincomalee area. After talking to the principal I realized that the school needed a water tank for drinking water and a new toilet facility. The principal also said the children needed a place to conduct their prayers.

I brought these issues to the attention of the CHARM foundation, and it had contacted the principal with a view to providing assistance.

Many people criticise others but do nothing to remedy a situation. We can get support from NGOs and private sector to solve humanitarian problems. For this we have to plan and will follow correct procedures.



Representatives of the National Inter Religious Secretariat discuss solutions to humanitarian problems with Chairman of Business for Peace Alliance, Mr. Suresh De Silva





Mr. Neil Daluwatta, Former Deputy Inspector General of Police, Southern Province addressing the religious leaders from North



## Observation visits to the South made a positive attitudinal change



**Daphne Thuram**  
DIRC Mannar

We visited Puttalam, Negombo, Galle, Matara and Anuradhapura with the DIRC. Some Tamil members thought the Sinhala people would be hostile and voice anti-Tamil sentiments.

I was surprised when we were given a warm welcome. They were extremely hospitable. However one of the biggest obstacles was communication, since we were unable to speak in their language. During our visits to Galle and Anuradhapura we received souvenirs and exchanged sweetmeats and palmyrah leaf objects as symbols of our friendship.

The trips gave us a chance to visit places we had never been to before. Earlier I had thought that the Buddhist clergy only associated with Buddhists. I realized that I was wrong when Ven. Buddhiyagama Chandraratna Thero from Puttalam was friendly to us. I learnt that it was not only Tamils who suffered from the war but it was the entire country.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

### Children got a clear understanding on inter religious co-existence



**Hemanthi Jayasinghe**  
Pre-School Teacher  
DIRC Matara

It was a privilege to have joined the DIRC because it includes leaders of all religions.

As a pre-school teacher, I am interested in religion and culture, and fostering values of coexistence among children. I make an effort to educate them about the different ethnicities and religions within Sri Lanka.

We organized a field trip to places of cultural and religious significance in the Matara area. We went to a church and learned about their religion and religious practices. The children had never seen a member of the Christian clergy before.

We visited a Hindu Kovil and took part in some of the rituals. We went to a mosque. Most of the children and their parents had never been inside a mosque.

We were able to visit these places thanks to the DIRC. We had the chance to understand the significance of other religions and the importance of respecting one another in a multi religious, multi ethnic society and, most importantly, how to coexist in peace. We are grateful to the DIRC for giving us these opportunities and we hope to work together in the future.



Inter Religious Southern Province Conference, Galle





District inter religious leaders who participated capacity building workshop



After joining the program I wanted to learn Buddhism and Islam



**Elizabeth Nawaratne**  
DIRC Puttalam

We have many children affected by the war in the Puttalam area, and this program focused on helping them.

A lot of these children do not attend school. As part of a solution developed in an awareness and needs assessment workshop, we decided to enroll five students in a state vocational training institute.

As a Roman Catholic, I had been unaware of the importance and the value of other religions. However after joining the DIRC, I began to appreciate the teachings of other religions. I started reading books on Buddhism. I even read the Koran.

I would like to thank NPC and the European Union for promoting these programs to help dispel deep-rooted misconceptions within society while promoting inter faith dialogue and understanding.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

I spread the knowledge gained through these programs among Buddhist Sunday school children



### **Chaminda Pradeep Kumara**

Headmaster, Sunday School, Kirimetiya  
DIRC Polonnaruwa

I decided that religious knowledge of the children should be improved in accordance with what I learnt at the DIRC. I asked the children at my Sunday school to write a note every week about different religions and their ceremonies.

During the floods last February, Catholic priests came to our village to distribute dry foodstuff and clothes to victims. A child at my Sunday school asked about the cross that a Father was wearing. The priest asked the child what he knew about Christianity. The child answered the questions, so the priest was pleased and asked how he knew the facts. The child explained and when the priest asked me, I told him that we must know about other religions in our society. The priest agreed to help us when necessary.

I am happy I could to share the knowledge that I gained with the children that I teach. It is our duty as citizens of this diverse country to guide our children to understand others and to coexist.



Inter religious representatives who came from the North to the South receive blessings from Buddhist Monks





“Make Our Children Happy” program to commemorate International Children’s Day 2011



## Villagers appreciated Divithura Estate mobile service and “Make Our Children Happy” program



**Karunatunge Welikala**  
DIRC Galle

After inaugurating the Galle DIRC, we discussed the services we were expected to provide. According to instructions from NPC, we started investigating the needs of people indirectly affected by the war. One of our members asked us to help people of Divithura estate to get documents necessary for having full citizenship rights and obtaining benefits such as EPF payments, which they could not claim due to lack of marriage certificates. They could not conduct financial transactions with banks or prove their identity to security forces as they lacked identity cards. Their freedom of movement was curtailed. Needing to make a daily wage, they had no time to spare on going to the Divisional Secretariat to pursue the matter.

We discussed the issue with officers of the Weliwitiya Divisional Secretariat but they thought that such a service was unnecessary, going by the statistics of the area. But after listening to our request, they agreed to provide the facilities. We got some voluntary services from our members and NPC readily gave its support as well. We helped 146 people to obtain their identity cards and marriage certificates in February 2011. A DIRC member, Mr. Sivakumar, said that with these documents, people were able to conduct their transactions easily.

The Divisional Secretary said she was happy that most of the services she had to provide were done voluntarily through the DIRC. As we know, there are many in Sri Lanka who have lost opportunities due to the lack of such documentation. If we could conduct such mobile services, it would be a

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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great help to them.

We also identified 45 children whose mothers were war widows or who had lost their fathers in the war. Even during their holidays, these disadvantaged children had to help their families to make a living. They had no opportunity to relax or enjoy their lives. In October 2011 we held a “Make Our Children Happy” program to commemorate International Children’s Day in Balapitya, taking them on a boat ride along the Madhu river. We conducted an art competition and sporting events, distributing prizes and gifts. The parents said that they never seen their children so happy and pleased with the river trip as well as the prizes and gifts they received. Most of them had never sailed on the river, although they had seen it.

During our observation visits we have heard of many children facing psycho-social problems. If there was a good program to relieve their trauma and help them to live a normal life, such children could be of service to the development of the country.

**One of our members asked us to help people of Divithura estate to get documents necessary for having full citizenship rights and obtaining benefits such as EPF payments, which they could not claim due to lack of marriage certificates. They could not conduct financial transactions with banks or prove their identity to security forces as they lacked identity cards.**

## Inter religious program created a remarkable social, political and religious impact in Matara District



Inter Religious Leaders meet with the Chairman of the National Youth Council, Mr. Piyum Perera



**Wasantha Kariyawasam**  
DIRC Matara

In the beginning we had difficulties implementing the work of the DIRC because there was no proper communication with the people about its objectives. Some officials blamed us, saying our effort was useless but we were able to prove them wrong. Now we receive the support of several people as well as the support of officials of the area including the District Secretary, Deputy Inspector General of Police and the Superintendent of Police.

Religious leaders such as Buddhist priests, Christian clergy and Maulavis are our ardent supporters. They are friendly with each other and if the Buddhist priest is unable to attend a program that is organized by others in the area, he asks the Maulavi to participate.

One day I received a call about a clash between Sinhala and Muslim people in Dickwella. We visited the area and called Minister Vasudeva Nanayakkara, asking him to provide police protection to the people. We also informed the members of local government. The next day the District Secretariat arranged a meeting with Minister Dulles Alahapperuma about the incident. Our members also took part in the meeting. Our leading role in settling the conflict was well recognized by officials and by the people.

One of our Maulavis changed attitudes with a blood donation program in his mosque. Although blood donations were not usually conducted in mosques, he proceeded after carefully studying the teachings in the Koran. A

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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Buddhist priest volunteered as the first person to donate blood. Over 160 people participated in the event, which was the first time in the village that Sinhala and Muslim people had come together. It was a success because of the bonds forged between the communities through DIRC programs.

Our convenor, Rev Pannananda, had the opportunity to contribute some money to build a house for a poor family in Horowpathana village, Anuradhapura, when he went on an observation visit with us. After that, he had the idea of building a house for a poor family in his area. He started construction on a Poya day. This was possible because the program changed the mentality of the priest. He joined our program willingly.

Mrs. Nandanie, Child Probation Officer and supervisor of a children's home in Matara, participated in the DIRC's child protection workshop. When members of the Eastern Province Inter Religious Council visited the South, they brought exercise books for disadvantaged children. Mrs. Nandanie suggested giving the books to poor children in Mathota.

People in Mathota are very poor. Many parents are drug addicts. Children do not attend school because of neglect. Community leaders of the village wanted to help them. We discussed the matter with the DIG, and Mrs. Nandanie organized an awareness program where she explained to parents and children the importance of protecting children from abuse and how it could be done. Health officials and police officers also spoke of ways and means of protecting children.

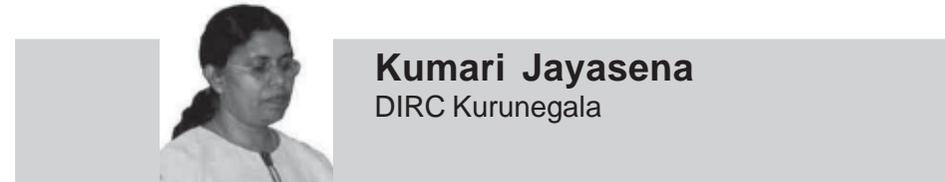
Through the relationship DIRC had built with the National Languages and Social Integration Ministry, we were able to get three people assigned as Tamil language teachers in the Matara District.

**Our convenor, Rev Pannananda, had the opportunity to contribute some money to build a house for a poor family in Horowpathana village, Anuradhapura, when he went on an observation visit with us. After that, he had the idea of building a house for a poor family in his area. He started construction on a Poya day.**

## Observation visits gave us better understanding of the real conditions of North and East



Former Bishop of Kurunegala, Rev. Kumara Ilangasinghe, addressing the Kurunegala Inter Religious Council



**Kumari Jayasena**  
DIRC Kurunegala

Through field visits, I had the opportunity as a DIRC member of the South to exchange ideas with people in the North. They treated us well and we became close friends.

Goodwill and brotherhood have developed among us. If we could develop such goodwill and brotherhood among all communities in Sri Lanka, any misunderstandings that exist would be removed. If more visits of this nature could be organized, they would be very effective.

DIRC members have united and they work together in all activities irrespective of their religious beliefs. As a Christian, my experience with them is invaluable for working with a diverse community.



## Case Studies in Reconciliation

We stopped the sea plane project that could have been a disaster for the farmers



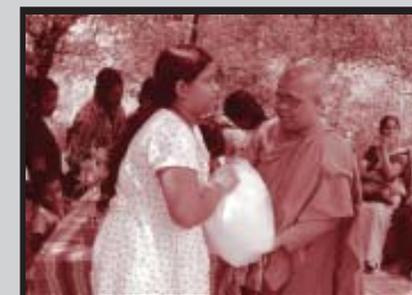
**Sujeewa Gayanath**  
DIRC Polonnaruwa

For the last three years, since the inauguration of Polonnaruwa DIRC, we have done many activities. We are pleased with the mutual cooperation and understanding that is present among the clergy of various religions. Earlier they met at religious and public events but then went their separate ways. But now religious leaders regularly participate at each other's events and unite to understand the culture behind other religions. This shows that our attempts to create religious cooperation and understanding have been successful. Our DIRC is going beyond the usual limits. We intervened in a problem that affects the life of the people of Polonnaruwa. The farmers of the district are ahead of other districts as producers of rice but they are hampered by various rules and regulations. The Government, believing that tourism is a means to improve the economic conditions of people, selected several tanks to land sea planes.

After the people of Polonnaruwa learnt that the Parakrama Samudra topped the list, civil society and farmer organizations united against the plan. The Polonnaruwa DIRC was a partner in this group and did its best to defeat the idea. All religious leaders came together to make people aware of the issue. Thamankaduwa and Nagenahira Depalaathe Upa Pradhana Sanganayake Demunnawe Uparatne Thero said that whatever was harmful to farmers would directly affect everyone, so they should all support this protest. Now we feel the sea plane program has been slowed down. All religious leaders can have an influence when necessary to defeat whatever is bad for society.



Program Manager of the European Union, Mr. Benedict Soyra, evaluates the Inter Religious Council





Handing over a statement about problems of war affected people to the Chairman of the Eastern Provincial Council, Mr. H.M.M. Faiz



## We improved the economic strength of the war affected women



**F. Noorul Ismiya**  
DIRC Trincomalee

We identified women affected by war in the Jamalia Nagar, Kuchchaveli and Nilaveli areas. Many were widows or women whose husbands had disappeared during the war. They faced economic problems in providing for their families. They had no means of livelihood or guidance on ways and means to make a living. The DIRC, in collaboration with Trincomalee Chamber of Commerce, conducted a self employment awareness program for 40 women to improve their means of livelihood and income sources by giving them training.

At the workshop, Chairperson of Women's Chamber of Commerce, Mrs. Rohini Mallika, trained the women and explained how sweets and other food items prepared at home could be sent to the market, and how to register themselves in this business. The participants registered with the Chamber without a fee and wanted to participate in future workshops. Six of these participants were selected for advanced training for seven days.

After the workshop, the women were able to sell their products and create a demand in the market. We consider it a great achievement of the DIRC that we were able to increase their income levels.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

We successfully intervened to diffuse some conflicts



**Maulavi Mohammad Ramzi**  
DIRC Ampara

Members of the DIRC decided to prepare correct voters lists, which had not been properly done before because of the war. Many people had lost their voting rights. With the cooperation of an NGO involved in election activities, we registered eligible people and improved voter turnout.

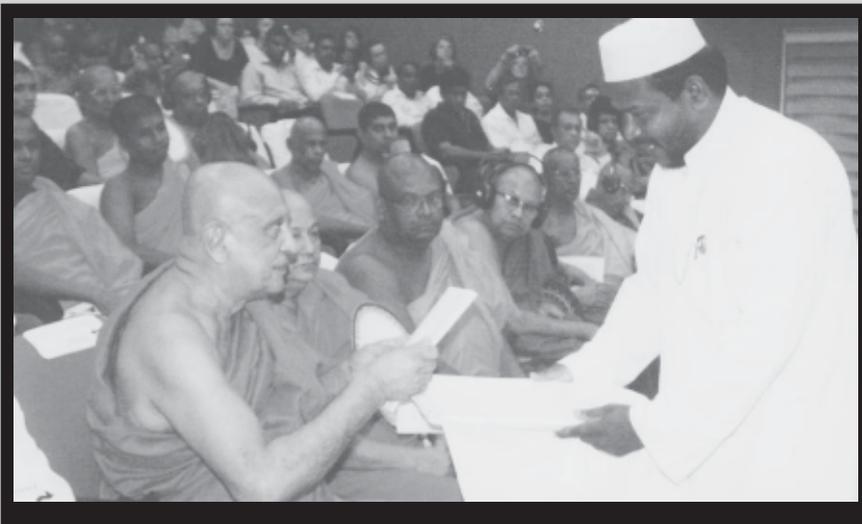
Many women in our villages were frightened of being assaulted by a man know as the grease devil. The DIRC took the issue to the police and other relevant institutions, acting as a mediator, and calming the tension.

Before the DIRC, there was no interaction between religious communities. Now there is a new commitment and understanding among religious leaders. This is a new experience that this will be beneficial for the people.



Inter religious leaders and civil society representatives having a discussion with Mr. Ranil Wickremasinge, the leader of the opposition





Handing over the manifesto to Rev. Maduluwawe Sobhitha Thero



## The best way to solve conflicts among the communities and religions is religious coexistence



**Ven. Elamaldeniye Dhammananda Thero**  
DIRC Matara

During my exposure visit to the East from the South, I saw for myself the terrible economic and psychological difficulties faced by people living there. In the village of Kurungupanja in Kinniya area of Trincomalee, the people did not have a road to reach their village but had to travel by trailer along a damaged path. There was no roof on the school so the children studied under the shade of a tree. They lacked uniforms, books and other materials. They did not even have slippers and had to walk 5 or 6 miles to school, barefoot, along an uneven path.

They treated us hospitably when we visited them, travelling in a trailer. I still remember the taste of the orange juice they offered us. They were very genuine. My visit was the first to the village by a Buddhist priest. We gifted exercise books and stationery to the children.

A month later, a group from the North came to my temple in the South. It was a new experience for people in the area. The villagers treated the visitors to traditional sweets and welcomed them. Two nuns in the group said, "We never thought that we would be able to visit a temple. You gave us a warm welcome. You treated us well. It is a great pleasure for us."

I have now realized that the best way to solve conflicts among the communities and religions is religious coexistence.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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At Thennahena Estate in Pittabaddara, we arranged to have birth and marriage certificates issued to 75 people. We registered the marriages of 25 couples who were living together, solving many issues that had troubled them, as well as their children and children. Dependants of unmarried couples were deprived of benefits given by the estate. They could not admit their children and even their grandchildren, to schools.

Other villagers have asked us to conduct similar mobile services. We will be able to do it with support from relevant officials and with the guidance of NPC.

**At Thennahena Estate in Pitabeddara, we arranged to have birth and marriage certificates issued to 75 people. We registered the marriages of 25 couples who were living together, solving many issues that had troubled them, as well as their children and grand children.**



National level civil society leaders and the representative of the European Union participating the National Peace Secretariat meeting



## We solved issues faced by women and children



**A.L.M. Rafaideen**  
DIRC Trincomalee

We worked hard to build close relationships among the communities. As an example, the DIRC identified needs of children affected by war. We found that some of them were going to internet cafes and visiting obscene web sites, causing their parents worry. After discussing this at the DIRC, members met the owners of the internet cafes and talked about the problem with them. They promised to check what children were doing on the computers, which they did.

We also told the children about the harmful effects of looking at these web sites. The parents thanked us for the interest we were taking in the welfare of their children. We were happy that we were able to guide the children in this way.

We also identified issues that affected women. Many of them lacked the means to make a living and told us there was no one to encourage them. We discussed the matter with the Trincomalee District Chamber of Commerce, which agreed to conduct a workshop to give them the necessary guidance and knowledge. Then we selected the participants according to their needs and interests and showed them how to get financial assistance.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

### Economic empowerment will bring social change

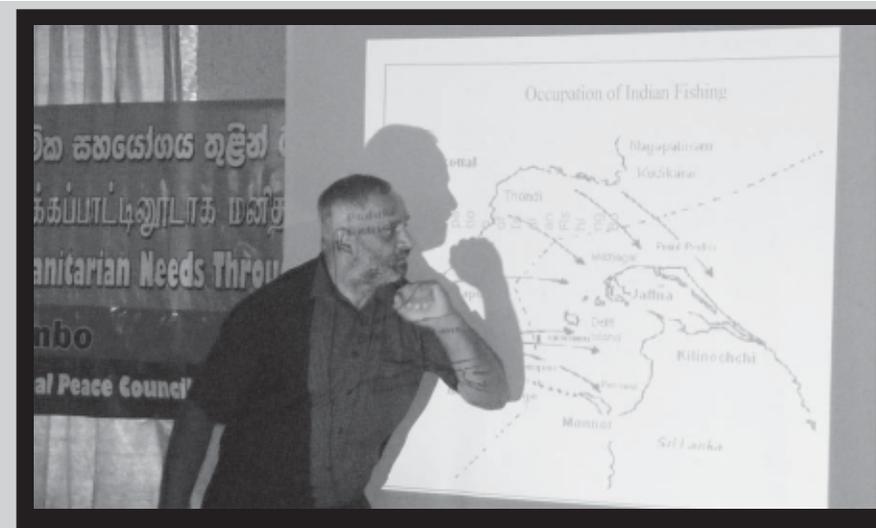


**P.K.N. Moorthy**  
DIRC Batticaloa

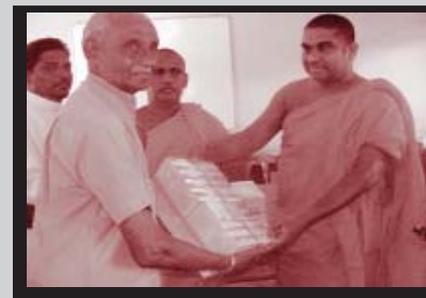
Pattipalai is a village affected by war. The women asked us to help them to find suitable livelihoods. First we gave them leadership training and selected a group of 35 women. We supplied simple equipment for them to make rice from boiled paddy, and they started businesses. Caritas and the Divisional Secretariat helped them with other equipment. About 100 people are indirectly involved in supplying raw materials. The families said it was a great help to them and thanked us for our support and guidance.

In Kurudavalai, another village affected by war, we trained 30 women in home gardening and gave them loans. We provided self employment training to another group of women in Kalladi village. The number of women increased to 45 and they were given loans of Rs. 50,000 from the Peoples Bank, which they have already paid back. This was a very successful program. We hope to provide more loans of Rs. 100,000. We commend the cooperation of the people in making this a success.

We selected another group of women and trained them in cattle rearing with the cooperation of the Human Rights Council. Through such activities we are trying to bring about social change. Caritas AHED is also helping us in this task and we must thank late Rev. Fr. Sylvester Sritharan, who helped us in many ways.



Discussing problems of fishermen in the North East with Director of National Fisheries Solidarity Movement, Mr. Herman Kumara





Inter religious leaders and civil society representatives who participated in the Eastern Province Inter Religious Conference



## Guidance of DIRC gave us strength to undertake national responsibilities



**K. Logini**  
DIRC Trincomalee

I joined the Trincomalee DIRC as a representative of the Kalladi Women's Society and gained a lot of experience from the programs. I was influenced by a child protection workshop and started paying attention to war affected children.

We did a survey to collect information about non school going children and prepared a list. We identified Al Majeed Vidyalaya in Siraj Nagar as the nearest school and had discussions with the principal. He agreed to admit the children if the Kalladi Women's Society funded them. We informed the Divisional Secretary of the area and he gave assistance to six children, who are now attending the school. It is a great pleasure for us.

Afterwards we had discussions with the parents and guardians, who said the children were happy and doing well in their studies. I believe that we must take an interest in such issues.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

### Religious and civil society leaders provided support to poor school children



**Maulavi M.Y. Hadiyathulla**  
DIRC Trincomalee

The people of Kurangupanja village in the Kinniya area have been affected by war and floods. It is a Muslim village and I am the principal of the school, where the only building has no roof and children study under the trees. They have to walk to school in bare feet for several miles along a broken path. Their parents are very poor so most of the children stop their education at primary level. Often they do not have enough food to eat.

When DIRC representatives from the South came to the East, they brought exercise books and other learning materials for the children and distributed them in the school. The visitors were sorry to see the bad condition of the school.

There were two Buddhist priests in the group. It was the first time that the children had seen Buddhist priests.



Mrs. Ariyawathi Galappatti, Vice Chairperson of Eastern Provincial Council, listens to Inter Religious Council Leaders



## Working according to the Quran, we were able to create better living conditions for women



**Maulavi S.T.K. Rahaman**  
Co-Convenor- DIRC Polonnaruwa

The devastating war that lasted for 30 years affected all the people of Sri Lanka irrespective of community, religion, caste, language and the area they live. It created an environment where violence overpowered humanity and people suspected each other.

All religions - Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam - preach non violence. No religion advocates war. All religions advise their followers to respect and honour other people. This should not be confined to words. This quality should emanate from the minds of the people.

The war killed thousands of people. It brought massive destruction to property. Many people are disabled for life. Ordinary people have many economic problems. Although reconstruction is in progress, the wounds in the hearts of the people have not been healed. They are not at peace. That is why DIRCs were established - to build unity and foster coexistence among people of different communities, and to bring help to those who are suffering from the pain of war. The main objective of the program is to create a peaceful society through mutual understanding among the religious communities who were divided by war, and to develop the skills needed to fulfill their social duties and responsibilities, as well as to meet the humanitarian needs of women and children affected by the war.



Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, Executive Director Sarvodaya, addressing the religious and civil society leaders at the Inter Religious Peace Secretariat



## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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Women are considered an integral part of society and should be protected. Protecting women in society leads to the protection of society as a whole. No male can play the feminine role. They can never be mothers, wives, sisters or daughters. The main factor for building a prosperous society is women. Therefore the DIRC has given priority to issues affecting women and the next priority to children, because children are our future.

The majority of people in Polonnaruwa are Sinhalese, followed by the Muslim and Tamil communities. The DIRC was able to solve a conflict that arose due to the noise coming from the Hasan prayer of the mosque in the heart of town.

When there were floods, relief items were distributed to affected people through the intervention of leaders of all religions. Through these activities we, who had been cut off from Buddhist priests, built cordial relations with them. By participating in funerals, new year celebrations and other festivals of all the religions, we strengthened our relationships with each other. This helped us to contribute towards the uplifting of the conditions of the people.

**No religion advocates war. All religions advise their followers to respect and honour other people. This should not be confined to words. This quality should emanate from the minds of the people.**

## Inter religious visits supported those who are suffering



Southern Provincial Councilors, Mr. Channa Mendis, with the representatives from the East



**W.A. Fatima Rinosa**  
DIRC Galle

I have worked with several NGOs. I am a Government servant and a Muslim woman. I was asked to join the DIRC by a Buddhist priest in my village. The majority of people are Sinhala and we have lived together without any communal bias as brothers and sisters of the same family.

With the DIRC, I had the opportunity to work with Hindus and Christians. I started work with the Galle DIRC. I considered this part of my duty like my duty to my family. I had a lot of experiences with the people of the country. In spite of the heavy work load with my family, I did not neglect the work of this organization.

I had the opportunity to go on a visit with religious and civil society leaders to the East. We went to Kurungupanja village in Kinniya in the Trincomalee District. It was the most shocking experience of my life. People were very poor and worked hard for a living. There was only a narrow track to their village, which they travelled on foot, by bicycle or tractor. All of us including Buddhist priests, Catholic fathers, Kurukkals and Maulavis went to the village in a tractor. On the way we saw sheds with corrugated sheets or cadjan and realized that people were struggling hard to resettle after the cruel war.

The shelters were about 7 kilometres from the school so the children had to walk this distance to attend school. When we arrived we saw how the



## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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villagers and the children were sitting on mats under a large spreading tree to greet us. They had no chairs to sit on. When we heard their stories, we were shocked and all who went with us were in tears. Before the war these people had decent homes and a satisfactory means of living. Now they had nothing.

This organization has helped me to see and experience these living conditions. Before this, I thought that all people in Sri Lanka were living well. I thank the DIRC for giving me the opportunity to meet and talk to those who are suffering from utter poverty. There are many more experiences in my mind. I also had similar experiences during my visit to the North. I pray to Allah that these people may have the luck and courage to live happily in future.

**I have worked with several NGOs. I am a Government servant and a Muslim woman. I was asked to join the DIRC by a Buddhist priest in my village. The majority of people are Sinhala and we have lived together without any communal bias as brothers and sisters of the same family.**



Matara District Secretary, Ms. Athukorala, distributes books and stationery to war affected children of the North



## Through DIRC I learnt that all people share a common humanity



### **S.J. Vidanapathirana**

National Integration Promotion Officer  
Divisional Secretariat Matara  
DIRC Matara

Instead of happiness, peace and joy, streams of blood have flowed in Sri Lanka for the last 30 years. Now people are able to enjoy peace, and to create a new culture by moving freely around the country, interacting with each other. North-South observation tours are activities organized by NPC project.

Being able to travel from North to South and South to North is no longer just a dream. Through NPC's program, the doors were opened for brothers from the North and the South to visit each other. The visit of Northern Inter Religious Council representatives to Matara was one such happy event that we can be proud of. We organized activities for them with the cooperation of high level Government officials including the DIG of the Southern Province and the District Secretary of Matara. The Government officers explained various rules and regulations to the group. Many had little understanding even of rules on agriculture and fishing. Members from the North had been afraid to come to the South but they were relieved by the friendliness of the Southern people once they arrived. DIG of the Southern Province provided security while they had special blessings from religious leaders. Even political leaders welcomed them at the Sarvodaya Centre in Matara. They were sorry to leave and we were sorry about their departure. It is NPC that paved the way for this meeting. As an NGO, it is trying hard to bring sustainable peace. We all believe that sustainable peace can be built only through goodwill. When we visit the North, they will be waiting to welcome their brothers and sisters from the South. We hope that the relationships built through these visits could last always.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

Inter religious cooperation created a strong mechanism for sustainable peace



**Ven. Udagama Dhammananda Thero**

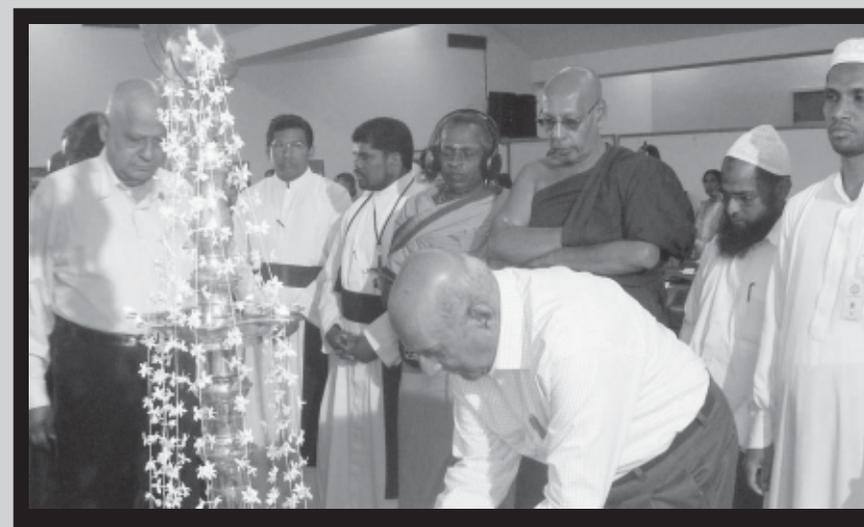
Co-Convenor- DIRC Polonnaruwa

The attempt to bring humanitarian relief to those affected by war with the partnership of all religious leaders is very important. Polonnaruwa DIRC has contributed a lot to satisfy this need. Although I could not attend several programs due to my visits abroad, I am giving my utmost support and blessing to these activities.

Now all religious leaders are getting together to discuss common problems faced by people. At the National Convention held in Colombo, religious leaders adopted a common resolution that was presented to relevant authorities. We are able to do such things only if we maintain good relationships among us. Although participants at the convention came from the four corners of Sri Lanka, we had an unbreakable unity.

Although the 30-year war has ended, all development activities cannot be completed at once. This needs time. When we visited Jaffna, we discussed this with the local population. We who live in Polonnaruwa have no check points or road barriers but they are still there in Jaffna. To bring life in Jaffna to normalcy, they have to be removed gradually. On both sides, there were people profiting from the war. Even now they have influence, so we need to build relationships among us.

When I visited Jaffna I met people affected by the war. We went to a remote village in Chavakachcheri. People there had been trapped and saved



Opening of Inter Religious National Secretariat



during the last stages of the war. They told us very sad stories that were painful to hear. I met a woman called Jayachandra Wijayarani who had a six year-old daughter. She had suffered but had now recovered with counselling. But they had no means of living so she could not educate her child.

After this visit, I discussed the child's plight with people who helped the temple and we collected funds from our temple to support her education. We put the money in a bank in Chavakachcheri, which the mother could access each month at the rate of Rs. 500. We have deposited funds for one year and we hope to help the child until she finishes school. The Jaffna DIRC is following up on the progress. We are providing a similar scholarship to another child. For this I also get the support of people who help me.

If humanitarian needs of people are satisfied, they will not look at society with anger and suspicion and this will narrow the gap. If suspicion among Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people can be removed, coexistence will thrive. Therefore in our places of worship, we must discuss ways of bringing relief to the people and ways of contributing our efforts to find a lasting peace. I believe that inter religious cooperation is a powerful mechanism to achieve this.

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## Case Studies in Reconciliation

When an issue arose, the Muslim community discussed it with DIRC



**Ven. Tellambure Sarana Thero**  
Incumbent, Sri Saddhatissaramaya  
DIRC Galle

“Hatred cannot be suppressed by hatred. This can be done through kindness.” This is a saying from the past. Religious teachers play a powerful role in creating a resilient society. By accepting all religions, we can build an ideal society. The teachings and rituals of all religions have a spiritual power to bind us.

Lord Buddha visited Sri Lanka to settle disputes. In order to remove sanctions against Japan after World War II, former President J.R. Jayewardene quoted the gatha given above to put forward his ideas at the peace conference. Because of this the people of Japan were able to build a new country. We also have the task of building a new country, for which leaders of all religions should unite and march forward. Galle is a place where religious and communal conflicts have occurred in the past. There is a small Tamil community in the city. In business, Muslims are prosperous because of their Sinhala customers, so the two communities have a close relationship. When an issue arose, Muslim people discussed it with the DIRC and Buddhist priests. In our organization religious leaders of all religions are well represented. It is a real strength to us. In our district, there are Tamils living on estates. Most of them did not have birth certificates and marriage certificates, so they faced various problems in their daily lives. We conducted a mobile service with the cooperation of Government officers to issue the certificates. We also helped some of the children to continue their studies. Several donors supported us. The DIRC is vital to assist in meeting the humanitarian needs of people.



Religious and civil society leaders from the East in discussions with Deputy Mayor of Galle, Mr. Kelum Seneviratne

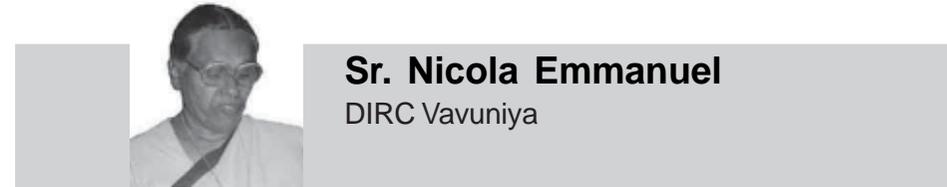




Inter religious and civil society leaders meet most venerable Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith



These are small but valuable efforts



**Sr. Nicola Emmanuel**  
DIRC Vavuniya

Many people in the Vavuniya district were badly affected by floods in 2011. They had also suffered during the war. We discussed this situation and what steps to take at the DIRC, and decided to ask organizations to help us in relief efforts. We collected one million rupees worth of dry rations, and these were distributed among flood victims.

DIRC members from the North distributed exercise books to children in the Punthotam camp. These may be small efforts but they are valuable, although it is impossible to solve such problems without a political solution. On another occasion we had a prayer session about the grease devil incident, which had caused unrest among the people. We gathered at the church to pray. This was published in the news and also at international levels, so we were able to alleviate the problem.

We initiated a counseling program for widowed women living in camps in the Vavuniya area. Most of them were traumatized by fear, shock and loss of loved ones. We distributed school supplies to children and gave loans for women to improve their income generation. On May 18, 2012, we organized a silent prayer in memory of those who had lost their lives in the war.

We have formulated a constitution for the Vavuniya DIRC and are planning to engage in sustainable development work.

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

Let us use inter religious values to find solutions to national issues



**Jagath Liyanaarachchi**

Attorney at Law  
Committee member  
National Peace Secretariat

The set of proposals to improve the conditions of women and children in a post war context was prepared through a participatory method. The main data was supplied by the 12 DIRCs based on their identified needs and suggested solutions.

The proposals based on social issues and solutions identified by religious leaders and civil society activists were initially prepared at district level. In these sessions religious leaders of all four religions and civil society activists representing all communities and languages contributed their findings and suggestions. They had considered their religious and cultural backgrounds in making their proposals.

Preparation of the provincial proposals with a consideration of the district proposals was a challenge as there could be disparities between the two. Therefore a set of proposals had to be designed that could be adopted by common consensus, being very careful of word usage. Three sets of proposals were adopted with common consensus at provincial level.

The preparation of national level proposals was even more challenging to our drafting board as they required the consent of representatives of 12 DIRCs. Although the adoption of proposals at district level was easy, the same delegates found it difficult to agree on some issues as they had to represent the diverse aspirations of their regions.



Mrs. Nimalka Fernando, Human Rights Activist, addresses the inauguration meeting of the Inter Religious National Secretariat



The draft national proposals were forwarded to the National Board representatives for deeper discussion and agreement. In the end they were able to agree with consensus and the proposals were presented to the participants of the National Conference for their observations.

In the task of drafting national proposals, the long experience of the drafting board, the representation of the three main communities and their cooperation in various activities of the DIRCs in the past two years helped in its success.

Some activities included in the proposals at the district level had been undertaken at regional levels and had helped reconciliation and coexistence in these regions. Solutions had already been found for some of the problems and served as examples of what could be done. This is a better approach than blaming the authorities. The ability to draft a set of fair proposals that could be agreed on by all and had the approval of all the religions was a good achievement.

The interest and the commitment of religious and civil society leaders to improve the humanitarian conditions of women and children affected by war and to bring unity amidst diversity should be an example to policy makers in solving the national conflict.

**The interest and the commitment of religious and civil society leaders to improve the humanitarian conditions of women and children affected by war and to bring unity amidst diversity should be an example to policy makers in solving the national conflict.**

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

### Proposals to improve living conditions of women and children in the post war context



**Kumuduni Abeywickrama**

Former Deputy Secretary, Southern Province  
DIRC Galle

Several officers of the Galle Probation and Child Care Department who participated at a workshop on child protection conducted by NPC said they found the information valuable. I also used the knowledge gained at the workshop during lectures to local organizations, who did not have this information. They also found it valuable.

Abused children from all three communities are housed at the Hikkaduwa Certified School. They were sent to the school from different areas by the courts. Most of them had been sexually abused either by their parents or by strangers. They were orphans or came from poor families where their parents could not afford to visit them once a month from distant areas. Sixteen of the children attended school while 40 were getting vocational training.

The Galle DIRC organized a workshop for the children of the Hikkaduwa Certified School, with many activities to keep them entertained. There were lectures and individual, friendly discussions. School books and other learning materials were given to the children. The resources needed for the workshop were collected from local donors, who were glad to contribute to such programs.

We spent the day with the children, who were happy to have us. Afterwards I discussed the program with the principal, who said that the children had enjoyed the workshop. We also discussed it at Inter Religious Council meetings and we were satisfied with the success of the program.



A group of children who participated in the "Make Our Children Happy" program conducted to commemorate International Children's Day 2011



## Fulfilling our religious duty



Inter religious leaders and civil society representatives of the Eastern Province in front of Nallur Kovil in Jaffna



**Siva Sri Kirubananda**

Kurukkal  
Co-Convenor- DIRC Jaffna

As religious leaders, it is our duty to serve all people. However, we have not had the opportunity to assist people of other religions. With the establishment of the Jaffna DIRC, with the guidance of NPC, religious leaders were able to unite and serve the community as a whole. We found solutions when people of other religions faced problems and disasters.

Last year valuable religious and archeological objects were being stolen from Hindu Kovils in Jaffna, causing distress to the Hindu community. The Jaffna DIRC discussed the robberies and presented a letter to the District Secretary and the Governor of the Northern Province about the situation. After discussions with the religious leaders, the Governor ordered the police to provide security to the Kovils.

The Kurukkals of Kovils were pleased with the measures taken by the police due to the efforts of the Jaffna DIRC.

## Annex - I

**Problems of war affected women and children identified by DIRCs  
and attempts and measures taken to solve them**

| Nos. | DIRC              | Problems Identified   | Measures taken for solutions  |
|------|-------------------|---|---|
| 1    | Vavuniya District | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The fundamental problems of the resettled people. E.g.: transport difficulties, security etc.</li> <li>• Large number of dropout school children due to poverty</li> <li>• Problems of civil protection</li> <li>• Problems of women widowed by war</li> <li>• Need to develop social attitudes and humanitarian relief</li> <li>• Land problems and problems of resettlement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ People who suffered due to the 30-year war faced another disaster with floods that occurred after heavy rains in February 2011. Most of them lost their homes and livelihoods. As a temporary measure dry rations were distributed among 98 Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim families at an expenditure of Rs. 100,000.</li> <li>➤ DIRC was invited to the meeting of the members of the European Union and its collaborating agencies held at Oxfam Office in Vavuniya on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2011. The EU spoke of grants they offer and asked DIRC to send them a project proposal based on identified issues by the DIRC.</li> <li>➤ On 7<sup>th</sup> December 2011 at a meeting held at RPR Mamar, the present situation and the identified issues were presented to EU MPs by Sr. Nicola, who represented the Vavuniya DIRC. They said they are taking steps to influence the Government in international levels.</li> <li>➤ DIRC participated in the International Women's Day commemoration held at Maharambai Kulam organized by FIRM, the only one in Vavuniya.</li> <li>➤ DIRC Vavuniya under the leadership of Fr. Jesurajan organized half a day of silent prayer at St. Anthony's Church Rapaikulam to stop torture and disturbances by the "grease devil" incident in Vavuniya.</li> </ul>  |
| 2    | Jaffna District   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widespread unemployment and lack of livelihoods among women affected by war</li> <li>• Political problems: The attitudes of the Tamil people towards resettled Sinhala people</li> <li>• Problems of children: Education, Nutrition, Pre-school education, child abuse and poverty</li> <li>• Economic problems: Lack of compensation and barriers to remove sand</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The private buses transporting passengers in and around Jaffna municipality overload their buses, harassing women and children Letters were sent to Passenger Transport Authority and relevant organizations calling their attention on this matter on 30.08.2011.</li> <li>➤ The services of Mrs. Sinnaiya Ponnimalar, Principal, Teacher Training Centre, Kopai, were suspended. Appeals were made to Hon. President and the Minister of Education to conduct a formal inquiry and to reinstate her on 20.07.2011.</li> <li>➤ Distribution of cooked food to the Muslim people who were displaced by the 2010 floods through the intervention of DIRC.</li> <li>➤ Distribution of dry rations to the families of Palai and Uduthurai villages in 2010 floods at an expenditure of Rs. 40,000.</li> <li>➤ In order to get the Government and relevant authorities to find solutions to harassment of people in Samanthurai by the "grease devil", a religious mass for 100 people from all religions was conducted and broadcast through media.</li> <li>➤ There were disturbances during rituals and ceremonies of Nallur Kovil because the Sinhala people of the South who visit the Kovil did not know Tamil. The attention of the Municipal Council was directed on this matter and the notice boards with guidance and instructions in Sinhala were fixed in the Kovil premises.</li> <li>➤ On 4<sup>th</sup> November 2011 an awareness program was conducted on HIV/Aids for 18 selected youths. The PHI of Welanai area participated as a resource person.</li> <li>➤ International Peace Day was commemorated in collaboration with Centre for Peace and Reconciliation on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011 with the participation of 100 religious and civil society leaders and 400 affected children.</li> <li>➤ A discussion was held with the authorities about handing over of land in Ariyalai that had been acquired by the Army to the original owners. The discussion ended successfully and the army agreed to hand over the land.</li> </ul> |

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

|   |                      |   |   |
|---|----------------------|---|---|
| 3 | Mannar District      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems of resettlement: Lack of sufficient income; lack of housing facilities, and drinking water, land problems and problems connected with settling land disputes</li> <li>• Education: Lack of sufficient income for schooling and the school drop outs</li> <li>• Health: Nutritional deficiencies and the lack of awareness on nutrition</li> <li>• Land problems: No interest taken by authorities to look into the facilities of people who were resettled here from Puttalam</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Through letters and discussions attention of the Chairman of Prudheshiya Sabha and relevant officers was directed to initiate a program to minimize road accidents caused by wandering animals such as asses and dogs on the roads to the town.</li> <li>➤ A liquor shop was opened on one of the roads leading to Mannar and with the sale of liquor, people get drunk and harass women walking past. Letters were sent to relevant officers including the Commissioner of Excise to take necessary action on the matter.</li> <li>➤ Engaged with PAFFREL as observers at the last local government elections.</li> <li>➤ People who suffered due to the 30-year war faced another disaster with floods that occurred after heavy rains in February 2011. As a temporary measure dry rations were distributed among 98 Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim families costing Rs. 100,000.</li> <li>➤ Letters were forwarded for the attention of His Excellency the President and Hon. Ministers and Government officers on the problems faced by people due to the opening of new liquor shops.</li> <li>➤ On 7<sup>th</sup> December 2011, at a meeting held in Mannar, the situation of the North and the identified issues were presented to the MPs of the European Union. They said they are taking steps to influence the Government at international levels.</li> </ul>  |
| 4 | Trincomalee District | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of protected houses; lack of transport facilities; lack of proper waste removal facilities (drains etc) in resettled areas</li> <li>• Education: Lack of proper education due to poverty and low income conditions and children are more exposed to abuse by the use of internet</li> <li>• Health: Nutrition deficiencies and the lack of awareness on nutrition</li> <li>• Problems connected with employment and self-employment facilities</li> <li>• Problems connected with lands and resettlement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Engaged with PAFFREL as observers at the last local government elections.</li> <li>➤ People who suffered due to the 30-year war faced another disaster with floods that occurred after heavy rains in February 2011. As a temporary measure exercise books and other materials were distributed among 120 school children of 5 Sinhala Tamil and Muslim schools worth nearly Rs. 100,000.</li> <li>➤ With the cooperation of the DIRC members of the South 50 children of Kurangu Panjan Muslim School of Kirniya who were affected by the floods were given exercise books and other materials worth of Rs. 9,000.</li> <li>➤ A conference on child abuse was conducted for 56 school children of Jamaliya Muslim Vidyalaya and their parents on 31 July 2011. OJC, Women and Children's Desk, Trincomalee Police Station, participated as a resource person. Maulawi Arfn participated in counseling.</li> <li>➤ A dialogue was conducted on 26 July 2011 on moral codes of Islam and Christianity at Medico Village. 20 religious leaders, 5 journalists and 8 civil society leaders participated in this dialogue.</li> <li>➤ An awareness program on entrepreneurship was conducted with the collaboration of the Chamber of Commerce Trincomalee for the women affected by war on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2011. 6 out of this group were selected for a training program designing creations from oyster shells. All 21 were selected to be trained under EUNSA project.</li> </ul> |
| 5 | Batticaloa District  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of sufficient livelihood facilities</li> <li>• Low opportunities for self employment</li> <li>• Problems in continuous education</li> <li>• Problems in putting up houses</li> <li>• Health: Nutritional deficiencies and the inability to get nutritious food</li> <li>• Mental Problems: more tendency for suicide</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ People who suffered due to the 30-year war faced another disaster with floods that occurred after heavy rains in February 2011. As a temporary measure dry rations were distributed among 98 Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim families on 09.05.2011 at an expenditure of Rs. 100,000.</li> <li>➤ With the cooperation of DIRC members of the South, exercise books were given to 50 war affected school children of Kuludevalai village and soap was given to 40 war affected widows of Pattipalai village at a cost of Rs. 10,000.</li> <li>➤ The goods worth Rs. 40,000 that were supplied by Anuradhapura DIRC members were distributed among war affected people on 21.04.2011.</li> <li>➤ A one day program was conducted in collaboration with People's Bank, Kattankudi Branch for 35 women in Manjanthoduwai village to promote self employment.</li> </ul>  |

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| 6 | Puttalam District | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social problems arising out of the lack of awareness of other different cultures</li> <li>• Non implementation of any programs for developing self-employment</li> <li>• Lack of vocational training programs and the minimal opportunities for vocational training</li> <li>• Lack of interest in acquiring birth certificates, marriage certificates and national identity cards</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge on civil and criminal law and the procedures of getting services from government authorities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Engaged with PAFFREL as observers at the last local government elections.</li> <li>➤ Several Muslim religious leaders participated in the funeral procession of the Nayaka Thero of the Buddhist Centre, Puttalam.</li> <li>➤ A discussion was conducted with the D.S. Puttalam to settle the conflicts that arose in the area because “grease devil” incidents. At every religions centre, the community was told to keep calm. Maulavi Abdulla Alim discussed this matter with the Defence Secretary Mr. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa.</li> <li>➤ People who suffered due to the 30-year war faced another disaster with floods that occurred after heavy rains in February 2011. Most of them lost their livelihoods. As a temporary measure exercise books and other materials were distributed among 98 Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim school children at an expenditure of Rs. 100,000.</li> <li>➤ A legal camp held at Bandaranaike Vidyalaya, Vanathavilluwa, Puttalam, to make people aware of criminal and civil law by lecturers from Human Rights Studies Centre of Colombo University to mark International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2012.</li> <li>➤ To celebrate International Women’s Day, a workshop on women’s rights violence against women was held at Bandaranaike Vidyalaya, Vanathavilluwa, Puttalam, on 10 March 2012 with the participation of 140 women, school children and parents and facilitated by lecturers from the Law Faculty of Colombo University.</li> <li>➤ Clothing was given to war affected people living in an elders’ home with a donation from the Grand Mosque of Puttalam.</li> </ul> |
| 7 | Matara District   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of opportunities for non-formal education and facilities for language training</li> <li>• Problems connected with the care of women and children</li> <li>• Problems of acquiring birth certificates and national identity cards for the people in the plantation sector</li> <li>• Improvement of consultation services and mental attitudes on national conflict</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Organized a mobile service with Divisional Secretariat, Pitabeddara, on April 2011, and provided 75 identity cards and 160 birth certificates to Tamil people in the plantation sector and registered 25 marriages of people living together unmarried.</li> <li>➤ With special participation of the Muslim community, 125 Sinhala and Muslim people donated blood at a blood donation camp organized by the Maulavies of DIRC.</li> <li>➤ Conducted a medical clinic for 50 disabled army soldiers and initial planning done to conduct a program in October 2011 to improve their mental well-being.</li> <li>➤ Intervention to combat the crisis that arose on 03.09.2011 between Sinhala and Muslim communities with the help of government organizations and had direct contacts with the Hon Minister of National Languages and Civil Reconciliation, Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara to settle this matter.</li> <li>➤ When the members of the DIRCs of North and East visited the South a cultural program including traditional dances was conducted with the collaboration of Matara cultural centre to give them an idea about the culture of the South.</li> <li>➤ When a group of youth who receive vocational training and women came on a trip to South with Fr. Dickson, the co-convenor of Jaffna DIRC, on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2012 Sinhala Tamil New Year Day, Maulavi MNM Nissam with the support of other religious leaders provided breakfast for them.</li> </ul>  |

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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| 8  | Galle District       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of basic opportunities for non formal education and facilities for language training</li> <li>• Problems of acquiring birth certificates and national identity cards for the people of the plantation sector</li> <li>• Improvement of mental attitudes on the national conflict</li> <li>• Improving the economic conditions of families without income sources</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Organized a mobile service on March 2011 with the Welivitiya, Divithura Divisional Secretariat to provide 95 birth certificates and 145 identity cards for those people living in Divithura Estate and surrounding areas.</li> <li>➤ Directed requests made by school leavers to follow vocational training courses to Don Bosco Technical Institute, Negombo, to consider the available facilities.</li> <li>➤ Distribution of exercise books and other materials worth Rs. 30,000 to 37 students of Neluwa-Devalegama Primary School on 13 September 2011.</li> <li>➤ A program was held on 15.10.2011 to mark International Children's Day for children of low income families as well as of Army personnel. They were taken on a boat trip along the Madu Ganga and games and an art competition were also held with prizes given.</li> <li>➤ A government approved school in Hikkaduwa has children who were abused and who were behaved badly. They have been rehabilitated. An awareness program was held for the children, who given stationery by Northern DIRC members who were on an exposure visit.</li> <li>➤ With the support of donors and others in the area a program was organized to entertain 30 children from low income families in the area at Sanasa Mandiraya on 19.12.2011.</li> <li>➤ 47 people from Galle attended a ceremony of the daughter of Mr Dharmaraj, the District Coordinator of Jaffna DIRC. A member the household said it was the first time that Sinhala people had participated in a ceremony of this kind, where they had the opportunity to learn customs and rituals of the North.</li> <li>➤ A group of youth who are having vocational training and women were welcomed to the South along with the Rev. Fr. Dixon a Co-convenor of DIRC Jaffna, and necessary guidance was given to them.</li> </ul> |
| 9  | Polonnaruwa District | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of opportunities for non formal education and facilities for language learning</li> <li>• Problems connected with the care of women and children</li> <li>• Problems of acquiring birth certificates and national identity cards</li> <li>• Consultation services to improve mental health</li> <li>• Lack of income sources including jobs</li> <li>• Lack of infrastructure for health, communication, electricity and water</li> <li>• Problems of civil security</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A conference was conducted on "Child Abuse and a Better Family" on 26 August 2011 at the auditorium of Welikanda Divisional Secretariat for 52 pre-school teachers, Sunday school teachers, school prefects and civil society leaders.</li> <li>➤ Engaged with PAFFREL as observers in the last local government elections.</li> <li>➤ People who suffered due to the 30-year war faced another disaster with floods that occurred after heavy rains in February 2011. Most of them lost their homes and livelihoods. As a temporary measure dry rations were distributed among 98 Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim families at an expenditure of Rs. 100,000.</li> <li>➤ With the cooperation of the DIRC members of the South, exercise books and other materials worth Rs. 9,000 were distributed among 25 students of Manampitiya Sarvodaya Village.</li> <li>➤ A seminar was organized in collaboration with farmers' societies on 10.09.2011 to make the people aware of environment pollution and other damage to farming because of the government's project to land sea planes on Parakrama Samudra, Mimeriya and Giritala tanks.</li> <li>➤ Celebrated Sinhala and Tamil New Year on 14 April 2012 with Mr. Sujeewa Gayanath the Coordinator of DIRC, together with religious leaders.</li> </ul>  |
| 10 | Kurunegala District  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems connected with the care of women and children</li> <li>• Need for developing social attitudes and humanitarian relief</li> <li>• Unemployment and lack of income sources</li> <li>• Minimal opportunities for non formal education</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Distributed exercise books and other materials worth Rs. 10,000 among 20 affected Tamil students of Hindu Maha Vodyalaya, Kurunegala.</li> <li>➤ Handed over of goods worth about R. 5,000 to Trincomalee to be distributed among affected people.</li> <li>➤ Stationery worth of Rs. 30,000 was donated to 50 children of low income families on 17.05.2012 at Torayaya Muslim Vidyalaya &amp; Meddegama Primary School.</li> </ul>  |

|    |                       |  |   |
|----|-----------------------|--|---|
| 11 | Anpara District       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems of civil protection</li> <li>• Inability to provide proper education due to poverty and low income sources</li> <li>• Unemployment and lack of livelihood</li> <li>• Problems connected with land and resettlement</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ People who suffered due to the 30-year war faced another disaster with floods that occurred after heavy rains in February 2011. As a temporary measure exercise books and other materials were distributed among 120 Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim students at an expenditure of Rs. 100,000.</li> <li>➤ With the cooperation of the DIRC members of the South, exercise books and other materials worth Rs. 8,000 were distributed among 50 students of Manthanuth Sairam Ambic Vidyalaya, Akkarapattu.</li> <li>➤ War affected people at Hingurana, were also threatened by dengue. Some were admitted to hospital. A Shramadana was organized by the villagers on 25.06.2011 with the participation of Grama Niladhari, PHI, and DIRC members to prevent the spread of dengue.</li> <li>➤ A seminar on child abuse was held for 69 students of Hingurana Maha Vidyalaya on 30.06.2011. As resource persons, OIC of the Division for Women and Children, PHI and the Principal were present.</li> </ul>  |
| 12 | Anuradhapura District | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non participation of youth in development process</li> <li>• Undeveloped fundamental health facilities</li> <li>• Moral problems (for this awareness and attitudinal progress programs are essential)</li> <li>• Minimal opportunities for non formal education programs</li> <li>• Problems of acquiring birth certificates and national identity cards</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Construction of a permanent house for a war affected family in Yamoya village was approved and construction started.</li> <li>➤ People who suffered due to the 30-year war faced another disaster with floods that occurred after heavy rains in February 2011. Most of them lost their homes and livelihoods. As a temporary measure dry rations were distributed among 98 Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim families at an expenditure of Rs. 100,000.</li> <li>➤ Handed over of articles worth Rs. 40,000 collected from Anuradhapura to DIRC, Batticaloa, to be distributed among war and flood affected Tamil and Muslim women of the area.</li> <li>➤ With the intervention of Rev. Velimuwapothana Piyarathana Thero, a mobile service was organized on July 2011 at Divisional Secretariat to provide identity cards and birth certificates to those in the Horowpotana area.</li> <li>➤ A religious dialogue called 'Nisalavila' was conducted on Wesak Poya Day 2012 with the participation of religious leaders. They discussed the ethics that are embedded in each religion.</li> <li>➤ A one day workshop on introducing strategies to improve self-employment was held for widows and women abandoned by their men at Suhadagama of Ratmale at Yann Oya Junction.</li> <li>➤ A presentation on positive thinking was made by Mr. Wijayantha Ukwatte, a senior lecturer from SLFI for 40 students and 60 parents at Kahatagollewa primary School at Kebithigollewa on 6.12.2011. Stationery was donated to 50 selected students from low income families of Army personnel and war affected Sinhala families. Children who participated at sports events were given gifts. The donation was made by Mr. H.P.H. Kulathunga, a businessman.</li> <li>➤ A youth camp was organized from 21 to 23 January 2012 to improve skills and capacity of youth to contribute effectively to the development process. This was supported by Muslim Aid and Gandhi foundation.</li> <li>➤ A street drama was held at Kahatagollewa primary school at Kebithigollewa on 23.02.2012 to educate children, staff and parents on human rights and preventing child abuse. A dialogue was held on the same topic.</li> </ul> |

**Note:**

These social problems were identified by the religious and civil society leaders of DIRCs through a formal process. They were again analyzed and prioritized by the same groups. The prioritized problems are given above.

## Annex - II

The issues identified at district levels which were forwarded to respective authorities through several sessions of national secretariats/provincial committees/district active committees meetings.

| Date                            | Authority  | Identified Issue   | Measures taken for solution  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 30 <sup>th</sup> April 2011     | A delegation from the National Secretariat held discussions with the Chairman of the National Youth Services Council, Attorney at Law Mr. Lalith Piyum Perera  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The absence of a national youth policy</li> <li>➤ The misuse of land in the Eastern Province belonging to the National Youth Council</li> <li>➤ The absence of a comprehensive mechanism for youth rehabilitation</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓The Chairman of the National Youth Services Council, speaking at a discussion on TV, noted that the formulation of a National Youth Policy is underway.</li> <li>✓We learned that some of the issues were directed to Minister Dullas Alahapperuma and M.P Namal Rajapaksa.</li> </ul>   |
| 30 <sup>th</sup> May 2011       | Discussions held by representatives of the National Secretariat with M.P. Ravi Karunanayake, who is also the National Organizer of United National Party (UNP)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The issue of resettlement in the North and Eastern provinces</li> <li>➤ Compensation due to individuals who died in the war</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓We learned that UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe and other officials have been informed about the issues on resettlement.</li> <li>✓We also learned that they were planning an inspection tour within the Northern province.</li> </ul>   |
| 20 <sup>th</sup> August 2011    | Discussions held by representatives of the National Secretariat with the Head of the Media Center for National Security and Director General of the National Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organizations Mr. Lakshman Hulugalla | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Restrictions imposed on non-governmental organizations in discussing human rights issues pertaining to the North and Eastern Provinces</li> <li>➤ issues relating to security</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓We were told that such programs would be allowed as long they are not conspiring against the government.</li> <li>✓We were told that this will be discussed with the Secretary of Defense Gotabhaya Rajapaksa.</li> </ul>  |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> September 2011 | Discussions held by representatives of the National Secretariat with Minister of National Languages and Social Integration Vasudeva Nanayakkara  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Citizens' lack of knowledge and barriers of learning a second language</li> <li>➤ The public's lack of knowledge on a second language and the lack opportunity in learning</li> <li>➤ The fact that government documents and circulars are not forwarded in the Tamil language</li> <li>➤ Singing of the National Anthem only in Sinhala</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓The representatives were informed that the application process has started for Tamil language classes to start in the near future.</li> <li>✓We were informed that from now on distributing of circulars and other government documents in Tamil is to be considered mandatory, and those relevant authorities have been informed regarding this measure.</li> </ul> |

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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| 15 <sup>th</sup> November 2011 | Discussions held by representatives of the Northern Province Inter-Religious Committee with the Governor of the Northern Province Major General G.A. Chandasiri  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lack of transparency within development activities carried out in the Northern province and the failure to consider people's ideas regarding development efforts</li> <li>➤ Theft of historical artifacts from Hindu Kovils</li> <li>➤ Issues relating to civil security</li> <li>➤ Delays in resettlement efforts, and the failures of setting it up in a formal manner</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ High level state officials were being instructed to start grass root level committees comprising of both religious and civil leaders in order to get suggestions on development while giving special emphasis to the issues of women and children affected by war.</li> <li>✓ A mobile police watch was put in operation in order to protect the historical artifacts of the Hindu Kovils.</li> <li>✓ We were informed that issues relating to resettlement and civil security would be directed to relevant authorities.</li> </ul> |
| 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2011 | Discussion held by representatives of the National Secretariat with former president of the Business Alliance for Peace, Mr. Suresh de Mel                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Unavailability of a program which can generate sources of income to distressed women</li> <li>➤ Lack of support from the business community to address issues relating to human rights</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Members were requested to forward project reports for small scale entrepreneurship programs.</li> <li>✓ We were informed that necessary action will be implemented in order to get the support of district commerce chambers.</li> <li>✓ A self employment program was launched for low income women with the support of the Trincomalee district chamber of commerce.</li> </ul>  |
| 07 <sup>th</sup> December 2012 | Discussion with EU parliamentarians by the members of DIRC's Mannar and Vavuniya   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Issues and problems regarding civil security and because of High Security Zones</li> <li>➤ Lapses in resettlement process and need for the process to be formalized</li> <li>➤ Speed up compensating disappeared</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We were informed that the problems will be forwarded to the attention of state authorities.</li> <li>✓ Pressured the government through IMF and Sri Lanka-friendly countries.</li> <li>✓ We were informed that they will discuss these issues with other civil organizations.</li> </ul>   |
| 09 <sup>th</sup> January 2012  | Discussions held by representatives of the National Secretariat with the Chairman of the National Child Protection Authority Mrs. Anoma Dissanayake              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The lack of proper information reaching relevant authorities regarding child abuse</li> <li>➤ Problems existing within child protection centers and instituting a plan to streamline operations</li> <li>➤ Inefficiency of respective officers</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We were informed that ground level co-ordination committees will be formed that can be accessed by DIRC members.</li> <li>✓ We were informed that formal actions will be taken against the problems prevalent within child protection centers while implementing existing laws and introducing new laws if the need arises.</li> </ul>   |
| 30 <sup>th</sup> January 2012  | Discussions held by representatives of the Southern Province Inter-Religious Committee with the permanent secretary to the North Western province Chief Minister | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Unavailability of income sources to women affected by war</li> <li>➤ Increasing levels of child abuse and unavailability of solutions</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We were informed that there is already a self employment program designed to provide relief for women and that there is a possibility to include women identified by the DIRC.</li> <li>✓ It was mentioned that these issues will be directed to the North Western Province Chief Minister's attention.</li> </ul>   |

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| <p>06<sup>th</sup> March 2012 and 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012</p> | <p>Discussions held by representatives of the Eastern and Northern Provincial Inter Religious Councils with the Chairman of the Eastern provincial council H.H.M. Fais</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The issues prevalent within resettled villages of the Eastern province (for example, problems related to drinking water in the Nilaveli Jiea village)</li> <li>➤ Unavailability of income sources to women distressed by war</li> <li>➤ Issues related to lands and resettlement</li> <li>➤ Request for an allowance to be paid to Sunday school teachers</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We were informed that issues of resettled villages will be observed and given solutions.</li> <li>✓ Identified issues are to be addressed in April through a provincial council session after entering them on an agenda.</li> <li>✓ We were informed that necessary measures will be taken by the provincial council to provide incentives for self employment.</li> <li>✓ It was mentioned that formal measures will be taken and voluntary teachers will be considered for the measures.</li> </ul> |
| <p>April 28, 2012</p>  | <p>Presentation of the identified problems by the delegates of the Provincial Inter Religious Council Southern Province, at the Southern Province Conference to the leader of the opposition, Southern Province Provincial Council and to the Chief Minister, Southern Province by Hon. Kumara Dhammika Municipal Council member</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Curbing child abuse, alleviation of harassment to women and protecting children</li> <li>➤ Language use in dealing with government institutions</li> <li>➤ Developing spiritual qualities and social protection</li> <li>➤ Creating coexistence by providing opportunities for economic development</li> <li>➤ Education, vocational training and job opportunities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We were informed that these matters will be directed to Leader of the Opposition Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe and also that these will be discussed at the next Provincial Council meeting.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>May 10, 2012</p>  | <p>Presentation of the problems identified by the delegates of the Northern Province Provincial Inter Religious Council at the Northern Province Conference to the Bishop of Mannar, Most Rev Rayappu Joseph After the Northern province conference committee member Rev Sister Nicola directed the problems to former District M.P. of Vavuniya, Mr. Sivanathan Kishore</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Social protection and the promotion of culture</li> <li>➤ Education, vocational training and job opportunities</li> <li>➤ Development of local industries and the creation of an economic revival</li> <li>➤ Bringing civilian life to normalcy</li> <li>➤ Language problem connected with administration</li> </ul>   |   |

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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| <p>June 9, 2012</p>  | <p>Presenting the identified needs by the delegates of the Eastern Province Inter Religious Council at the Eastern Province Conference, to Mr. H.M.M. Faiz, the chairman of the Eastern Province Provincial Council</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bringing civilian life to normalcy</li> <li>➤ Disappearances and abduction of people</li> <li>➤ Developing livelihoods and building economy</li> <li>➤ Social protection and promotion of culture</li> <li>➤ Formal education and vocational training</li> <li>➤ Language problem connected with administration</li> <li>➤ Resettlement and lands</li> <li>➤ Reconciliation process and building sustainable peace</li> <li>➤ Other problems connected with day to day life and measure that could be taken to solve them</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We were informed that these problems will be included to June Provincial Council meeting agenda.</li> <li>✓ Stated that priority will be given to all problems that could be solved at provincial level.</li> <li>✓ Stated that national level problems will be directed to central government authorities.</li> </ul> |
| <p>June 16, 2012</p> | <p>Presentation of the Resolution passed at National Conference to Rev. Maduluwawe Sobhitha Thero, Hon. M.P, Karu Jayasuriya (UNP), Hon M.P. Sumanthiran (TNA) and Mr. Mano Ganeshan</p>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Curbing child abuse alleviation of harassment of women and protecting children</li> <li>➤ Use of language in dealing with government institutions</li> <li>➤ Developing spiritual qualities and social protection</li> <li>➤ Building coexistence by providing opportunities for improvement of local industries and the creation of an economic revival</li> <li>➤ Bringing civil life to normalcy</li> <li>➤ Disappearances and abduction of people</li> <li>➤ Developing livelihoods and building their economy</li> <li>➤ Resettlement and lands</li> <li>➤ Building sustainable peace and reconciliation process</li> <li>➤ Other problem connected with day to day life and measure that could be taken to solve them</li> </ul> |   |

## Annex - III

# Resolution – Inter Religious National Conference

### **Resolutions for improvement of living standards among women and children in post war Sri Lanka**

12 District Inter Religious Councils have been established in their respective areas including the North and East, comprising religious and civil society leaders, committed towards seeking humanitarian solutions to issues faced by women and children in post war Sri Lanka. Additionally a National Council has been established, along with 3 Provincial councils, comprising of religious and civil society leaders selected from their respective district committees. The Southern province council comprises of members from the Anuradhapura, Kurunegala, Matara, and Galle districts, while the Eastern province council comprises of members from the Polonaruwa, Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Ampara districts. The Northern Province council comprises of members from the Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mannar, and Puttalam districts.

District Inter Religious Committees have gained significant information regarding the humanitarian needs of women and children in areas directly and indirectly affected by war, and have taken steps to channel their problems towards government representatives, members of the opposition, the business community and religious leaders. These Inter Religious Committees have been able to address some of the grievances in this regard.

Meanwhile a resolution, passed by 44 religious leaders and 59 civil society representatives at the Southern province inter religious convention on 28 April 2012 was submitted to political leaders and religious leaders in the area. A separate resolution was formulated at the Northern Province inter religious convention, encompassing several recommendations made by members of the Northern province inter religious council, as well as a solutions formulated by the 48 religious leaders and 61 civil society leaders representing their respective councils.

The resolution was passed on 12 May 2012 in Mannar, and was presented to political and religious leaders in the Northern Province.

### **Issues faced by victims of war**

We as members of the DIRC initiative, and religious leaders representing the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities, seek to promote democratic rights of all individuals regardless of national, language, and religious differences. Under the premise of a religious brotherhood we wish to make the following recommendation.

### **Observations and Proposed Solutions**

#### **1. Bringing normalcy to civilian life**

The Council has identified the following issues, with regards to people presently living in war ravaged areas.

Individuals being displaced from their land and property

Large groups of people remain displaced due to destruction of property during war, construction of military camps, demining operations, and acquiring of land for various security reasons. Large groups of people currently live in resettlement areas while certain others live with their relations. Over 10 000 people are still housed in welfare camps in the north. A similar situation exists within the Eastern province, though as not appalling as in the North.

People are being resettled in areas where there is an obvious lack of basic necessities and they are unable to fulfill their basic needs. Failing to uphold the rights of such people to live in a permanent residence has led to an overall erosion of civil life. Furthermore these people have lost their traditional livelihoods, as they have been resettled in areas far away from their original dwellings.

#### **Military interferences on daily life**

The military has a large presence on civil administration activities in the North, and consequently people feel a military presence in all social, cultural and religious activities organized within the area. The council feels that this is a detriment towards fostering a healthy civil society and an obstacle towards post war reconciliation.

Abductions and Disappearances

The Council sadly notes that 3 years after the conclusion of war there still

surface reports of abductions and disappearances from the North and East. Those abducted include schoolchildren, which is most saddening.

### Activities carried out by paramilitary groups

The Council points out that the functioning of armed gangs and paramilitary forces within the North and East has adversely affected civil society.

Loss of Life, and individuals faced with permanent disabilities

The Council also notes that there are large numbers of widowed families in the North and South who had lost their husbands and loved as a result of war. The council feels that justice should be served to these families.

Rehabilitation programs and Inmates in custody.

Ex-combatants are held captive in the absence of sufficient evidence and their families are unable to receive information regarding them. Meanwhile, individuals getting released from government rehabilitation centers face a problem of securing employment.

Loss of personal documents

Individuals who have lost family members during the war face a problem of obtaining death certificates, and consequently are unable to show ownership to their land. Moreover, others who had lost important personal documents such as marriage certificates and Birth certificates also face a problem in this regard.

The following proposals are aimed at addressing the above mentioned issues as well as programs to ensure normalcy within the civil society:

- Speeding up resettlement of displaced persons in their traditional homelands and restoring infrastructure in villages.
- Removing military presence from civil Society activities, and the relocation of military camps from settlement areas. Handing over the lands and houses acquired by army to their owners
- Instituting a reparation scheme to compensate for loss of life, and damage to property incurred during the war, in addition to speeding up legal proceeding regarding individuals held in custody.
- Investigating into abductions and disappearances and the

dismissal of paramilitary and other armed groups.

- Conducting mobile services to provide important personal documents to people.
- Speeding up demining efforts.

Eviction of Muslim Community by the LTTE from the North

During the war the Muslim community living in the North was evicted with 24 hours notice by the LTTE. They could not take their belongings with them. Most of these people have had to spend a long period of time in welfare centres for the displaced or with their relatives. As a result there was much harm to the culture and way of life of the people. Also the competition for scarce resources with the host community has led to economic, educational, health, social and political tensions. In addition, some of the Sinhalese people who fled the North during the war have shown interest in returning. These issues have led the Inter Religious Committee for the Northern Province to make the following recommendations:

- i. The Muslim people who were evicted from their homes by the LTTE should be provided with legal assistance to resettle
- ii. The infrastructure facilities for all displaced persons (Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese) to resettle should be provided without delay. A non-partisan mechanism needs to be set up to monitor and speed up the resettlement process.

### 2. Livelihood development and improvements in local life

A large number of individuals have lost their traditional livelihoods as a result of war, and are unable to cultivate their farm lands today, since they are being utilized by the Army and Special Task Force. Therefore, traditional farmers have lost their livelihood and the problem has also been aggravated by the fact that land is being given to multinational companies.

Fishing restrictions imposed by the Army in addition to illegal fishing activities carried out by Indian fisherman has had an adverse effect on the fisheries industry in the North while fishing activities carried out by fisherman who receive special privileges and government protection has also hampered the industry. Furthermore, the use of illegal fishing methods has also contributed to this problem.

Barriers to trade exist in the Northern Province and consequently the business community is faced with several important problems. For instance,

## Case Studies in Reconciliation

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traders in the North and East have been unable to build trade relations with other traders from the south.

Unemployment is on the rise, since there is little opportunity for small scale enterprise, and this situation is complemented by the fact that the area has poor infrastructure especially in relation to technology. This is further aggravated since labor for development activities are being procured from areas instead of the North and East.

The opportunity for economic expansion was stunted by the long drawn war which affected the region, and the opportunity for regional trade between the North and East was also held back as a result of war. Even though it has been three years since the conclusion of war, there has been little work done towards economic integration and the Council also feels that there has been lack of opportunity given with regards to traders from the region. The Council makes the following recommendations to address the above mentioned problems.

- Handing over of farmland utilized earlier by the military to their original owners whilst supporting them in developing land.
- Addressing the problem of illegal fishing activities carried out by Indian fisherman in local waters, and implementing steps to uplift the local fisheries industry.
- Utilizing workers within the region for construction and infrastructure development activities.
- Developing local industries with the aim of creating a market for local goods.
- Developing a comprehensive mechanism to conduct cross regional trade between the North, East and South.
- Re starting manufacturing operations within factories.

### 3. Social Security and Promotion of Culture.

Lack of social security remains an important problem to be addressed in war ravaged areas, and has resulted by the weakening of civil society organizations and NGOs in the region. This has resulted in an overall degradation of culture leading to an erosion of cultural values and ethics. For instance there have been a number of reports where ancient artifacts had been stolen from temples. The Council hopes to make the following recommendations to address these problems.

- Child abuse, child labor, orphans and under age marriage. Children returned home from children homes are now not in safety
- Drug abuse prevalent within the region.
- Prostitution and spread of pornography.
- Rising crime rates.
- Mental problems relating to high levels of stress.
- Lack of protection for widowed families.
- Lack of protection for senior citizens.
- Erosion of cultural values, as a consequence of tourism within the region.

Women and children have been largely victimized by these problems. The Council hopes to make the following recommendations to address the problems mentioned above.

- Creation of social security committees centering places of worship, and implementing counseling programs.
- Strengthening the capacity of child protection committees.
- Improving quality of children homes, Implementing counseling sessions, aimed at people suffering from depression and other mental problems.
- Setting up organizations to look after senior citizens.
- Preventing activities related to tourism, which has an adverse effect on the culture.

### 4. Education, Vocational Training, and Employment Opportunities

A large number of youth joined the military during the time of war, and as a result missed out on educational opportunities. High levels of government spending on defense and low levels of appropriations for education, vocational training and improvement of employment has affected the resource potential of educational institutions. Lack of teachers and infrastructure in schools in the North has resulted in high dropout rates. The Council makes the following recommendations to address the problems mentioned above.

- Implementing vocational training and skills development programs aimed at children leaving school after ordinary level.
- Implementing vocational training programs aimed at the international job market.
- Developing the resources of vocational training and educational

institutions.

- Increasing the role of the private sector in vocational training activities, under proper guidance.
- Creating a program to involve retired army personnel in development efforts.
- providing alternative livelihood opportunities to individuals who had lost their traditional livelihoods as a result of their land being taken over for tourism activities.

### 5. Promotion of Sinhala and Tamil in within government agencies

The Council has realized that there are only a handful of government officials in the north who have the ability to communicate in Tamil.

Tamils and Muslims in these areas, face problems when seeking services from government agencies such as provincial councils and police, since they are unable to communicate in the Tamil language. The problem also extends to judicial institutions within the area, since there are only a few translators, and subsequently impacts the serving of justice.

Meanwhile, since the activities of the North and East provincial administrations are conducted in the Tamil language, the Sinhala community becomes greatly inconvenienced.

The Council brings the following recommendations to the attention of relevant authorities.

- Employing Tamil language proficient individuals for government service.
- Implementing a program to provide Tamil proficiency to Sinhala speaking state employees, and applying the same program for Tamil state employees to improve their Tamil language proficiency.
- Implementing the national language policy on state circulars, gazette notifications, and signboards.
- Implementing steps to create a culture where both Sinhala and Tamil language is used.

### 6. Land and Resettlement

The Council has noticed several problems with regards to

resettlement efforts in the North and East, especially in instances where displaced families are resettled away from their traditional land. It is also saddening to note that people have been displaced due to government efforts during the post war time, as a result of apportioning land for tourism activities, and the transfer of land for foreign companies for business purposes. Furthermore this has resulted in the loss of traditional livelihood for people in the area.

The Council makes the following recommendations in this regard.

- Stressing the importance of resettling people in their traditional lands.
- The handing over of land to foreign companies in a manner, which minimizes the effects on the civil society.
- Minimizing unnecessary political intervention.
- Ensuring security for resettled individuals.

### 7. Fostering Mutual Understanding and Reorganizing Efforts

We understand that areas which were under the supervision of the district inter religious council's represent areas consisting of all stake holders of war. Thus the Council welcomes the recommendations made by the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission whilst stressing the importance of implementing the recommendations. At the same time the Council believes that programs should be implemented with the aim of promoting mutual understanding and goodwill between the people of the North and East and rest of the country.

### 8. Common Observations and Recommendations

The council has observed that women and children affected by war are facing many other problems other than what are mentioned above.

- (a) Appointments to government service is done under political influence
- (b) Issues in selling paddy and obstacles for agricultural activates
- (c) Lack of employment opportunities
- (d) Human-wild elephant conflict

The council emphasizes that the some decisions taken by the implementing authorities has created draw backs in implementing the proposals given above. The council further emphasizes that strengthening of rule of law and good governance is a compulsory need,

-16 June 2012, Colombo-

From among those affected by the three-decade war, it is necessary to give priority to women and children in order to build post war reconciliation and to focus on meeting humanitarian needs. Otherwise it will not be possible to reach the objective of building a reconciled society.

Towards this goal, NPC implemented the project “Enabling the Humanitarian Solutions through Inter Religious Cooperation and Cohesive Community Response in Sri Lanka” to work closely with inter religious leaders and community leaders. Through this project we tried to support fulfilling the needs to a certain extent.

This booklet includes the stories of practices and successes of attempts made by religious and community leaders in implementing this project over two and half years.

This booklet aims to encourage and appreciate the efforts of the activists who are involved in such actions and also to convince society that better results could be achieved by taking these stories as examples.

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