



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

Paths To Peace

Two Symposiums to End SCORE

February
2022

NPC's Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Activity (SCORE) conducted two symposiums at the end of its three year project.

The first symposium was on the role of the public service in local reconciliation efforts, which was conducted as a concluding session of the training programmes on non-discriminatory customer service that were carried out in 2021. Obtaining the participation over 100 government officers, local government authority representatives and community members, the programme ended in a meeting that enabled the officers to identify existing discriminatory practices in local and central government institutions while encouraging them to provide inclusive services.

In the first session, Shashik de Silva, a leading researcher of Social Scientists' Association who developed the Non-Discriminatory Customer Service (NDCS) module, presented the findings of Everyday Peace Indicator Research (EPI) research and the NPC's contribution to mitigating the discriminatory customer services.

While sharing NPC's experience and findings in carrying out NDCs trainings, Mr. de Silva explained the contribution of the project to rectify discriminatory practices giving priority to the perceptions of the service recipients. In the second session participants were divided into six groups consisting of local government authority representatives, government officers and community based organization representatives. They discussed existing discrimination in the government service delivery sector and suggested possible solutions to rectify them based on their experiences.



The third session consisted of a panel discussion where participants questioned the experts including Professor T. Jayasingam former Vice-Chancellor of the Eastern University, Mr. Raliudeen Divisional Secretary in the Padaviya Divisional Secretariat and Mrs. Menaka Herath Education and Special Programme Director of Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission.

The second symposium was in Batticaloa with the participation of over 100 community members including Grama Niladaris, integration officers and district coordinators from partner organizations on the theme of community based interventions to strengthen the social cohesion and reconciliation.

SCORE beneficiaries discussed ways to improve community level interventions to sustain peace and reconciliation covering learning points, achievements, gaps and challenges. Dr. Ahilan Kadirgamar, Senior Lecturer at the University of Jaffna, spoke on the significance of community based interventions in strengthening local reconciliation initiatives and the role of community members. He pointed out the importance of empowering community members to take ownership of local reconciliation efforts.

Mr. de Silva shared findings on conducting community level interventions and challenges and gaps and highlighted the contributions needed from the community.

Community representatives spoke about their own experiences in contributing to SCORE's initiatives including training programmes and activities carried out for women, youth, war-affected communities, school students and coexistence societies.

The final session was ended with a panel discussion where academic experts answered questions from participants. Panel members were Dr. Ahilan Kadirgamar, Mr. Ravi Muniyandy Senior Lecturer in Political Science/Sociology Department of Eastern University and Professor T. Jayasingam. A case study published by NPC covering stories in the intervention was presented to the guests.



Uplifting the Rule of Law with Police Collaboration

NPC's Collective Engagement for Religious Freedom (CERF) project conducted three training programmes for community police officers to strengthen civil society and police collaboration to solve local issues while improving participants' knowledge of the existing legal framework on religious freedom domestically and internationally.

With the collaboration of the Community Police Unit of Police Department of Colombo, NPC carried out the training for more than 150 Community Police Officers in Thannekubura, Avissawella and Ratnapura.

The training programmes, consisting of interactive sessions, were conducted by a group of facilitators who explained how the Community Policing Service improves relations between the community and police and ensures greater police responsiveness to security issues and local safety. The main session on rule of law dealt with domestic and international legal instruments in place to safeguard religious freedom that included domestic constitutional provisions, the penal code, acts and international conventions.

Participants learnt how the concept of rule of law was linked to community policing service. The facilitator used groups activities and discussions to keep participants engaged while the resource person told participants how during ancient times, the king was a divine creation but later the concept of social contract came into being and followed by democratic rule.

Explaining the difficulties being they faced a participants at the Kandy training, Surath Senanayake, said, "Community police guidelines say that an officer should be there for each Grama Niladhari division and that the officer should visit the village regularly to monitor it, take entries and solve problems. As a result of fuel expenses, lack of police officers, and financial issues, officers cannot give their full attention to the village."

Answering him, Manoj Samarasekara, head of the Community Police Unit, said, "It is true that the police department has financial and human resource issues. We have offered three wheelers and fuel allowances to the police officers to travel to villages. We will reform many things in the system of community policing with support of government and non-government sectors."

Mr. Ravindra Mahesh from Kandy, "I would like to thank NPC for arranging this training. We learnt that we often make mistakes when taking entries of complaints especially when people speak different languages and we don't take accurate entries. This is a major issue that needs to be addressed."



Preventing Violent Extremism Training for Community Leaders

NPC held four training programmes for 152 state officers in Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Kandy and Kurunegala including Grama Niladaris, development officers and social services officers directly involved with the community on Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) concepts and skills for PVE implementation.

Another six training programmes were held for 236 community police in Ampara, Mannar, Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Kandy and Kurunegala under the project Prevention of Violent Extremism - Capacity Building in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Participants learnt about the actors and drivers of extremism, the push and pull factors of extremism, the context of post independent politics, the JVP insurrections, Tamil minority alienation and the Easter Sunday attacks.

State officers and community police members discussed and identified root causes of extremism that were polarising different religious and ethnic communities as structural and cultural violence.

Marriage Certificates for Resettled in Jaffna

NPC is assisting resettled communities in the Jaffna district to obtain legal documents through its project Sustaining Peace Through Inclusive Service Delivery funded by Freedom House in collaboration with its partner, Organisation for Elangai Refugees Rehabilitation Ceylon (OfERR).

Legal documents such as birth certificates, death certificates, national identity cards, land deeds and marriage certificates are necessary to ensure the rights of any citizen but many people do not have the necessary documents to obtain their rightful services, especially those who resettled on their land after fleeing the fighting during the war.

In Kayts and Nallur, couples who have not registered their marriages due to social and cultural issues were able to register their marriages. The couples said it would have been difficult to obtain the documents without the help and advice of the Divisional Secretary.

Some couples in Kayts who were not married due to various disputes and were not accepted by their families were able to register their marriages.



Exchange Visit to Bridge Language Gap

An exchange visit for 23 Sinhala and Tamil Local Inter Religious Committee (LIRC) members was organized to Beruwala and Trincomalee under NPC's National Languages Equality Advancement Project (NLEAP).

The first visit was to the Dalada Maligawa. Some Muslim participants thought that they would not be allowed inside the temple but they were able to go inside.

A peace walk with about 75 people was held to promote language rights with trilingual posters and stickers designed to highlight the equality of languages.

Certificate were awarded to 44 people who took part in the Tamil spoken class. Several events were arranged by the students to demonstrate their fluency in the other languages. Participants said the course was helpful for their career as well as to build coexistence among people in a multi cultural community.

Preventing Hate Speech Among Youth

Fourteen workshops on hate speech, prevention of violent extremism and non-violent communication were conducted for 543 youths representing several organizations in Nuwara Eliya, Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Monaragala, Jaffna, Vavuniya, Batticaloa, Badulla, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Kandy, Kegalle, Anuradhapura, and Kandy districts under NPC's Plural Action for Conflict Transformation (PACT) project.

"I did not know exactly what hate speech was before this workshop. Because of the workshop, I realised the negative aspects of hate speech," said a participant from Polonnaruwa.

"I became aware of the prejudice caused by hate speech from this workshop. There should be a face book campaign on this," said a participant from Galle.

"My son is disabled. He was invited to the workshop. I am happy when my son is included in activities with other children. He told me that he had learned a lot from the programme," said a woman from Monaragala.



Discussions on Preventing Hate Speech

Ten programmes on prevention of hate speech were conducted by master trainers under NPC's project Technical Assistance to Justice Institutions in Sri Lanka project in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Kurunegala, Kandy, Badulla, Monaragala, Matara, Kalutara, Ratnapura and Kegalle.

Discussions on the prevention of hate speech were conducted by 1,000 politicians, religious leaders, local government authority members, youth leaders, representatives of civil society organizations and artists.

The events served as a platform for participants to learn from each other's experiences, bringing them into the national dialogue on the prevention of hate speech.

"Awareness-raising on preventing hate speech should at school level in order to foster peaceful coexistence among and between children who represent the next generation of the country," said Mr. G.A. Kithsiri, Additional District Secretary from Kurunegala.

"There should be continuous engagement and implementation of projects such as these since prevention of hate speech is a long term process. They should be carried out at community level with the support of NPC," said Regional Cooperation Minister Tharaka Balasuriya.

"Prevention of hate speech is a sensitive topic and an approach that provides an impetus to prevent and mitigate violence is needed," said lyricist Mr. Mahinda Chandrasekara.

President's Directive on PTA Needs to be Built Into Law

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has issued a directive that the police should not use the Prevention of Terrorism Act as a shortcut to dispense with investigations under the criminal procedures code and to use it only if there are clear links to terrorism. This presidential directive comes at a time when the government's proposed amendments to the PTA have been criticized as being inadequate by UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet in her report on Sri Lanka, by international human rights organisations and challenged in the Supreme Court by national organisations.

Excerpts of the UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet's report on Sri Lanka on a wide range of issues relating to human rights have been highlighted in the media and are a matter for concern. We call on the government to focus on protecting the human rights of citizens, meeting the expectations of the international community and securing the GSP Plus tariff concession. We believe that this reform of the law can be a part of the structural transformation in the country essential to sustainable peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

NPC notes the statement of the Human Rights Commission calling for the repeal of the PTA and that the offence of terrorism should be included in the Penal Code with a new definition for terrorism. We urge the government to provide a clear definition of the term "terrorism" in any future legislation which will prevent it from being used to arrest people for a wide variety of reasons, and also to make every arrest subject to judicial ratification. The inclusion of the president's directive to the preamble to the anti-terrorism legislation will serve to further strengthen the power of the judiciary to scrutinise police arrests under it and help put brakes on the prevailing culture of impunity.

February
2022

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.

Safeguarding Human Rights and GSP Plus

Freedom of speech and expression is a constitutionally protected right. The Foreign Ministry statement contradicting the views expressed by the Chairperson of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust, Ambika Satkunanathan, brings up issues of the limits of legitimate public criticism of government policies and actions. We do not agree with its content and tone or with the personal targeting of Ms Sathkunanathan.

In a submission to the European Parliament's subcommittee on human rights on January 27, Ms Satkunanathan made a critical assessment of the human rights situation in the country and provided recommendations in that regard. Much of what she said is also contained in statements made by the political parties representing the people of the North and East, and by civil society members including the National Peace Council.

The National Peace Council believes that as a representative of civil society, Ms Satkunanathan has the same rights and freedoms with regard to speech and expression even if her views are not in line with government thinking and priorities. We particularly regret the paragraph in the ministry statement that draws a parallel to LTTE propaganda as a method of discrediting or silencing a critic.

The National Peace Council appreciates the Foreign Ministry and government's willingness to engage in dialogue with different sectors in civil society which has led to positive outcomes and can be further built upon and expanded. We also wish to reiterate that just as much as the government, we in civil society want the best for our country, including retaining the GSP Plus by upholding the 27 international human rights covenants that successive governments, including our present government, have pledged to live by.

Media Release issued on 06.02.2022

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