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இலங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Paths To Peace

May 2016

Citizens Peace Award Posthumously Granted To Ven. Sobitha Thero

The Citizens Peace Award for 2015 was posthumously granted to the Ven. Maduluwawe Sobitha Thero for his fearless approach to minority rights and inter religious coexistence, and for providing skillful leadership in promoting humane values and democratic governance.

The Ven. Sobitha agreed to accept the award during his lifetime. The date of the award ceremony was set with his consent for November 5, 2015, but by that time he had fallen seriously ill.



The presentation of the award took place in Alapathgama at a ceremony presided over by the Speaker of Parliament, Karu Jayasuriya. Professor Sarath Wijesooriya, who heads the Movement for Social Justice that the late monk led, accepted the trophy on his behalf. NPC's Executive Director Dr Jehan Perera affirmed NPC's commitment to work along with the National Movement for Social Justice to make the values and concepts of good governance, inter religious pluralism and human rights reverberate throughout the country and most of all in the hearts and minds of its citizens.



The Citizens Peace Award was established in 2010 and is intended to honour and encourage those individuals in civil society who have demonstrated courage and consistency in the protection of and respect for human rights, peaceful settlement of disputes and promoting increased understanding between and among communities. Previous winners have been Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu (2011), Dr Nimalka Fernando (2012), J C Weliamuna (2013) and Father Harry Miller (2014).

TJ Orientation For NPC Partners

Under NPC’s Reconciling Inter Religious and Inter Ethnic Differences (RIID) project Phase II, an orientation meeting was conducted at NPC for its partners and District Inter Religious Committee (DIRC) leaders.

Twenty two representatives from DIRCs and partners from Jaffna, Nuwara Eliya, Galle, Mannar, Puttalam, Batticaloa, Ampara, Kandy and Matara participated in the meeting.

The objective of the orientation was to brief the participants on the elements of the project and to raise awareness about the Geneva resolution on Sri Lanka and the Transitional Justice (TJ) process. Speakers included NPC Chairman Dr. Joe William, Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera, Programme Manager Thushara Ranasinghe and Project Coordinator Saman Seneviratne.

“The Sri Lankan government has promised to follow the Transitional Justice (TJ) process to reconcile post war Sri Lanka according to international standards. There are many misrepresentations about TJ. For example, when it comes to accountability, people think it’s about taking members of the armed forces to the electric chair,” said Dr. William.

“Therefore we have a responsibility to educate people about TJ since we need their support to implement TJ mechanisms to bring about reconciliation in our country. That is what we have been doing,” he added.

TJ Orientation In The Field

Two orientation and TJ awareness meetings were held in Jaffna and one each in Ratnapura, Galle and Matara under NPC’s Reconciling Inter Religious and Inter Ethnic Differences (RIID) project Phase II.

At one of the Jaffna meetings, a participant asked about the arrest of former LTTE leaders.



“In this situation, how can we contribute to truth seeking process? If they tell the truth in future they might be arrested, so how is possible for us to take part in the TJ process?” he asked.

Another participant at the Jaffna meeting suggested having exchange visits from the north to the south to share stories of how northern people were affected by the war, so that people in the south would understand and support the Tamil people.

Other issues raised at the Jaffna meetings included militarisation, the return of acquired land to the owners, the slow pace of resettlement, delays in the justice process, lack of job opportunities, finding missing persons and the resettlement of Jaffna Muslims.

War Affected Women Share Experiences On Exchange Visit

Fifty war affected women from five districts got together in Matara for two days to share experiences, exchange ideas and understand the process of healing under NPC's project Post Conflict Healing: A Women's Manifesto, funded by FOKUS.

The participants from Vavuniya, Mannar, Puttalam, Hambantota and Galle - including women from NPC's partner organisations - have been directly or indirectly affected by the war. A translator was on hand for those who could not understand each other's language.



The programme included group presentations, individual presentations, experience sharing, group discussions, songs and dance drama and feedback sessions. The women exchanged gifts and souvenirs at the end of the exchange visit.

Each group discussed the problems confronting war affected women in their district. Military widows from Galle and Hambantota said they faced social stigma after their husbands' deaths while women from Vavuniya and Mannar said they had been displaced due to the war. Some had no permanent housing while others could not repay loans, faced gender violence and had lost property.

In Mannar, women were still searching for missing relatives. Parents whose children were missing had received letters from the Presidential Commission investigation missing persons that were written in English, which they were unable to read.

Participants related several experiences and success stories of past activities to demonstrate how women at the grass roots level could get together to bring about change and find solutions to their problems.

The project focuses on women as being the agents of change in bringing about community level healing and encouraging women to take part in the decision making process.

It contributes to the reconciliation process through capacity building, encouraging increase of female participation at local and grass root level, community healing and providing a platform for the voice of the woman to be heard.

"We always thought that military widows were happy because they had received compensation and had a regular pension from the government. But after we met and spoke to them, we realised they missed their husbands just as we did. We now understand the difficulties faced by war affected women from the south of Sri Lanka. We are all in the same boat."

Participant from Mannar

Third Phase of Write To Reconcile Begins With Anuradhapura Workshop

The third phase of Write to Reconcile, inaugurated in 2012 by international award winning author Shyam Selvadurai, commenced with a residential training programme in Anuradhapura.



During the workshop, participants were taught the craft of creative writing. In the evenings, there were visits by human rights workers

who spoke about their life and work, and films were screened on the theme of reconciliation. Participants made two field trips into the Vanni and the border villages to meet villagers from these areas, sit in their homes and find out first hand their experiences of the war and about their lives post war.

The project, conducted in English, brings together emerging writers from Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan diaspora, between the ages of 18 to 29, as well as Sri Lankan teachers and professors who are interested in writing fiction, memoir or poetry on the issues of conflict, peace, reconciliation, memory and trauma, as they relate to Sri Lanka, with an emphasis on the period after the war.

Over the course of the weeklong residential workshop and two three week online forums, participants will learn the craft of writing and produce work that addresses the themes of the project. The work produced by the participants will be published in the Write to Reconcile Anthology 3.

The project's outcome for 2016 will be focused more on creative pieces that reflect the post war situation with particular emphasis on the border villages and the Vanni. "Post-war themes, as well as pieces on the border villages and the Vanni, were in short supply in the previous anthologies. So I am keen the next anthology has stories and poems about this," Mr. Selvadurai said.

In the past, attending a residential workshop in Sri Lanka was a mandatory part of the project, but diaspora participants were not always able to make the journey. "I wanted to make the project more accessible to them," he said. "It is important to get their point of view too. They were key players in the war and should also be a part of post-war reconciliation." So this year, Write to Reconcile is offering places for participants from the diaspora who want to only participate online.

Working together with Shyam Selvadurai and his team, including award winning writer Nayomi Munaweera, brings an extra dimension of arts and culture into NPC's portfolio of activities that addresses the heart as well as the head.

The two anthologies this partnership has produced have been very well received by those who wish to gain a deeper insight into Sri Lanka's transition process.

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.

Credibility of TJ Mechanisms Is Essential

Among the festering wounds of Sri Lanka's protracted war that came to its bitter end 7 years ago is the fate of at least 20,000 persons who went missing and whose names have been registered with the Presidential Commission to Investigate into Complaints Regarding Missing Persons (the Commission) which was established in August 2013. The Cabinet of Ministers has approved draft legislation to establish an Office of Missing Persons, which is intended to expedite the search for missing persons and bring closure to their loved ones. It also ratified the Convention against Enforced Disappearance as promised at the UN Human Rights Council session in September 2015 in Geneva.

The National Peace Council commends the government for seeking to establish credible and effective new institutions as part of its commitment to the process of transitional justice as promised both to the people of Sri Lanka and to the international community. The Office of Missing Persons is one of the four transitional justice mechanisms promised by the government at the September 2015 session of the UN Human Rights Council. With the next session of the UNHRC scheduled for June this year, the government may be seeking to have the legislation regarding this mechanism in place prior to the meeting in Geneva. The government is expected to give a progress report on the implementation of the UNHRC resolution it co-sponsored in October 2015.

However, concerns have been expressed by human rights organizations and victims groups that they have not been given adequate opportunity to provide their feedback on the proposed Office of Missing Persons. The National Peace Council believes it is of utmost importance to inspire public confidence in the credibility of the government's proposed transitional justice mechanisms, including the Truth Commission, judicial accountability mechanism and Office of Reparations which are included in the government's list of promised new mechanisms. We request the government to publicise the draft legislation and give an adequate opportunity for public feedback on the proposed legislation prior to passage into law in Parliament.

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