



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



Paths To Peace

June 2025

Bringing Sri Lankans Together for Peace

NPC's Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation and Social Justice (PAIRS) project, funded by Misereor and co-funded by CAFOD in collaboration with District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), has achieved significant progress in promoting inclusiveness, social justice and reconciliation throughout several districts.

Over 477 diverse participants including religious leaders, women leaders, government officials and youth representatives have come together for the project's major activities, which included DIRC meetings and CSO consultations where numerous important concerns were addressed. Discussions in Batticaloa and Jaffna focused on preventing hate speech from spreading negatively on social media. Through community led projects, Colombo and Polonnaruwa concentrated on resolving ethnic and religious issues. Stakeholders in Kurunegala and Nuwara Eliya laid the foundation for subsequent initiatives by stressing the value of preserving civic space and fostering pluralism. Community leaders in Kegalle and Ratnapura emphasised the difficulties with documentation and language inclusion, particularly for the underprivileged Malayihaha and plantation communities. Vavuniya gave language rights top priority while Galle, Kandy and Ratnapura developed into hubs for cross cultural dialogue and interfaith understanding.

Each consultation and meeting established a secure environment for open discussion, reciprocal education and group action planning. In addition to identifying regional issues, the project has given communities the confidence to take charge of developing solutions. The foundation laid in June was a significant step toward equity, inclusivity and lasting peace, with follow up initiatives already underway.



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

June 2025



Follow us on
Facebook



Stories of Success

Kandy: using conversation in place of division

Kandy DIRC has developed into a healing space in an area that was devastated by intercommunal violence in 2018. Deeply ingrained mistrust is being broken down by hosting discussions in mosques and promoting mutual understanding of religious customs. In a move toward unity in language and spirit, CSOs agreed to drop the term “minority” in favour of “fraternal communities” as part of a crucial campaign.

Matara: from margins to mainstream

The systemic neglect and ongoing teacher shortage in Matara's estate communities were brought to light by CSO leaders. With a focus on gender and ethnic inclusion, estate women voiced their opinions at inclusive DIRC sessions in Deniyaya. Campaigns for fair teacher deployment and community-based service monitoring are in process.

Monaragala: reaching the unreached

By interacting with local religious leaders and granting membership to these groups, Monaragala DIRC was able to close a significant gap with indigenous Rathugala villages. As CSOs push for more robust state-NGO collaborations to support both indigenous and estate communities, new initiatives will now concentrate on enhancing education and service delivery.

Ratnapura: language and justice for the Malaiyaha community

A young man's moving comment at a DIRC meeting in Ratnapura on the possibility of violence if structural exclusion persists urged immediate action. The CSOs are now pushing for reforms after identifying the scarcity of mediators who speak Tamil as a hindrance to justice. In order to fill service gaps in plantation areas, DIRCs also want to work with nearby institutions.

Kurunegala and Nuwara Eliya: the voices of women in sacred places

DIRC meetings turned into significant events for inclusion in both districts. Often reluctant to enter non-Islamic places of worship, Muslim women in Nuwara Eliya confidently participated in interfaith discussions. Following its understanding of the DIRC's peacebuilding purpose, a mosque in Kurunegala that had previously barred women from entering opened its doors. These incidents demonstrated the value of civil discourse and a cooperative attitude.

Kegalle: documenting identity and dignity

The pressing need for official documents among Malaiyaha families was brought to light during the CSO consultation in Kegalle. CSOs made a commitment to set up mobile services for providing ID, marriage and birth certificates that are essential for gaining access to justice, healthcare and education. This initiative is a good example of community-led support for administrative inclusion.

Puttalam: a harmonious self-initiated act

Without any financial support, the Puttalam DIRC hosted a kadala dansala for Poson Poya in a demonstration of interfaith harmony. The occasion reflected the spirit of respect for one another and peacebuilding by welcoming individuals of all faiths and providing a common area for cultural enjoyment.

Interactions under the project have shown that communities can unite, communicate honestly and take collective action even in the face of persistent issues. Plans for actualisation initiatives such as civic awareness campaigns and legal activism are underway, laying the groundwork for long lasting change based on respect, dignity and trust.



Empowering Community Women Leaders

Under Phase 3 of NPC's Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) project, 21 needs based training sessions were conducted in the Badulla, Kandy, Kegalle, Matara, Monaragala, Nuwara Eliya and Polonnaruwa Districts to strengthen the capacity of Super Group, Peer Group and Youth Group leaders to address community issues identified through earlier stages of the project. Each district held three focused sessions with each session tailored to the unique challenges faced by local communities.

The training topics were grounded in the lived realities of participants. In several districts, issues of caste based discrimination and the exclusion of marginalised communities emerged as recurring themes. Communities from estate sectors and certain villages reported feeling neglected both socially and in terms of services. In response, a training session on how to engage with excluded communities was conducted to help participants reflect on their own perceptions and build empathy driven, inclusive approaches. The session was facilitated by Mr. Asanka Fernando who encouraged participants to recognise internalised biases and understand the structural roots of exclusion.

A woman participant in Monaragala said, "Although we were trying to address the issues, sometimes we carried discriminatory thoughts. Now we understand how to be empathetic and see people properly."

Environmental concerns were a key focus. Many communities, particularly those in semi-urban and estate areas, reported serious garbage disposal problems and pollution of local water sources. To address these, training sessions on legal regulations and environmental laws related to garbage disposal were held led by Mr. Ruchira Rosa, a lecturer from the Department of Law at the Open University of Sri Lanka. Participants learned about environmental protection laws, the responsibilities of local authorities and the power of legal tools such as the Right to Information Act.

A youth participant in Kegalle said, "We now understand that addressing issues without documentation or proof won't work. This session taught us how to act legally and sustainably."



In the Kandy District, participants had the opportunity to engage directly with a Public Health Inspector to discuss the poor condition of public washrooms in a central town area. The session highlighted how even basic needs like sanitation were linked to rights, dignity and accountability. It also emphasised the importance of proper complaint mechanisms and follow ups through local councils. A woman leader explained, "We often avoid using public toilets because they are unsafe and unhygienic. This session made me realise we can and should demand better."

These needs based trainings not only equipped participants with practical knowledge but also helped them shift their perspectives from feeling powerless to becoming active agents of change.

Whether addressing social exclusion, environmental degradation or public health concerns, women and youth leaders were empowered with the tools, confidence and connections needed to lead effective, inclusive interventions in their communities.



Collaborative Research for Reconciliation and Social Cohesion

NPC's Mobilising University State Engagement for Reconciliation (MUSTER) project, supported by Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka (SCOPE) and co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Foreign Office, held a research symposium on Research for Reconciliation bringing together four universities and their 12 research pods to showcase the culmination of research and community engagement work.

The symposium commenced with opening statements and a welcome address by NPC's Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera followed by an address by Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda. It featured comprehensive presentations from twelve research pods across four universities, each addressing distinct challenges facing reconciliation and social cohesion through locally relevant research, and culminated in a panel discussion where the university coordinators and district secretaries shared their perspectives on the research findings.

Research pods from Sabaragamuwa University discussed challenges facing marginalised communities including issues within gem mining communities, digital accessibility gaps in rural areas and bureaucratic barriers preventing citizens from accessing essential services. University of Jaffna research pods focused on post-conflict recovery and inclusion, investigating disability inclusion challenges, discussing how displaced communities can transition to empowerment and exploring how cultural preservation serves as a tool for healing and identity formation.

University of Ruhuna research pods addressed foundational community challenges including the socio-economic pressures facing tea estate workers, the complex relationship between government institutions and community service delivery and healthcare access barriers in rural areas. Eastern University research pods examined harmony and cultural preservation, focusing on interfaith dialogue mechanisms and environmental challenges facing coastal communities while preserving traditional practices and conflict resolution approaches within agricultural communities.

Each session included discussion sessions, mentor views and video documentary screenings with audience engagement, providing multi-dimensional perspectives on the research findings and community impact. Aaranya Rajasingam, Senior Advisor and Acting Head of Programme, GIZ-SCOPE, spoke on the importance of youth led initiatives such as this.



A publication, Research for Reconciliation, containing abstracts of the 12 research papers was launched. A panel discussion was held moderated by Dr. Perera, which brought together university coordinators and district secretaries to discuss the research findings, demonstrating the collaborative framework that characterises the MUSTER approach to reconciliation.

The symposium concluded with awarding ceremonies recognising universities and district secretariats for their efforts in realising the projects goals, followed by certificate presentations to student researchers from the research pods for their diligent and impressive research work. Prof. Sarath Ananda, Chairman of the National Education Commission, delivered the concluding remarks, highlighting the project's significance in furthering reconciliation efforts.

The symposium represented the successful transition of the project from intensive research and community engagement phases to formal knowledge dissemination and recognition. It engaged academic institutions, government officials, student researchers and community representatives, validating the project's multi-stakeholder collaboration methodology for sustainable reconciliation and social cohesion.

Research Report on Factors Guiding Voter Preference in Elections

A research report titled Factors Guiding Voter Preference in Elections in Sri Lanka, commissioned by NPC under the EU funded project Active Citizens for Elections and Democracy, was launched in Colombo.

The study conducted by Dr. Mahesh Senanayake and Ms. Crishni Silva of the University of Colombo offers valuable insights into the key drivers of voter behaviour within Sri Lanka's dynamic political context. It examines how factors such as economic concerns, perceptions of leadership, trust in public institutions and prevailing social issues influence electoral decisions.

The research showed that voters overwhelmingly prioritised candidates who would offer clear strategies to address the economic crisis, fight corruption and ensure good governance. Ninety three percent of respondents indicated they would vote based on a candidate's ability to resolve the economic crisis. Eighty three percent prioritised candidates committed to tackling corruption. Eighty six percent favoured candidates with strong educational backgrounds, signalling a preference for qualified, competent leaders over political dynasties.

The study also found a decline in the effectiveness of political patronage, with nearly fifty percent of voters rejecting transactional politics such as food aid distribution, government job promises and infrastructure projects for electoral gain. This indicates a shift towards issue-based and policy driven decision making.



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

June 2025



Follow us on
Facebook



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

The launch event brought together a diverse group of participants including academics, policymakers, political actors, project partners and media personnel.

The programme commenced with a welcome address by NPC's Executive Director, Dr. Jehan Perera, who underlined the importance of understanding voter psychology against the backdrop of both global and national challenges. He called for deeper reflection on the democratic responsibilities of both leaders and citizens.

This was followed by Project Manager, Ben Perinpanayagam, who introduced the Active Citizens for Elections and Democracy (ACED) project. He outlined its objectives to safeguard enabling civic space and promote political pluralism and inclusion by sharing and applying locally generated knowledge. He also explained the context in which the project was conceptualised and implemented.

Dr. Johann H. Hesse, Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation to Sri Lanka, addressed the audience as the special guest. He reaffirmed the EU's continued support for democracy, governance and citizen empowerment in Sri Lanka. He explained the EU's rationale for funding initiatives such as ACED noting that democracy, rule of law and human rights are central values enshrined in EU treaties.

Dr. Hesse referred to past EU election observation missions in Sri Lanka including last year's presidential election observation and expert missions for parliamentary elections. These engagements, he said, reflected the EU's belief in supporting democratic processes worldwide. He also referenced the disclaimer in the report noting that while the EU funded the research, it was not responsible for the opinions or political content, which belonged solely to the authors and those involved.

In conclusion, Dr. Hesse emphasised the two way process of democracy with bottom up values and top down responsiveness. He raised the inclusion of women in politics as a critical area needing improvement, referencing international conventions such as CEDAW and recommendations from election observation missions. He encouraged these themes to be explored in follow up workshops and commended NPC for its initiative and successful completion of the research.

Special invitee, Secretary to the Prime Minister, Pradeep Saputhanthri, acknowledged the government's perspective on strengthening democratic institutions and enhancing citizen trust. He emphasised that Sri Lanka was a democracy and understanding the electorate was vital. A survey of this nature was not merely an academic exercise but a diagnostic tool. He expressed his appreciation to the research team, stating that without such research, understanding of political trends would be based on speculation. "Research must be an evidence-based exercise and this study is highly beneficial to society," he said.

Mr. Saputhanthri highlighted that findings from the report were clearly reflected in recent presidential and parliamentary elections. He stressed that this report provided invaluable insight to political parties to understand voter sentiment, the media to shape public discourse and the general public as a mirror of its collective expectations. He noted a significant shift from patronage politics to policy-driven culture, with voters maturing and demanding concrete solutions rather than mere election promises. Additionally, he emphasised the call for fundamental system change, urging all stakeholders - government, private sector and civil society - to collaborate and build trust.

A key highlight of the event was the presentation of the research methodology and findings by Dr. Mahesh Senanayake and Ms. Crishni Silva. They detailed their use of conjoint analysis to determine what matters most to voters during elections, offering a data-driven foundation for understanding voter behaviour. Enumerators who conducted fieldwork shared their experiences, offering authentic insights into community engagement and the diversity of voter perspectives encountered. The event also featured responses from political party representatives, who reflected on how the study's insights could shape future policies and electoral strategies.



Institutional Accountability When State Institutions Defend Justice

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), in a recent ruling, has exemplified the role that independent and effective state institutions must play in a functioning democracy. The National Peace Council (NPC) commends the HRCSL for its principled intervention in the case of Mohamad Liyaudeen Mohamed Rusdi, detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for displaying stickers expressing his views on Israel and Palestine.

This case highlights the dangers posed by the continued existence and misuse of the PTA. Despite the absence of any evidence linking Mr. Rusdi to terrorism, and despite police acknowledgment that the slogans did not constitute a criminal offence, he was arrested, detained without being brought before a magistrate, publicly labelled as mentally unstable in official police communications, and subjected to a restriction order that continues to curtail his freedom.

Particularly troubling is that Mr. Rusdi's arrest appears to have been based on racial and religious profiling. The HRCSL found that the police's determination of "radicalisation" was premised on generalised, discriminatory assumptions that would likely not have been applied had he not been Muslim. This constitutes a serious violation of the democratic principle of equality before the law and the constitutional guarantee of equal protection to all citizens, regardless of race or religion.

The case once again highlights the urgent need to repeal the PTA. For decades, this law has been justified as a necessary instrument to combat terrorism, but in fact has been used as a mechanism to suppress dissent, intimidate minority communities, and justify arbitrary detention. PTA has been used frequently in Sri Lanka to detain individuals without credible evidence, only to have their cases collapse later. The NPC reiterates its position that the PTA must be abolished, and not replaced with legislation that reproduces its repressive features under a different name.

We support the HRCSL's recommendations and urge the government and relevant authorities to implement them without delay. In particular, we call for the payment of compensation to Mr. Rusdi for the violation of his fundamental rights as called for by the HRCSL, the harm to his reputation and livelihood, and for the establishment of clear safeguards to prevent racial and religious profiling by law enforcement agencies.

The HRCSL's meticulous investigation and detailed legal reasoning stand as a model of institutional integrity. In the past public confidence in state accountability has been very low. The situation is now changing for the better and this ruling demonstrates that meaningful oversight and justice are indeed possible when independent public bodies act with courage and clarity. The case of Mr. Rusdi is a reminder of the dangers of unchecked authority and prejudice, and also of the critical role that principled state institutions can play in defending the rights of all citizens.

Media release issued on 19.06.25



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

June 2025



Follow us on
 Facebook





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

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.

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

Website: www.peace-srilanka.org

Email: info@peace-srilanka.org

Tel: 011 2818344, 011 2854127

Fax: 0112819064