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தில்ங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Paths To Peace

December
2019

Solving a Dispute Through Discussion and Non Violence

Under its Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Activity (SCORE), NPC conducted a series of dialogues on building a better future through memory in the Seruwila area.

A mixed village dialogue for the Navakkenikadu and Sumedankarapura Grama Niladari Divisions of Seruwila was held to resolve a conflict between the two communities over grazing land while encouraging them to resolve problems in a non-violent manner with empathy and compassion based on past experiences.

NPC conducted a series of dialogues for both communities separately in August and September. The mixed community dialogue was a result of an agreement to come onto one platform to discuss the issue. As a result, two committees were appointed in both villages and possible solutions were taken into consideration.

The participants who attended the dialogue knew about the dispute and understood the social, political and economic causes that led to the situation. Both parties accepted the fact that the wrongdoing had been done by a small group of people while emphasising the fact that others were honest and respectable people. Insufficient support by the government to solve the land issue was criticized.



According to the participants, both parties have lived peacefully with each other. They had done their best to prevent the conflict becoming ethnicity-based. Most people were positive about the suggested solutions and if these were implemented, there would be no repetition in the future.

“This problem is between two ethnic groups. The facts become distorted because of this. Both groups are trying to justify their actions. The mistrust, which is based on ethnicity, has led to unnecessary problems. However, I appreciate the fact that both communities have come up with possible solutions to solve this conflict,” said President of the Village Development Society of Sumedankarapura, Mr. M.K.L. Senarath Bandara.

Reparation Vital for Sustainable Peace and Reconciliation

NPC conducted a programme consisting of three workshops on the meaning of reparation funded by the UN’s International Organization on Migration (IOM). Participants came from 12 districts across the country and included victims, NGO leaders and representatives of District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs).

The programme concluded with a special educational event on reparation held in Colombo.

Speaking at the event, NPC Chairperson Dr. Joe William pointed out reparation was a critical component for societies that had undergone trauma to heal because it recognised the suffering of people and helped them to rebuild their lives.

Programme Manager Nirosha Anthony said the programme had educated victims of war on reparation. A survey had been conducted to find out the views of people on reconciliation. Most people thought reparation was only for the Tamil community but through the programme they learnt that it was for all ethnic groups who had been affected.

NPC Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera said that while economic development was necessary, it was also necessary to have justice and to find a solution to the problems of the past.

Opposition MP Harsha de Silva pointed out that reparation acknowledged the responsibility of the state and other groups to redress the consequences of wrongdoing. Even if the state was not responsible, it must repair as it was responsible for welfare of all citizens.

German Ambassador Jorn Rohde said that while reparation could not undo the horrors and injustices of war, it could show that the government cared for its people and that something bad had happened. He said that reparation was about having justice and could bring healing and sustainable reconciliation.

Office on Missing Persons Commissioner Mr. S. K. Liyanage said that there were serious and complicated issues that took time to resolve. Since most victims had been the breadwinners in their families, those left behind had become destitute. Reparation had to be given to them, he added.

During the question and answer session, Mr. Liyanage emphasised that the OMP needed the cooperation of victims in order to carry out its mandate. However, some participants pointed out that people were afraid to visit the OMP office because they were observed and sometimes threatened.

Learning and Sharing to Foster Inter Faith Engagement

A three day experience sharing visit was organized by NPC's Collective Engagement for Religious Freedom (CERF) project for 120 members of the Akurana, Negombo and Vavuniya Local Inter Religious Committees (LIRCs) in Vavuniya with the support of the Social Development Services Foundation (SDSF), Sarvodaya and the Rural Development Foundation.

The visit was an opportunity to witness, learn and share experiences in formulating and implementing committee activities and public interventions as well as being a platform to promote pluralism, which is a core objective of the project, through inter faith engagement and interaction.

The first inter faith sharing activity was organized at the Anuradhapura Grand Mosque where participants from all faiths were able to witness the Friday Jumma prayers and engage in a discussion facilitated by the Mosque Trustee Committee on the importance of coexistence in creating a unified country.

The discussion opened the opportunity for participants of other faiths to express their thoughts on the value of unity. Several participants emphasised the importance of creating a national identity so members of all faiths could unite and move towards a peaceful society.

At the next session, Vavuniya District Secretary Mr. I. M. Haniffa praised the activities of the LIRC, saying that it fostered coexistence among communities and had successfully identified community level conflicts, thus preventing them from occurring even while other parts of the country were in turmoil.

NPC Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera emphasised the importance of valuing and embracing diversity. "Although we belong to different faiths and ethnicities and have different political ideologies, we come together as one when it is needed. Our strengths lie in our diversity. We must use our differences to our advantage," he said.



The three committees then made presentations on the activities they had conducted so far, highlighting their community engagement interventions. They learnt from each other about how to effectively engage with communities according to their specific needs and shared their thoughts on the successes and areas to be improved.

Later the participants visited Thalikkulama village to see the multi religious Sunday school that was built by Vavuniya LIRC as a solution for the limited interaction and understanding among religious communities of the village. The visitors gifted stationary items, school bags and books to underprivileged children in the village.

On the third day participants were taken to the Vanni Rehabilitation Organization (VAROD). Several people who had been disabled during the war shared their experiences with the committee members.

Committee members were able to witness first hand the suffering caused by war as well as the role of religious leaders in healing and bringing communities together.

“We always emphasise it is just only a few people engage in extremism while the majority are moderate. We should educate others on the value of diversity and coexistence whenever possible,” said a Community Policing Inspector from Vavuniya.

“There was a bit of distance between Muslims and other religious communities in Negombo. So the religious leaders got together and arranged common initiatives such as visits to religious places. Come and visit us so we will able to broaden our understanding of each other,” said a Moulavi from Negombo.

Call for Government to Continue Supporting Transitional Justice Mechanisms

A series of workshops were conducted in Polonnaruwa, Batticaloa, Nuwara Eliya, Jaffna, Ratnapura and Hambantota on pluralism, Transitional Justice, good governance and missing persons for Local Government Agents (LGAs) in 16 districts under NPC’s project Consolidating Ongoing Multi-Level Partnership Actions for Conflict Transformation (COMPACT).

LGA members, including several women, representing different political parties attended the workshops.

Participants from the Jaffna workshop said that the mechanisms of Transitional Justice needed to be properly established by the government. They said that the government should continue to support the Office on Missing Persons and the Office of Reparation. It was also important to formalise and establish a proper prosecution mechanism.

A female participant who took part in the Ratnapura workshop asked NPC to conduct a separate workshop for female LGAs who would benefit from the topics that were discussed. She pointed out that there were obstacles for a female LGA member to work in politics such as the lack of knowledge of good governance, Transitional Justice and pluralism. Also, female LGA members were discriminated against because men believed that women were not as efficient as males when it came to performing their duties.

Building Solidarity and Harmony After the Easter Sunday Attacks

Three solidarity visits were organized to Kandy, Moneragala and Anuradhapura under NPC's project Consolidating Ongoing Multi-level Partnership Actions for Conflict Transformation (COMPACT) to build solidarity among the different communities of various districts and bridge the distance that was created by the Easter Sunday attacks.

The visits consist of sessions for target groups such as women, youth and children and end with a general discussion for all communities and age groups, which helps them to appreciate their neighbours and communities while spreading the importance of working towards a peaceful and reconciled Sri Lanka.

More than a 100 youth and women participated in the solidarity visit to Kandy, which included a cricket match where the teams consisted of youth from all ethnicities and religions. The women took part in cultural and religious exchange discussion where they got to know each other and clear up any doubts they had regarding different religious and cultural practices.

During the visit to Moneragala participants of all ages worked together to plant trees along a road. Afterwards there were cultural and religious exchange discussions followed by a musical show by Jayathilaka Bandara, who sang a collection of peace songs that showcased the importance of living in harmony and coexisting with different cultures and communities.

The visit to Anuradhapura consisted of games and cultural exchange discussions. More than 300 people were present at the village mosque to welcome the visitors, exceeding the expected number. The Moulavis at the mosque said they wanted to bridge the gap between themselves and their neighbouring communities after the chasm caused by the Easter Sunday attacks.

The solidarity visits were organized with the collaboration of stakeholders such as the Divisional Secretariat office, the Human Rights Commission, the National Youth Services Council, the Community Policing Unit, local NGO and CBO leaders and religious leaders.



Human Rights: The Right of Every Human Being

NPC participated in a commemoration of Human Rights Day Human in collaboration with the Human Rights Commission in Batticaloa and Caritas EHED under its project Accountability Through Community Engagement and Initiatives for Transition (ACE-IT) funded by the European Union.

Addressing the audience, Bishop of Batticaloa Rt. Rev. Dr. Ponniah Joseph said human rights were a must for a person to live as a human being. He added that everyone's human rights should be protected regardless of their religion, race or language. The event included a peace walk through the town as well as cultural dances, dramas and songs.

Community Leaders Discuss Transitional Justice

A meeting for 63 community leaders from the estate sector was held in Nuwara Eliya under NPC's project Accountability Through Community Engagement and Initiatives for Transition (ACE-IT) funded by the European Union.

At the meeting, the issues of Transition Justice and the new state mechanisms were discussed. Other topics included human rights, good governance, the Office on Missing Persons, the Right to Information Act and the National Police Commission.

Participants said that there should be more awareness about human rights, especially in the estate sector where women were badly mistreated.

Painting For Reconciliation

Many paintings are coming up in cities and towns across the country but most depict only Sinhala Buddhist culture.

In order to project a balanced picture, Kandy District Inter Religious Committee members, with support from the National Peace Council, have begun painting murals that project the message of reconciliation in Digana, where anti-Muslim riots took place.



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.

Matters of Concern for National Reconciliation in the New Year

The celebration of Christmas took place without incident and in the manner that Christians in Sri Lanka have traditionally done. This was a success of governance as there were security warnings due to the Easter bombings that caused heavy loss of life to Christians at worship in three of their churches. The government made arrangements for enhanced security to ensure that there was no recurrence of such acts of violence or terrorism. The National Peace Council appreciates the security and freedom enjoyed by all communities to celebrate their special occasions in safety and live as equal citizens.

As the country heads to a new year we wish the new government that came to power after the Presidential Elections of November 16 to continue to govern the country in a manner that meets the hopes and aspirations of our multi ethnic and multi religious population. We are strengthened in our confidence by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's declaration on taking the oath of office where he said he would be the president of all Sri Lankans, and not only of those who voted for him. This position has been reiterated by other government leaders who have pledged their will be equal treatment to all citizens.

At this time we want to express our concerns about several matters that could potentially impact upon inter-community relations with the state. The first is the president's statements that development would be prioritized in resolving the ethnic conflict and that strengthening the system of devolution of power is not going to be the answer. Second is the president's assertion that there is no problem of missing persons to be resolved and limiting it to those who fell on the battlefields of war. The third is the assertion by government leaders that the national anthem will not be sung in Tamil at the forthcoming Independence Day celebrations. We urge instead the continuation of the policy set in 2015 that the national anthem would be sung in both Sinhala and Tamil languages in keeping with the earliest post-independence practice in 1949 at the inauguration of the Independence Memorial Building at Torrington Square of singing of national songs in both languages.

As an organization that has worked to build bridges between the ethnic and religious communities and the state for the past 25 years, the National Peace Council requests the government to reconsider its initial assessments of the issues outlined above. These are issues that have come down the decades and require institutional reform and political commitment to resolve. We urge the government to discuss these matters with the political parties and representatives of the ethnic and religious communities, in keeping with the plural nature of Sri Lankan society, prior to concretising them as policy decisions.

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