



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

Paths To Peace

February 2016

NPC Promotes Concept of TJ Through Training Workshops

NPC conducted a series of training workshops on Transitional Justice (TJ) for policy makers, civil society leaders, security forces personnel and government officials in Colombo, Jaffna and Trincomalee.

One of the workshops was for members of NPC's District Inter Religious Committees to lay the groundwork for further sessions in the districts so that the concepts of TJ could be brought to the grassroots level.



Some 255 participants attended the workshops, which are funded by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives and GIZ/FLICT to promote people's participation in the TJ process.

TJ expert and trainer Patrick Burgess, who has been involved in helping countries establish Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) around the world, gave participants an extensive grounding on what TJ meant and how it could be administered.

Through video clips, group exercises and drawing from his knowledge of TJ mechanisms from around the world, Mr. Burgess touched on a wide range of topics including the four pillars of TJ (truth seeking, justice, reparations and institutional reform); International Humanitarian Law as it pertains to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide; the International Criminal Court, international, national and hybrid tribunals and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs).

The three-day workshop for trainers was addressed by South African Ambassador Geoffrey Doige who explained his country's experiences with a successful TRC and by Parliamentarian M.A. Sumanthiran who spoke on the political challenges of Sri Lanka's TJ process.

NPC Takes TJ To The North

February
2016

By Taylor Dibbert

I had the pleasure of attending a transitional justice workshop in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. The event was organized by the National Peace Council (NPC), a Colombo-based organization. Jehan Perera, executive director of the NPC, participated.

The workshop was led by Patrick Burgess, an Indonesia-based lawyer with deep knowledge of human rights and transitional justice. Burgess spoke about the four key parts of transitional justice: truth-seeking; prosecutions; reparations; and institutional reform. He emphasized the importance of taking a holistic approach.

While the sequencing of a country's transitional justice process could be up for debate, Burgess reminded the audience that getting to the truth - actually figuring out what happened - will always be crucial. He also emphasized that every country is different and that it's up to the Sri Lankan people to decide what type of transitional justice process would work for them.

Burgess spent some time talking about truth commissions and noted that South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is the most well-known example. Burgess is an engaging speaker and the material he presented provided some nuance and detail, yet his presentation was still quite accessible.

After the first part of the workshop, things moved to a more interactive format. The idea was for people to ask questions and perhaps seek clarification on any of the issues, which had been raised during the presentation. There were some questions, though there were also several comments. Let's keep in mind that Sri Lanka's Tamil community has suffered disproportionately from a civil war, which lasted nearly three decades and an ethnic conflict that continues.

There were some emotional moments. Many people are tired and frustrated. They are still hurting and they want to be heard. They want answers. They want the truth. They want to know what happened to their loved ones. They are also disappointed with the United Nations (UN) and the UN system.

Approximately 70 people attended the event. Pre- and post-evaluation questionnaires were handed out. "These educational events are important because there are a lot of misconceptions about transitional justice," says Perera.

"Most people in the country see it as being about accountability and punishment for war crimes. This leads to false expectations. There is a need for people to learn that transitional justice is a more holistic concept, and includes truth seeking, reparations, and institutional reform also," he added.

This workshop stands out as a rare (and relative) bright spot. More than one year after Mahinda Rajapaksa's unexpected electoral defeat, the new government's progress on core Tamil issues, including the release of Tamil political prisoners and demilitarization, has disappointed many.

Transitional justice in Sri Lanka is going to take time and it's going to be a difficult process. In that context, awareness-raising about such an important topic is vital.

"There were some emotional moments. Many people are tired and frustrated. They are still hurting and they want to be heard. They want answers. They want the truth. They want to know what happened to their loved ones."

Courtesy The Diplomat

New Equipment For NPC Partners Who Support Torture Survivors

Under its project Promoting Accountability and Preventing Torture by Strengthening Survivors of Torture in Asia, NPC purchased equipment for local partners to upgrade their services to torture victims and their families. The project is funded Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) and the EU.

The Centre for Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (CPPHR) was given equipment to upgrade its newly built counselling centre in Trincomalee. The new centre will support torture victims and their families with counselling and provide a safe space for them to come for assistance when needed.

At present, large numbers of war affected persons, both male and female, have little or no psychosocial support in the Eastern Province. CPPHR received equipment including a laptop and desktop computer, printer, video camera and furniture.



In the South, there is a need to address police torture, which has reached epidemic proportions in certain areas. The Citizens Committee Gampaha District (CCGD) provides advisory services, legal support and information dissemination on available mechanisms to address incidents of police torture. These services are provided free of charge. CCGD received a computer, video camera, printer and fax machine and furniture to upgrade its victim support centre.

Gender Training For NPC Staff

A gender expert from India, Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan, held a series of interactive workshops on gender sensitisation for NPC staff where she explained that a gender lens was a way of looking at any situation to see the participation, realities and needs of everyone in society and understand how their gender identity has influenced their experiences.

She said that a gender sensitive policy and practices within an organisation incorporated gender concerns into all phases of programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Through the use of group exercises, videos and drawing on her own experiences, Dr. Rajagopalan showed how gender stereotyping and discrimination affected both men and women in a negative way and limited their potential in all aspects of their lives.

She spoke on the system of patriarchy that gives preference to the male child so that girls and women are discriminated against through customs, culture, law and behaviour. Dr. Rajagopalan also touched on how gender issues influence conflict and peace building.

Dr. Rajagopalan's two month stay at NPC is funded by the Nexus Fund in the US that works to prevent atrocities taking place in the world.

NPC Establishes DIRC in Hambantota, Explains TJ Mechanisms

Under its project Initiating Multi-level Partnership Action for Conflict Transformation (IMPACT) supported by Misereor, NPC established a new District Inter Religious Committee (DIRC) in the Hambantota District.

Two new DIRCS have already been formed under the project in the Anuradhapura and Badulla districts. NPC has set up nine DIRCS over the past four years.

Through the three year IMPACT project, NPC will establish seven new DIRCs in total and create awareness within communities throughout the country of the requirements to progress from post-war to post-conflict development by explaining the principles of Transitional Justice (TJ).



There is a gap between what is happening at the decision making levels of society and at the community level. The government has been responsive to concerns expressed by civil society about the absence of participation in the transitional justice processes. It has appointed an eleven-member Consultation Task Force that is working with the help of Pablo de Greiff, Special UN Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence.

The framework for the consultation process, already formulated, will have two phases - a web-based process in all languages and a face-to-face consultation process that will focus on specific stakeholders including children, military, disabled combatants, widows and ex-child combatants. The government has planned to mobilise civil society groups to undertake wide ranging consultations with multiple sectors of society to modify and supplement the mechanisms it has proposed.

At the meeting in Hambantota, organised with its partner Samadhi Foundation, there were 31 participants, including Buddhist monks, Christian priests, Moulavis and a Kurukkal.

NPC Executive Director Jehan Perera explained the components of TJ and how NPC will contribute as a civil society organisation towards the peace process by educating people on peace and reconciliation related subjects and lobbying for their views at a national level.

Matara District MP Buddhika Pathirana shared his views on importance of educating people so that they could make decisions with the correct knowledge and information.

“We must thank NPC for selecting Hambantota for establishing a DIRC. This will be a good platform for people to share their ideas and tell their stories, as well to learn from others. People will have a chance to make their own decisions at the grass root level.”

Sandaranga Jayasuriya

Healing Workshop For War Widows

February
2016

Under its project Post-Conflict Healing: A Women's Manifesto, NPC held a healing workshop in the Hambantota district for widows, mothers and sisters of soldiers who died in the war.

The project aims to mobilise women to take an active part in community healing, to establish lasting peace and to increase the participation of women in the process of post conflict transition.

The manifesto will articulate women's perspective of transition from post-conflict to peace and translate their perspectives of this transition into action. The project is funded by FOKUS women.

In order to achieve these aims, various healing activities are being held in nine districts. The activities are based on the tenets of Transitional Justice, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission report and recommendations and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.



Thirty eight women participated in the workshop in the Hambantota district that was held with the support NPC's partner organisation, Ruhunu Rural Women's Organisation, which has been working with the widows, mothers and sisters of soldiers. Some of the women were cultivators while others were seamstresses and traders. Many of them had to look after elderly relatives after they finished work.

Several women spoke about the attitude towards war widows in society and how these attitudes translated into harassment and withdrawal of support for the vulnerable women. War affected women and their children were perceived as unprotected and thus easy prey. As they became war widows and headed households, they lost support from in-laws as well as from their own families. This was an indicator of the stigma surrounding war widows and female headed households.

The women also shared grievances over not receiving the right benefits as war widows. They also wanted counselling for the trauma they suffered.

The participants were eager to share their stories and hardships. It was evident that they were still suffering and needed psychosocial help. They were also in need of financial assistance to bring up their children.

"Women who are unprotected get harassed in this society. It is the way people view a lady that is unprotected. If you dress up as a man you would have more protection. It is the way people in society view men and women."

Workshop Participant

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.

Independence Day Boost To National Reconciliation

The singing of the national anthem in Tamil that marked the end of the Independence Day celebration was a strong gesture of reconciliation by the government. It was one of the most significant actions taken to lessen the sense of alienation of the Tamil speaking people and make them feel a sense of equal belonging to the national polity.

It will also reignite hope and confidence that the government will stay true to its mission of healing the wounds of many decades of inter-ethnic strife and war. The issue of language has long been an emotive and divisive one. The boycott of the Independence Day events by the opposition and the government's mixed messages on the implementation of the resolution of the UN Human Rights Council were indications of the pressures that exist within the polity.

However, the government led by President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe took the decision to carry forward the reconciliation process, which is another opportunity for the unity of the country. The National Peace Council congratulates the government for having had the courage and the wisdom to overcome the objections of nationalists and for having had the national anthem sung in both the Sinhala and Tamil languages on Sri Lanka's 68th anniversary of independence. This was a message of care to the Tamil people. We believe that there is a need for more messages of care that would demonstrate to the Tamil people that they are not marginalized and are a part of the national polity.

Some other key areas for the government to tackle would be release of land taken over by the military, release of detained persons who have been incarcerated without charge for many years and ascertaining the fate of missing persons. Immediate steps taken in these areas would increase the trust and confidence of the Tamil people in the commitment of the government to resolve their problems and treat them as equal citizens.

It would give more time and space to the government to tackle the contentious and sensitive issues of accountability for war crimes. The UNHRC resolution, which needs to be implemented, and the concept of transitional justice, are more than about accountability for war crimes, and include reparations and institutional reforms which could be given the central place at this time.

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

Website: www.peace-srilanka.org, Email: info@peace-srilanka.org

Tel: 2818344, 2854127, Fax: 2819064