



Paths To Peace

January 2025

A Step Towards Justice for the Enforced Disappearances

NPC's People Unite for Justice and Accountability (PUJA) project conducted its second district level activity session in Batticaloa to empower civil society organizations (CSOs) to effectively advocate for meaningful truth telling regarding enforced disappearances.

Two officers from the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) and the Office for Reparations (OR) were present to guide participants on procedures and the services offered by the government entities. The session provided a valuable platform for CSOs to address their concerns and seek clarification on critical issues related to enforced disappearances. Several family members of the disappeared shared their personal experiences, evoking emotional responses from the audience.

"Families of the disappeared have identified the commander responsible for their loved ones' abduction and pursued legal action against him. However, the commander passed away before a judgment could be reached. Despite this, the families continue to await a resolution and justice. Is this a fair outcome for their patience?" asked Saratha Devi from the Batticaloa Peace Committee Organization. The question highlighted the frustrations and challenges faced by families seeking justice in the face of prolonged legal processes.

Another participant, Sathyaseelan Pashmaseelan, said, "This is the first time we got clear answers to our questions from government officers because when we work with people, they ask many questions that are hard to answer. But today we can direct them to the place where they can get solutions." This statement underscores the crucial role of the sessions in equipping CSOs with the knowledge and resources to better support the families they serve.



University Students Share Research on Social Reconciliation

Under NPC's Mobilising University State Engagement for Reconciliation (MUSTER) project, supported by Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka (Scope/GIZ) and co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Foreign Office, two initiatives focusing on knowledge sharing, research progress and capacity building were completed.

The final Sri Lanka Barometer (SLB) sharing session was the tenth and concluding session in the series, bringing together 35 participants, including students from South Eastern University, members of District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs) and Local Inter Religious Committees (LIRCs).

The primary aim of the session was to enhance participants' understanding of social reconciliation and public opinion based on SLB findings. They discussed key insights, expressed their perspectives and engaged in meaningful dialogue on various social issues. The completion of this series marked a comprehensive effort in fostering awareness and dialogue on reconciliation through evidence-based findings.

The district level training series was concluded with the final session conducted for the research pods of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. The training provided students with valuable knowledge on themes such as pluralism, inclusiveness, gender equality and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE).

Similar sessions have been conducted at Eastern University of Sri Lanka, University of Jaffna and University of Ruhuna. The training programmes equipped students with the necessary insights to develop and facilitate initiatives that promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

Progress review meetings were conducted in Jaffna, Matara and Ratnapura with university academics, students and government officials. They provided a platform for university students to present updates on their research, share findings and receive feedback from government representatives.

Officials from the District Secretariat, including the District Secretary, Additional District Secretary, District NGO Coordinator, District Social Integration Officer and Cultural Affairs Officer, participated in the discussions, ensuring that the research aligns with public sector insights and priorities. They served as a crucial step in refining the research process and preparing for the next phases of the project with the contribution of the government sector.

In the coming months students will prepare video documentaries, develop their research and finalise their reports to translate the knowledge gained from previous sessions into concrete outputs that contribute to the broader objectives of reconciliation and social cohesion.



Strengthening Community Bonds and Embracing Cultural Diversity

NPC hosted District Inter Religious Committee meetings under the Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Social Justice (PAIRS) project funded by Misereor and CAFOD in the Anuradhapura, Colombo, Jaffna and Polonnaruwa districts to foster harmony and unity among Sri Lanka's diverse ethnic and religious groups with a focus on deepening understanding of Hindu culture.

Discussions were conducted to assess ethnic and religious tensions across districts, which revealed that a lack of understanding of different religions and cultures often leads to conflicts ranging from minor disagreements to significant disputes. Such tensions underscore the importance of initiatives that bridge knowledge gaps and build mutual respect among communities.

A highlight of the meetings was the exploration of Thai Pongal, a Hindu festival that expresses gratitude for nature's gifts and a good harvest, strengthening bonds within families and neighbourhoods and fostering an atmosphere of peace and harmony. Participants from Buddhist, Christian and Islamic communities were encouraged to appreciate and respect Hindu culture, creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue and connection and fostering mutual understanding. Similarities highlighted the shared values and sentiments across all religious traditions, thereby reducing the potential for conflict, and encouraging coexistence.

Kegalle District Inter Religious Committee (DIRC) members conducted a Thai Pongal celebration at Northland Estate in Warakapola with the People's Development Foundation while Puttalam DIRC members held an event at the Muthu Mari Amman Kovil with WODEPT and Vavuniya DIRC members organized a similar event with the Federation of Institutions for Rural Management.

"Both traditions, Hinduism and Buddhism, regard the sun, the moon and cows as sacred, which is also mentioned in Buddhist teachings. By understanding the relationships within and between religions, we can reduce the divisive atmosphere that often arises between communities," said Ven. Dr. Madampagama Assaji Thissa Thero, Mahanayaka of the Amarapura Maha Nikaya, at the Colombo District meeting.



M.S. Amjath Moulavi from the Medawachchiya Jumma Mosque at the Anuradhapura meeting said, "Attending Thai Pongal was truly heart-warming. The communal spirit of the celebration reminded me of Eid where families and communities come together to share meals and strengthen bonds. I appreciated Thai Pongal's message of peace and harmony, which reflects Islamic teachings on unity and living peacefully with others. Being part of this celebration was a wonderful experience that highlighted our shared values of gratitude, togetherness and mutual respect, fostering a deeper connection with people from diverse backgrounds."

Religious leaders, women political leaders, youth leaders participated at the meetings, which advanced efforts to promote harmony, social justice and peace.



Advocating for a Youth Quota in Government

As part of NPC's Active Citizens for Elections and Democracy (ACED) project, funded by the EU, to promote a youth quota in government, a series of online meetings and research sharing sessions were conducted to empower youth to participate in the electoral process and to advocate for representation at all levels of government.

Advocacy meetings for youth and district partner representatives were held on zoom to identify and engage youth from various districts including Mannar, Kilinochchi, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Matale, Kandy, Badulla, Ampara and Batticaloa and guide them to plan local level strategies to advocate for a youth quota and political participation.

The topics discussed included planning campaign strategies at the local level, engaging with political parties within their respective local government areas, collaborating with journalists and social media personnel to promote advocacy efforts, preparing statements to support advocacy campaigns and using social media platforms and engaging with other community networks and sports clubs.

Another activity undertaken in January was the research sharing sessions on factors influencing voter preferences in elections, which involved sharing research findings with stakeholders to facilitate future advocacy efforts. Two sessions were conducted in Kegalle and Gampaha by Dr. Mahesh Senanayake and Ms. Chrishni Silva, two senior lecturers from the University of Colombo, for 35 participants in each district including civil society members, youth leaders and women leaders who engaged in discussions on the research findings and their implications for electoral processes. The sessions provided insights into voter behaviour. Participants expressed appreciation for the analysis and recommendations shared.

Building Bridges Through Mediation Training

A mediation training session under NPC's Action for Religious Coexistence (ARC) project was held in Trincomalee for Local Inter Religious Committees (LIRCs), youth leaders and NGO representatives to enhance their skills in conflict resolution and foster mutual understanding.

The training programme introduced participants to concepts such as arbitration, conciliation and tribunals, providing practical techniques to address disputes constructively.

M.N. Mohamed Nihan, President of the 3H Foundation, said, "Participating in this programme has been transformative. The explanation of concepts such as arbitration, conciliation and tribunal helped me to understand the different methods of resolving disputes beyond traditional approaches. The focus on win-win outcomes in mediation and the role of facilitation stood out to me. I now feel better equipped to approach conflicts with a problem solving mindset."

The session emphasised practical skills through interactive exercises and role playing, enabling participants to experience mediation first hand. They learned to listen actively, empathise and explore creative solutions. Small group activities encouraged collaboration among youth leaders, NGO representatives and LIRC members, facilitating valuable exchanges of ideas and experiences.

Participants left with enhanced skills and a renewed commitment to promoting peace within their communities. Organizers highlighted the importance of targeting diverse stakeholders to strengthen their capacity to foster harmony. "The programme is an important initial step for the LIRC committees," said an ARC representative. "By equipping participants with mediation tools, we aim to create a positive impact in their communities."



Women and Youth Lead the Way

An issue mapping programme for women and youth to identify and prioritise local issues was held in Matara under NPC's Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) project. Ms. Sreen Tahir from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the project's donor, participated in the discussions and shared her observations.

During a discussion on the current political situation, the women participants demonstrated an understanding of politics and expressed their readiness to face challenges for long term change. "We understand that meaningful change takes time. We are ready to face hardships and wait for success to come," one participant said. The women identified issues such as caste-based discrimination and the lack of sex education that leads to unintended pregnancies and child neglect as needing attention.

The youth participants discussed social issues and showed less political awareness than the women but identified problems they considered serious. They viewed caste and ethnic issues as outdated with one participant commenting, "Caste and ethnic problems are things of the past. We need to focus on present day challenges that affect us directly." The youth prioritised issues such as unregulated tourism and the lack of vocational training and educational opportunities for school leavers.

The programme revealed differences in priorities between the two groups, with women focusing on social inclusion and reconciliation while youth emphasised education and skill development. A democratic voting process was introduced to prioritise the most critical issues identified by the participants.

"It's one thing to read about such initiatives in reports but seeing them unfold in real life is truly rewarding," Ms. Tahir said.



New Study Reveals Key Factors Influencing Voter Preferences

A comprehensive study commissioned by the National Peace Council (NPC) Sri Lanka with funding from the European Union and conducted by Dr. Mahesh Senanayake and Ms. Crishni Silva of the University of Colombo has provided critical insights into the factors guiding voter preferences in upcoming elections in Sri Lanka.

The report, which is based on a survey carried out in August 2024, has continuing relevance as the country prepares for Local Government elections anticipated in April this year. The research employed a conjoint experiment and a general information survey to gather data from 1350 eligible voters, ensuring a representative sample of Sri Lanka's diverse population.

Voters overwhelmingly prioritized candidates who would offer clear strategies to address Sri Lanka's economic crisis, fight corruption, and ensure good governance. 93% of respondents said they will vote based on a candidate's ability to resolve the economic crisis. 83% prioritized candidates committed to tackling corruption. 86% favored candidates with strong educational backgrounds, signaling a preference for qualified, competent leaders over political dynasties.

The study found a decline in the effectiveness of political patronage, with voters rejecting transactional politics such as food aid distribution, government job promises, and infrastructure projects for electoral gain. Nearly 50% of voters rejected such practices, signaling a shift towards issue-based and policy-driven decision-making.

The study also found voters are moving away from identity-based politics with ethnicity, religion, and age—once dominant factors in Sri Lankan elections—are now less influential. A significant percentage of voters focused instead on leadership qualities, governance policies, and economic strategies.

The Aragalaya Movement has reshaped political consciousness. 55% of respondents said that the Aragalaya protests increased their political interest, especially among youth and educated professionals. 53% believe the movement had a positive impact on Sri Lanka's political landscape.

The findings of the survey are significant in the light of the presidential and general election that took place after the survey was conducted. We believe they present a blueprint for change for political parties and candidates alike who are preparing to contest the local government and provincial council elections that are anticipated in the months ahead.

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National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

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Our Vision:

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

Our Mission:

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

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