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National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Paths To Peace

October 2026

Human Rights Defenders' Wellbeing in Nuwara Eliya

NPC trained Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Nuwara Eliya to support Malaiyaha communities affected by Cyclone Ditwah. This activity is supported by the Carter Center. The training covered practical ways to help people obtain basic documents and access services, alongside a session on HRD safety, self-care and burnout prevention.

The HRDs began applying what they had learned almost immediately. They helped more than 100 Malaiyaha community members obtain basic documentation, including support for people who had lost documents or needed certificates to access services. This work is continuing.

As the HRDs took on this demanding work, NPC's monitoring and evaluation officer followed up on their wellbeing. In the last week of October, seven questions were shared in the Nuwara Eliya HRD WhatsApp group. They asked how many cases each HRD was following, which cases felt most difficult, whether they felt pressured to promise results and whether they were facing tension or misunderstanding. The questions also explored rest, support from peers or coordinators and whether any cases needed to be paused, referred or escalated.

Around 22 of the 30 trained HRDs responded. Where answers needed clarification, the monitoring and evaluation officer followed up by phone. Their responses offer an early picture of the emotional and practical pressures that can accompany community-based human rights work.





One HRD described helping families obtain death certificates after losing loved ones as well as assisting families who had lost all their documents as especially stressful. These cases involve complex administrative processes but also bring HRDs into close contact with people experiencing grief and loss. The responses underline the importance of ensuring that HRDs have ways to manage the emotional impact of this work and seek support when needed.

Some HRDs also described suspicion and frustration from community members. People asked what benefit the HRDs would receive from helping while others expected them to pay for documents. Such reactions can make it harder to build trust even when HRDs are volunteering their time to help neighbours navigate services.

The responses also highlighted the strain of working between community expectations and slow administrative processes. One HRD said they had felt pressured to promise outcomes they could not control. Community members wanted quick results while processes involving public institutions could take time and the HRD had no authority to speed them up. Another response described attempts to help school dropouts return to school while the young people themselves were reluctant to do so. These situations can leave HRDs feeling that they are responsible for solving problems without having the power to ensure a particular outcome.

The practical demands of the work can also be considerable. One HRD described the difficulty of bringing people together to apply for birth certificates when they were reluctant to lose a day's wages. Persuading people to attend could take substantial time and effort, and in some cases HRDs said they used the promise of the travel allowance to encourage participation. This illustrates how administrative support can involve significant logistical and personal labour beyond simply explaining a process.

Most respondents said they were taking enough rest. That is encouraging, but the check in also points to the value of asking regularly and creating an environment where HRDs can speak openly about what they need. One respondent said they received strong support from the project coordinator. Coordinator support is important while opportunities for HRDs to support and learn from one another can also help ensure that assistance does not depend on one person alone.

The questions also asked whether any cases should be paused, referred or escalated. HRDs identified cases that needed further attention, including a missing birth certificate involving the Divisional Secretariat office. Clear referral and escalation routes can help HRDs recognise when a case requires action by an institution or another service provider. They can also help prevent individual defenders from feeling that they must carry responsibility for matters beyond their role or control.

The findings point to practical ways to strengthen the HRD support system: clearer guidance on managing expectations and setting boundaries; peer support opportunities; training on responding to grief and protecting personal wellbeing; and community awareness about the HRDs' role. Together, these measures can help defenders explain what they can do, where they need to refer a case and how they can seek assistance when a situation becomes difficult.

The check in was an early follow up to training, not a final assessment. It shows both the commitment of the Nuwara Eliya HRDs and the challenges they are encountering as they help cyclone-affected families. Their work has already helped more than 100 community members move towards securing basic documents. Continuing to check in with them, strengthen referral pathways and provide opportunities for peer and coordinator support will be an important part of sustaining that work.

Empowering Community Leaders for Inclusive Post-Cyclone Recovery

In the wake of Cyclone Ditwah, NPC has mobilised to ensure that recovery efforts leave no one behind under the Accountability, Cohesion and Trust for Non-discrimination, Ownership and Wellbeing (ACT NOW) project.

Implemented by NPC, the project is principally funded by Misereor, with complementary support from CAFOD and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). NPC facilitated a series of critical training and discussion programs aimed at strengthening the role of District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs) as vital links between affected communities and government institutions. Bringing together local leaders in Kurunegala, Polonnaruwa, Matara and Nuwara Eliya, these sessions focused on the theme of inclusive recovery and access to government services following Cyclone Ditwah. The programmes provided DIRC members with essential knowledge on navigating government entitlements ranging from compensation and housing assistance to ensuring the continuation of children's education while identifying the unique challenges faced by vulnerable and underserved groups. A digital assessment tool has been introduced to capture service delays related to Cyclone Ditwah. These issues will be addressed through official government mechanisms.

A key feature of these initiatives was the direct engagement of high level government officials, including N.K. Jayawardhana (Additional District Secretary, Kurunegala), Sujantha Ekanayake (District Secretary, Polonnaruwa), Mr. Chandana Thilakarathne (District Secretary, Matara), Mrs. Kanchana Thalpawila (Additional District Secretary, Matara) and K.A.L.S. Kalugampitiya (Divisional Secretary, Nuwara Eliya). By equipping participants with a clear understanding of referral mechanisms and available state support, the training empowered DIRC members to act as effective mediators. Moving forward, these community representatives will utilise digital tools to document ongoing concerns, guide affected families toward relevant institutions and facilitate essential follow ups. By fostering stronger coordination between state officials and grassroots leaders, the project is not only enhancing immediate access to recovery services but also reinforcing the resilience and unity of communities as they rebuild their lives.

Speaking on the vital role of local committees in the recovery process, Mr. Jayawardhana thanked the National Peace Council for its continued support. "I believe in this organic formation of DIRCs, as they will bridge the gaps between the community and the state services," he said.





Strengthening Women's Engagement in Democratic Governance

The Women Organizing for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) project supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) conducted two one day capacity building training sessions in Anuradhapura and Badulla. Three meetings were also held in Anuradhapura, Badulla and Matara. Five activities were successfully completed during the month.

The programmes in Anuradhapura and Matara were facilitated by Dr. Crishni Silva, Senior Lecturer at the University of Colombo while the Badulla programme was facilitated by Mr. Faslan Mohammed, Senior Lecturer at the University of Colombo.

These intensive sessions provided an open platform to discuss critical democratic issues that have remained unresolved for years. Discussions focused on the eight year delay in conducting Provincial Council elections and its impact on democratic representation, local governance and access to public services.

Provincial Council elections have remained pending since 2018, creating a prolonged gap in elected representation at the provincial level. Participants highlighted how this delay has weakened democratic accountability and limited opportunities for citizens, particularly women, to participate in political decision making and regional leadership.

The discussions highlighted the importance of strengthening women's participation, particularly in rural areas of the Anuradhapura District where gender-based violence and discrimination against women remain significant concerns.

In Badulla, the technical sessions were facilitated by Mr. Mohammed. The sessions explored the impact of delays in Provincial Council elections on democratic governance and representation, the land rights of Malaiyaha Tamil communities, transitional justice, truth telling and minority inclusion.
The programme also focused on strengthening coordination and collective action among women Local Government Authority (LGA) members to promote democratic participation, inclusive decision making, and community engagement.





During the programme, M. Kalaivani, a young graduate of the University of Peradeniya, shared her personal experience of the challenges faced by Malaiyaha Tamil students in accessing educational opportunities. “When I gained admission to the University of Peradeniya, I never received the letter required to obtain my Mahapola scholarship. I still do not know what happened to that letter. Fortunately, a well-wisher from abroad stepped forward to sponsor my undergraduate expenses, enabling me to continue my education. However, this is not just my story. Many other Malaiyaha Tamil students and families in St. James Estate Badulla continue to face exclusion and barriers to accessing their rightful opportunities. My experience highlights the urgent need to address these inequalities and ensure that no young person is deprived of educational opportunities because of systemic barriers,” she said.

She also highlighted the difficulties faced by communities in accessing government assistance and public services following Cyclone Ditwah in November 2025.

“When Cyclone Ditwah occurred in November, we faced many difficulties due to legal barriers when trying to obtain compensation from the government. People are still living in shelters or temporary accommodation in neighbouring houses. We are all citizens but when we try to access our compensation, sometimes we feel that we are treated as second class citizens. Even now, we cannot easily meet our political representatives because there are only a few of them, and not everyone has the opportunity to meet them and present their grievances. If Provincial Councils were functioning, we could meet our local level representatives without delay.

“Although we have local councils, they do not have sufficient powers to decide what services should be provided to us. Even my child's school does not have enough teachers. However, we cannot raise these concerns because the principal says that requests have been made, but the necessary teachers have not been provided. If we had Provincial Councils we could raise our concerns, follow up on the progress and take the necessary action until our issues are addressed. At present, we cannot do this. Instead, we are told that the ministry has to make the decisions,” Kalaivani explained.







Nobel Peace Prize to Navanethem Pillay is Reminder to Sri Lanka of Unfinished Commitments

The award of the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize to Navanethem Pillay, the South African jurist and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, recognises her lifelong commitment to human rights, justice and international law. The National Peace Council (NPC) congratulates Ms. Pillay on receiving this highest honour for her contribution to peace and the protection of human dignity.

Ms. Pillay's commitment to human rights began in South Africa, where she challenged apartheid and defended Nelson Mandela and other anti-apartheid activists. As a judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, she helped establish landmark legal precedents recognising sexual violence as an act of genocide and a crime against humanity. As High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2008 to 2014, she championed accountability and the protection of fundamental freedoms. She currently serves on the bench of the UN's highest court, the International Court of Justice. She was selected by The Gambia to sit as an ad hoc judge in its ongoing, high-profile case accusing Myanmar of committing genocide against the Rohingya minority.

Her award has particular significance for Sri Lanka. During her tenure, the country's internal war and its aftermath came under scrutiny at the UN Human Rights Council. Her 2013 visit to Sri Lanka, and her assessment of the rule of law, militarisation, land and accountability, informed the 2014 Council resolution mandating an international investigation. She called for credible investigations, accountability and measures to address the grievances underlying the ethnic conflict, which became a significant part of international scrutiny of Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, seventeen years later her demands remain unfulfilled.

At the September 2026 session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, the Sri Lankan government called for time limits on country specific resolutions, including those concerning Sri Lanka. This position was taken in the context of the continuation of the evidence gathering and preservation mechanism on Sri Lanka, which the government opposes. However, restricting the duration of international attention cannot substitute for addressing the concerns that gave rise to it. NPC urges the government to implement recommendations made by Ms. Pillay and successive UN human rights processes which remain unfulfilled. These include credible investigations into wartime violations and enforced disappearances, protection of victims and witnesses, restoration of military occupied lands, demilitarization of the north and east, reform of laws that undermine fundamental freedoms, and meaningful progress on truth, justice, reparations and reconciliation.

The government also needs to address continuing concerns about civic space which have got aggravated through its envisaged laws namely, the Protection of the State from Terrorism Bill, the Prevention of Organised Crimes Bill and the NGO Registration and Supervision Bill.

The NPC pays tribute to Ms Pillay's contribution to the institutionalisation of international human rights law. Her Nobel Peace Prize is a powerful reminder that this framework must be defended and strengthened at a time when powerful countries increasingly disregard international law in pursuit of their own objectives. Whatever the constraints it faces, Sri Lanka, like all countries, has a responsibility to uphold these principles and fulfil its human rights commitments.

Media release issued on 11.10.26

Proposed Laws Risk Entrenching State Power and Enabling Repression

The NPP government's determination to tackle corruption, drug trafficking and organised crime, including criminality involving powerful politicians and senior state officials, presents a significant break with the past. Its mandate for system change requires both effective law enforcement and protection against arbitrary state power. In this light, the National Peace Council (NPC) is deeply concerned that three bills now before Parliament pull in the opposite direction. These are the Protection of the State from Terrorism Bill, the Prevention of Organised Crimes Bill and the NGO Registration and Supervision Bill. Their provisions raise serious concerns about excessive state power and the potential for repression, now or under future governments.

The Protection of the State from Terrorism Bill risks bringing legitimate political protest, trade union action and civil disobedience within the scope of terrorism offences. It provides for prolonged detention, inadequate judicial oversight and restrictions on access to legal counsel. Sri Lanka's experience with the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) shows how such provisions are used against critics, minorities and political opponents. Any replacement must break decisively with this history and ensure meaningful judicial oversight, prompt access to legal counsel and effective remedies against arbitrary detention. Several petitions challenging the Bill were taken up before the Supreme Court. NPC trusts the outcome will ensure the proper balance that protects human rights and democratic freedoms.

The Prevention of Organised Crimes Bill has come before Parliament without public discussion. It provides for extensive surveillance powers, detention of up to a year and the admissibility of confessions made to the police. Ironically, provisions from the PTA, which is to be repealed, have come back through the backdoor in this draft law. The fight against organised crime is essential, but it must not create a separate criminal justice regime in which ordinary safeguards are diminished. Admitting confessions made in police custody invites coercion, as the record of PTA abuse shows.

The proposed NGO legislation would give the state broad discretionary powers over the registration, renewal, suspension and deregistration of civil society organisations, including NPC, placing them under excessive administrative control. This threatens freedom of association, expression and independent advocacy, on which a democracy depends. Civil society plays an essential role in strengthening accountability, supporting vulnerable communities and promoting reconciliation. Its independence must be protected, not undermined by disproportionate regulatory control.

Taken together, these draft laws raise fundamental questions about the direction of governance reform in Sri Lanka. They concentrate powers that could be abused if not now in the future. Sri Lanka needs effective institutions capable of confronting corruption, organised crime and threats to public safety. It also needs institutions that protect citizens from abuses of state power. These objectives are complementary, not contradictory. It is essential for the government to substantially revise the three bills where their provisions fail to meet constitutional and international human rights standards.

Media release issued on 23.10.26



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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.

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