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கிளங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Paths To Peace

February 2017

Peace Building and Reconciliation Highlighted at Symposium

About 360 religious leaders, civil society activists and government officials attended a National Inter Religious Symposium organised by the National Peace Council under its project Reconciling Inter Religious and Inter Ethnic Differences (RIID). The project was supported by USAID/SPICE and CAFOD.



Addressing the symposium, Minister of National Co-existence Dialogue and Official Languages Mano

Ganesan said coexistence meant different communities should keep their identities while understanding their differences. He stressed the need to take dialogue and discussions to the grass roots so that people could participate in the reconciliation process.

Former President and Chairperson of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation Chandrika Kumaratunga said that reconciliation would not be successful without relationships between the religions in the country.

She commended NPC for working to bring together religious leaders to work together. “All organisations for reconciliation must get together and work on a long term basis,” she said, pointing out that most politicians were opportunists who had forgotten the importance of solving problems.

She urged the government to carry out its promise to formulate a new Constitution, adding that it should go beyond the 13th amendment, which “wasn’t sufficient.”

Another important issue, Mrs Kumaratunga said, was missing persons. Relatives of those who had disappeared must be given answers by the security forces. If not, they would always go on searching.

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Mission Director of USAID Dr Andrew Sisson thanked NPC for its valuable work to advance peace and reconciliation and added that USAID was glad to support a project that had created an impressive network for communities to build bridges.



“Bringing peace is still work in progress and it is challenging... We applaud steps taken by the government and civil society to engage the public in reforms,” he said, adding that every community had an important role to play in bringing peace, reconciliation and national identity.

He urged the participants to keep sharing lessons learnt and experiences and to keep pressuring national leaders to promote peace and reconciliation.

Norway’s Charge d’Affairs Knut Nyflot pointed out that religious leaders could solve problems before they escalated and spread. They could influence thinking and attitudes of people. “The Norwegian government values people’s participation in government and supports NPC’s work in bringing people together,” he added.

One member from each of the 16 DIRCs comprising Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Jaffna, Mannar, Batticaloa, Ampara, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura, Ratnapura and Badulla told the symposium about their work in the district and how the DIRC was able to meet its goals.

The major task of the DIRCs is to strengthen reconciliation building action among the various religious and ethnic communities based on the transitional justice process.

Other donors contributing to the inter religious activities of the DIRCs are Misereor, the Asia Foundation, British High Commission, with Norway providing core support to NPC.

The DIRCs also support civil society in the reconciliation building process at grass root level through intervening to reduce inter ethnic and inter religious unrest and conflicts.

“In the Polonnaruwa district, DIRC intervened to counter extremist forces that were spreading messages of hate against other religions and ethnicities. DIRC printed stickers and handbills promoting reconciliation and harmony and distributed them among the people.”
Ven Habarana Rathana Dhamma
Polonnaruwa DIRC

Clergy Presents Resolution To Government

Religious clergy and civil society activists from across the country have urged the government to take concrete steps to ensure that peace and reconciliation were established in post war Sri Lanka.



The leaders handed over a six-point resolution to the Minister of National Co-existence Dialogue and Official Languages Mano Ganesan, Chairperson of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation Chandrika Kumaratunga and Secretary-General of the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms Mano Tittawella at the National Inter Religious Symposium organised by NPC.

The Value of Inter Faith Dialogue

While religions have developed different belief systems over the course of time, all religions advocate tolerance, kindness towards others and nonviolence. Religious leaders have a high degree of respect and influence in their communities. If religious leaders can operate out of shared values, they can play a major role in healing the divides left by the civil war.

Coping with religious and ethnic diversity was the challenge of NPC. For the past two decades, NPC has been searching for its answer to this challenge. An important part of our answer was the District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs). Capacities of the members of DIRCs have been built over the years and well trained on subjects of conflict resolution, early warning and mediation, nonviolent communication, conflict sensitivity and prioritization of humanitarian needs, pluralism, media, documentation and referrals and also have built linkages with media.

DIRCs serve as focal points for inter religious reconciliation and problem solving at the local level. Their work in the communities have helped resolve issues of inter religious and inter ethnic tension before they escalate into conflagrations, and has also contributed to building reconciliation through collective activities.

DIRCs have two primary roles in furthering peace at the grassroots. One is offering local religious communities opportunities to undertake multi religious action and advocacy for peace, while their second objective is to help local communities create a strong internal solidarity regardless of ethnic or religious division.

Civil wars can tear the social fabric of community life. They leave behind deep wounds and undermines inter group trust. In our experience, carefully facilitated inter faith dialogues are one of the most powerful tools for developing mutual understanding that could contribute to sustainable peace and reconciliation of war affected communities.

Inter-faith peace building and reconciliation entails the following strategies:

- Strengthening our own spiritual roots as peace builders;
- Building constructive relationships between faiths;
- Developing skills for inter faith peace building programs;
- Taking effective action together.

Dr. Joe William
Chairman, NPC

NPC To Tackle “Hot Spots” In Two Multi Ethnic Districts

Under its project Inter-faith and Inter-ethnic Dialogue in Sri Lanka, NPC carried out orientation meetings for district level partners and District Inter Religious Committee (DIRC) members in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts and held training workshops on early warning and conflict sensitivity, Transitional Justice and Non-violence Communication.



A concept note on carrying out an assessment of hot spots was also developed. It was negotiated with the Eastern University to undertake the study.

The project aims to support inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue to reduce ethno-religious tensions in selected locations and ensure national reconciliation processes and policies take account of ethnic and religious viewpoints.

Despite positive post-war period developments, there has been a resurfacing of old tensions where the three major ethnic groups - Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims - live in close proximity and have a long history of conflict.

There is higher possibility that these ethno-religious tensions could erupt with proposed government reforms such as truth and reconciliation mechanisms and constitutional reforms including power sharing.

The project is supporting inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue at the local level in order to create networks and understanding among religious and other community leaders in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts, both located within a high risk province. For this purpose, a DIRC will be formed in Trincomalee and the existing one in Batticaloa will be expanded to include areas prone to conflict within the district.

NPC's project, which will run for two and a half years, works with religious leaders in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa Districts to empower them to better understand and contribute to policy advocacy at the local and national level. The project is supported by the Asia Foundation with funding from the British High commission.

Training and capacity building for DIRCs which include Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian religious leaders and lay persons contain topics such as non-violent communication, early warning and conflict sensitivity, mediation, gender, social cohesion, Transitional Justice, documentation and referrals, constitutional reforms and facilitation. Committee members will meet monthly to address, discuss and resolve local inter-religious and inter-ethnic disputes.

NPC Contributes To Geneva Dialogue On Promoting Reconciliation

Reflecting the positive changes in relations between civil society and the government in the past two years in relation to the reconciliation process, NPC Executive Director Dr Jehan Perera was invited by the Sri Lankan government to join the official delegation to Geneva to represent a civil society point of view at side events during the UN Human Rights Council sessions.

He was part of the team that spoke at a side event hosted by the Sri Lankan government, which was attended by the Human Rights community, Sri Lankan Diaspora, and by diplomats.

He said that as a civil society organization, NPC was committed to all four pillars of transitional justice (i.e. truth, accountability, reparation and institutional reforms) but that the political context had to be kept in mind, and priority needed to be given to what could be done now.

Dr Perera pointed out that victims needed to receive immediate relief in the north and east, and this had been slow in coming, but that more time also needs to be given to the government due to problems of coalition government and getting the people's support in the south.

He also had the opportunity to sit in at meetings of the government delegation with the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and to an official dinner with ambassadors.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in his report to the Council that the slow pace of transitional justice in Sri Lanka and the lack of a comprehensive strategy to address accountability for past crimes risked derailing the momentum towards lasting peace, reconciliation and stability.

“Seventeen months ago, when we published a detailed report on the grave human rights violations committed during the conflict in Sri Lanka, I urged the Government and all the people of Sri Lanka to ensure that this historic opportunity for truly fundamental change should not be squandered,” he said.

He noted that in many ways, Sri Lanka appears to be turning a corner on the promotion and protection of human rights, but he stressed that hard-won gains could prove illusory if they are not tethered to a comprehensive, robust strategy.

“This critical opportunity in Sri Lankan history cannot be missed,” he said, urging the government and people of Sri Lanka once again to prioritize justice alongside reconciliation to ensure that the horrors of the past are firmly dealt with, never to recur.



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.

Religious Clergy Promotes Reconciliation

In the backdrop of imminent constitutional reforms possibly leading a referendum, religious clergy and civil society activists from across the country urged the government to take concrete steps to ensure that peace and reconciliation were established in post war Sri Lanka. The leaders handed over a six-point resolution to the Minister of National Co-existence Dialogue and Official Languages Mano Ganesan, Chairperson of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation Chandrika Kumaratunge and Secretary-General of the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms Mano Tittawella at a national symposium organized by the National Peace Council (NPC). More than 360 persons participated in the symposium.

The symposium was held with support from District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs) comprising leaders of all religions and ethnic groups, government officials, university academics and students and youth representatives. The DIRCs worked towards conflict transformation and reconciliation by building support for the transitional justice process, especially truth telling and trust building within communities. A total of 18 DIRCs have been established in the districts of Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Puttalam, Kilinochchi, Kurunegala, Jaffna, Mannar, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Badulla.

In the resolution the leaders urged the government to bring back to normalcy the lives of people who have been evicted from their homes and properties, pointing out that many of them are without homes or incomes even today. The leaders said civil administration should be strengthened in keeping with the 19th Amendment because security forces still intervene in civil administrative activities and this hinders the freedom of life of the people in these areas. They added that the lethargic manner of working by certain government officials has hindered the improvement of infrastructure facilities and provision of various essential services.

The third point in the resolution said that there has not been specific and speedy action on missing persons and those who have been made to disappear illegally. "We firmly hope that the State mechanism for acting on the above matters will be strengthened and that action is taken to fulfill justice for the people affected directly and indirectly due to the war." The leaders also asked for a compensation process without any form of discrimination.

The resolution pointed out that extremist political activity and extremist religious groups and individual activities were destabilizing society and called for several measures to avoid such situations such as the establishment of social protection monitoring committees, strengthening the action of the Women and Child Protection Committees and conducting formal counselling services aimed at those subject to severe mental stress.

The final point in the resolution suggested several steps for building national reconciliation including implementing the national language policy and paying attention to activities that will improve inter-relationships among the communities. "If there are political groups, religious groups, government officials, civil society actors who will disrupt reconciliation, take legal action against them unmindful of their status," the resolution said. The government needs to act on these exhortations that are in the best interests of the country. This will be in accordance with the higher principles of democracy, as the great majority of Sri Lankan people want justice and reconciliation to be the heritage of all.

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