



ශ්‍රී ලංකා ජාතික සාම මණ්ඩලය
தில்ங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Paths To Peace

July
2019

Women Police Officers Learn to Deal With Human Rights Abuse Victims

A series of workshops to sensitize women police officers attached to the Women and Children's Desks in 11 districts began under NPC's project Accountability through Community Engagement and Initiatives for Transition (ACE-IT). The policewomen were taught how to interact with human rights abuse victims seeking their help and counsel them on various tools that help to increase their ability to listen and act.

The project is supported by the European Union (EU) and implemented in collaboration with NPC's partner organization, Right to Life. The work in the districts is centered on the Human Rights First Aid Coordinators (HRFACs) that give assistance to victims of human rights abuses.

As part of the project intervention, NPC works with victims of human rights abuses and encourages and supports them seek help from existing state institutions and mechanisms, and those set up under the Transitional Justice (TJ) framework.

Tools for women police officers included meditation, activities to awaken the senses including breathing exercises, sound bowl therapy and yoga, practical tutorials on empathy building, ethics and attitudes, discussion on tasks and functions of victim support personnel and counselling skills including listening and being attentive.



NPC completed training programmes for women police officers in Gampaha, Hambantota and Badulla Districts. Officers shared on-the-job experiences through play acting. They used a situation from the field and showed how they handled it. Group members discussed their methods with the trainers and how they could improve themselves using the skills they had received.

During discussions it was revealed that women officers were unavailable at the desks in the evenings because they went off duty at 5.00 pm. The desks were then managed by an available male officer at the station who had little or no training on managing Women and Children's Desks.

The officers requested NPC to share the training with higher level male and female officers to sensitize them on pre-requisites for being on a Women and Children's Desk.

Some of the issues discussed included the lack of women police officers to manage desks, the tedious task of manually entering full complaints that takes close to an hour, and the backlog of complaints requiring inquiries.

Women Police Sub Inspector W. Guneratne of the Nittambuwa Police Station said, "The training not only sensitizes us towards victims but also makes us look at our own actions in retrospect. We are beginning to realise that in the future we may be able to handle some situations differently."

The sessions were conducted by Senior Counsellor Sister Canice Fernando with support from Hatha Yoga instructor Shobana Cooke and Sound Bowl instructor Dheeshana Ameresekera.

Reconciliation Awareness Programmes for Community Based Organizations

Eight awareness programmes on reconciliation with Community Based Organizations were conducted by NPC in collaboration with partner organizations in Moneragala, Matara, Ratnapura, Kalutara and Vavuniya.

NPC is working with the Conflict Transformation Unit of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) to get people to understand concept of reconciliation and importance of its practice in society at the community level under its programme Creative Dialogue for Reconciliation.

Participants, who included small business people, farmers and community police, learnt to identify key reconciliation initiatives to be implemented at the community level.

During the programmes the participants engaged in a dialogue on reconciliation. They proposed recommendations to promote reconciliation at the national and community levels as well as reconciliation initiatives for implementation in their villages.

Participants prepared a plan for implementation of the reconciliation initiatives, which will be followed up with field officers. Some of the recommendations at the national level included creating a national level network to strengthen the reconciliation process, removing all Ministries of Religious Affairs, implementing one common law in the country, changing the current education system and improving policies, and providing support and justice for the people who had been affected by the Easter Sunday attacks.

At the community level, they recommended youth exchange programmes among villages and communities, identifying marginalized poor people and supporting their livelihood, developing facilities in village school and sharing knowledge on self employment.

Communicating Without Violence to Diffuse Conflict

Two workshops on Non Violent Communication (NVC) were held in Kandy and Moratuwa for 77 members of District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs) representing 16 districts under NPC's project Consolidating Ongoing Multi-level Partnership Actions for Conflict Transformation (COMPACT) funded by MISEREOR and CAFOD.

The workshops were facilitated by two trainers from the Centre for Non Violent Communication. Each three day session consisted of activities such as role plays and sharing experiences and difficulties in working as a peace activist.

The purpose of the training was to enable DIRC members to use methods and techniques of NVC when intervening to diffuse tense situations arising from ethnic and religious discord, as well as to apply these measures in their personal lives.

Participants were taught the four steps of NVC to improve the quality of their intervention measures.

A participant from Jaffna said, "I was able to gain a basic knowledge of NVC and I will be able to share the elements of the concept with the other DIRC members. It will be helpful to learn more about it. The workshop will be useful for school children, youth, police officers and politicians."

A local government representative from Anuradhapura said, "This is one of the most important training programmes I have attended. NVC is very important for politicians because today they are the ones who are responsible for much of the hate speech and racism in the country."

A woman participant said, "As a woman I face violence in my life on a daily basis. The training made a big impact in my life because it taught me how to deal with the violence. NVC Training should be taken to people in the village because much of the violence occurs there. Government workers, community leaders and religious leaders need NVC."



Empowering Youth to Promote Peace and Reconciliation

NPC, in partnership with Helvetas Sri Lanka, initiated a new project, Crossing Boundaries – Youth Groups In Sri Lanka, which will be implemented from July 2019 to December 2019.

Helvetas is an independent Swiss development organization that is building capacity in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe by implementing development projects in the areas of water and sanitation, agriculture and nutrition, education, economic development, democracy and peace, and climate and the environment.

The project, which is targeting active youth leaders in the Trincomalee and Matara districts, aims at empowering male and female youth to actively engage on the issues of tolerant and active coexistence, inter generational understanding, peace building and reconciliation in their respective communities by facilitating them to understand conflict and promote their role as catalysts in transforming conflict.

Activities will include stake holder meetings, inter faith dialogues with adult mentors, training programmes for youth and follow-up activities and memory work in each district. There will be language classes for youth and adults.

A project orientation meeting was held with the participation of Helvetas Sri Lanka and partner organizations. The selection criteria of target groups and implementation modalities of the project were discussed and finalized during the meeting.

Two areas from each district were chosen for the purpose of getting the involvement of youth from all three communities. Shakthi Organization in Trincomalee and Community Development Centre in Matara will assist NPC to implement the activities in the field.

Rule of Law Training for LIRC Members

A two day training workshop on the rule of law was held for 32 members of the Vavuniya Local Inter Religious Committee (LIRC) under NPC's project, Collective Engagement for Religious Freedom (CERF).

The workshop, which was facilitated by lawyer Jagath Liyana Arachchi, focused on the subject of religious freedom and how it was guaranteed under the laws in Sri Lanka.

The participants, who included religious leaders, local government officials, community police officers, development officers and NGO representatives, asked several questions about the existing laws and gave many examples of where they had experienced delays in their implementation.

Participants from the North felt that the legal system was not effective in some instances, especially in civil cases. They pointed out that people in the north were in a post war situation that made them more vulnerable when it came to seeking justice in general.

Enabling Communities to Participate in the Reconciliation Process

A one day training workshop on Social Cohesion and Reconciliation for community leaders was held in the Seruwila Division in Trincomalee District under NPC's project Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Activity (SCORE), which is funded by USAID and conducted in partnership with Global Communities.

The workshop aimed to enhance the capacity of the communities to engage constructively in the reconciliation process.

Forty seven community leaders were selected for the activity, which was conducted by Aruna Jayathilaka, a lecturer at the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka with training experience on Conflict Mitigation.

The community connectors of Seruwila took part in the training and supported as co-facilitators for the training. The participants learnt to identify the concept of conflict and tools for conflict analysis that included Conflict Tree, Time Line, Conflict Mapping and Onion Model.

The workshop concluded with a session on what conflicts prevail in the Seruwila division and which of the methods could be used to resolve these conflicts in an enlightened way.

Some of the initiatives suggested by the participants as solutions to solve conflicts within communities included establishing peace initiatives groups in villages, that all religious parties should cooperate in collective engagements, that everyone should participate in all cultural activities, that people should learn all three languages, that official work should be conducted in all three languages, that psycho-social activities should be held in conflict affected areas.

"The training was in both Sinhala and Tamil so we were able to express our ideas in our own language. One of the biggest problems we have is the language barrier. We can find solutions for these problem through these types of programmes," said T. Rajmohan from Ariyamankeni.



The Need for A Non Partisan Presidency

Cognisant of the political deadlock within the country, and as a means of ending it, President Maithripala Sirisena has referred to the need to abolish the 19th Amendment to the constitution. This as the landmark legislation that reduced the powers of the presidency and increased the autonomy of state institutions.

Both of these measures have had a positive impact on governance in the country. Despite the reduction in the powers of the presidency it continues to remain a powerful institution. Unfortunately, when the president and parliamentary majority are from two different political parties, it can generate political deadlock, which is the present situation in the country.

The ongoing political crisis in the country, the political deadlock, the weak governance, and the shocking security lapses that led to the Easter Sunday bombings are evidence enough of the disastrous impact that partisan politics can have, especially when played out at the highest levels of the polity.

Accordingly, the National Peace Council is of the view that the presidency, being a foremost national institution, voted for by the entire electorate, should be unfettered from partisan party politics and not be mired in it as at present.

In the context of the ongoing debate in parliament on the vexed topic of constitutional reform, we urge our lawmakers in parliament to consider a constitutional amendment that would further build on the 19th Amendment's commitment to the de-politicising of key national institutions.

We deplore the use of presidential powers for narrow and partisan purposes. While the president needs 50 percent plus one votes of the national electorate to be elected, the president needs to govern the country with all 100 percent of the population in mind and in heart.

The National Peace Council, therefore, calls for a 20th Amendment to the constitution by which any person elected as the president would be required by law to step down from all party political positions and be a non-partisan president who works for the wellbeing of all.

With presidential elections due within the course of this year, and concerns about the re-establishment of an over-powerful presidency being high, we affirm that the need for this constitutional amendment is particularly urgent.

Media Release issued on 18.07.2019

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

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

Deal With Systems Failure That Caused Easter Sunday Attacks

In the midst of the ongoing sittings of the Parliamentary Select Committee to investigate the Easter Sunday bombings two senior officials in the public service have been arrested by the police. The charges against former Defense Secretary Hemasiri Fernando and Inspector General of Police Pujith Jayasundara are that they did not take sufficient action to prevent the bombings that led to over 250 deaths and injuries to over 500 persons despite having prior information.

Senior public officials do not need prior permission to take pro-active decisions and pre-emptive actions about issues that falls under their statutory duties. However, from the evidence that is available there appears to have been a systems failure that went beyond the two individuals who have been charged. This includes the exclusion of the prime minister, deputy defense minister and police chief from the National Security Council meetings after the abortive attempt at a constitutional overthrow of the elected government and the failure to hold meetings of the National Security Council in the period leading to the bombings.

In these circumstances, the pinning of blame for the failure to stop the Easter Sunday bombings on former Defense Secretary Hemasiri Fernando and Inspector General of Police Pujith Jayasundara feels unfair. We believe that it will be useful to apply Systems Thinking which can help us see that what may seem an isolated problem is actually part of interconnected network of related issues. Ignoring this interconnectedness will lead to many unintended negative consequences for Sri Lanka in the short and long term. Quick fixes do not help in the long term.

The National Peace Council calls on the government to come up with a comprehensive report speedily on the factors that lie behind the Easter Sunday bomb attacks and to identify the loopholes in the national security system prior to deciding on which individuals to target to punish. It is possible that persons higher in the chain of command may also be held accountable. In particular, we call on the President, Prime Minister and Opposition leader to put political motivations aside and to jointly formulate an accountability process that will punish the guilty and rectify the systemic shortcomings that led to the tragedy of Easter Sunday.

Media Release issued on 05.07.2019

National Peace Council, 12/14 Balapokuna Vihara Road, Colombo 6, Sri Lanka

Website: www.peace-srilanka.org, Email: info@peace-srilanka.org

Tel: 2818344, 2854127, Fax: 2819064