



## Friends for Peace

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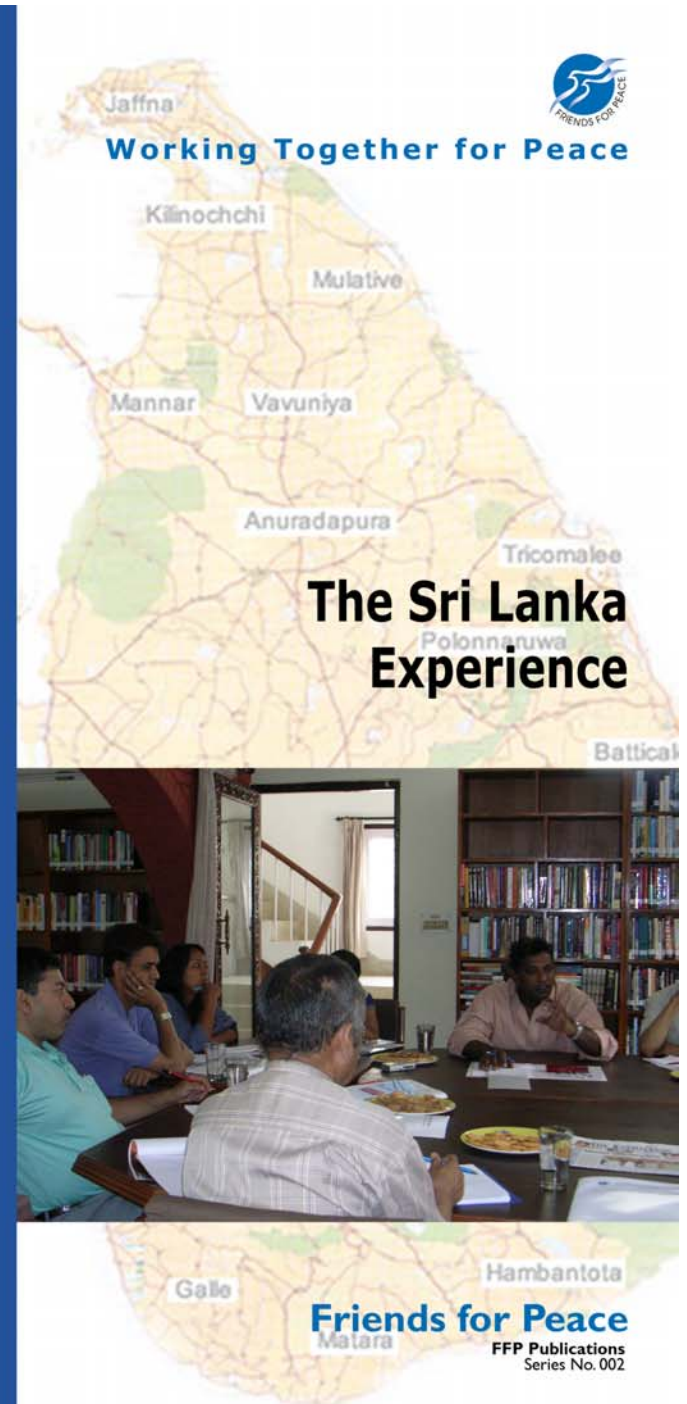
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## **FRIENDS FOR PEACE (FFP)**

Friends for Peace (FFP) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1977. It was established in May 2004 with a view to facilitate research in the field of conflict transformation and to contribute to a future peace process in Nepal. It works with local and international specialists on specific issues of concern in Nepal, convenes workshops for the sharing of experiences on peace processes from around the world and endeavours to be a leading research organisation providing a central source of information for a range of actors on conflict-related issues. It also aims to build the capacity of Nepali and other researchers to develop these strategies. In a post-conflict environment, it remains a public resource to be drawn upon for relevant information and expertise on post conflict transformation.

The main objective of FFP is to establish a credible knowledge-base that provides technical expertise on issues of concern in future peace negotiations and the wider peace process, and facilitates greater participation of civil society organisations and individuals in bringing about a peaceful resolution to the Maoist insurgency.

Based on a range of consultations, FFP is conducting research on various issues thought to be of concern in the current conflict context. Initial areas of research identified are comparative peace processes, security sector reform and international relation specific to conflict.

The comparative peace process covers the lessons and challenges of international experiences in peace building. Within its broad framework, research activities are being carried out on the topic of comparative study of other conflict ridden countries, documentation on peace initiatives and media response to conflict. This booklet forms a part of research work being carried out on comparative peace process. In the future, FFP will carry out research on various aspects of post conflict transformation and will continue to build on these and other pieces of research relevant to contemporary realities.

# **The Sri Lanka Experience**

**A Report on the Discussion with Dr Paikiasothy  
Saravanamuttu, Executive Director of Centre for Policy  
Alternatives (CPA), Colombo  
July 1, 2004**

*Organized by*  
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## **Foreword**

THIS BOOKLET forms a part of the research work being carried out on comparative peace process. One of the components of the research being carried out by Friends for Peace (FFP) is the study of peace processes pursued by various conflict ridden countries in order to draw lessons and share experiences which may come of use for negotiated settlement of Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Sri Lanka is one of the countries we have identified for comparative study.

This paper is an outcome of an interaction programme organised by Friends for Peace (FFP) on July1, 2004 with Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), Sri Lanka.

This booklet is nearly a verbatim record of experience-sharing with Dr. Saravanamuttu on the circumstances leading to Sri Lankan conflict, ceasefire, peace negotiation, third party mediation and status of armistice that has been in place for more than two years. In his talks Dr. Saravanamuttu tries to cast a prognostic view on the conflict scenario of Sri Lanka and shares the lessons and experiences gained in that country so that the negotiators, mediators, facilitators and the warring parties in Nepal might benefit by using them as a knowledge base for conflict transformation and building durable peace.

## **Acknowledgements**

THE PUBLICATION of this booklet has become possible because of valuable contribution of quite a few institutions and people working in the field of conflict transformation and peace process. We would like to avail ourselves of this opportunity to express our gratitude to them.

First of all we would like to thank the European Commission for funding our research programme which enabled us to organise interactions and discussions on various conflict related issues. In the same way we would also like to express our thanks to International Alert for kindly collaborating with FFP in the series of researches being carried out on various issues of concern. We are also grateful to Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu Executive Director of Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), Colombo, for giving his time despite his busy schedule. FFP is especially grateful to International IDEA and Nepal South Asia Centre (NESAC) for their kind cooperation in arranging Dr. Saravanamuttu's time for participation in the interaction. Our thanks are also due to Ms. Shreshna Basnet and Ms. Sabina Shrestha who intensively worked for transcribing the proceedings of the interaction, collected other relevant information and prepared a report, which we are presenting to you in the form of this booklet.

## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

CPA	Centre for Policy Alternatives
FFP	Friends for Peace
GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IDP	Internally Displaced People
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MPs	Members of Parliament
SLMM	Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission
TNA	Tamil National Alliance

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Historical/Geographical Background

Sri Lanka, a South Asian island country in the Indian Ocean, is situated 50 km or 31 miles off the southern tip of India, and is separated from India by the Palk Straits. Earlier known as Ceylon, the official name of the country was changed to The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972. Geographically, the coastal areas and northern half are flat whereas the central and south central areas are hilly and mountainous.

Sri Lanka's first settlers were the nomadic Veddahs. Legends relate them to the Yakkhas, demons conquered by the Sinhalese around the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. A number of Sinhalese kingdoms, including Anuradhapura in the north, took root across the island during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Buddhism was introduced by Arahat Mahinda, son of the Indian Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, and it quickly became the established religion and the focus of a strong nationalism, which set the country on to a cultural greatness. Anuradhapura was not unconquerable; hence repeated invasions from southern India over the next 1,000 years left Sri Lanka in an ongoing state of dynastic power struggles.

Sri Lanka has a history marked by invaders and colonials. Occupied by the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and by the Dutch in the 17<sup>th</sup>, the island was ceded to the British in 1796. The British in 1815 became the first European power to rule the entire island. Coffee, tea, cinnamon and coconut plantations worked by Tamil labourers imported from southern India sprang up and British introduced English as the national language in Ceylon. Ceylon became independent in 1948. Sri Lanka celebrates its national or independence day on February 4<sup>th</sup>.

## 1.2 Origin and Development of the Conflict

Many scholars often cite that the root cause for conflict in Sri Lanka is British colonization. Throughout their regime they created English-speaking elite from among the Sinhalese and Tamils. Their favouritism engendered an opposition which took social and racial overtones. The majority of those who had been left out of the elites were Sinhalese Buddhists; who began to promote the racist notion of Sinhalese superiority as an 'Aryan race' (Hattotuwa, 2002-2003).

After independence, Sinhalese groups gained control over the new state of Sri Lanka and began to exclude Tamils from higher education, job opportunities and mainly by making Sinhala the official language. The introduction of the 1956 'Sinhala Only' Act, which replaced English with Sinhala as the language of official government business, clearly disadvantaged large numbers of Tamils.

Hence, the conflict in Sri Lanka illustrates the operation of some of the most combustible factors in ethnic relations, language, religion, long historical memories of tension and conflict, and a prolonged separatist agitation. Most Sinhalese believe that the Tamil minority has enjoyed a privileged position under British rule and the balance has to shift in favour of the Sinhalese majority. Tamil minority is an achievement-oriented and industrious group that still continues to enjoy high status in society, considerable influence in the economy, a significant, if diminishing, role in the bureaucracy and is well placed in all levels of education systems. The fear and sense of insecurity among Tamils stem from the belief that they have lost the position they enjoyed under British rule in many sectors of public life in the country; 'a classic sense of relative deprivation' (Hattotuwa 2002-2003).

The introduction of communal quotas for university entrance in early 1970s led to the exclusion of meritorious Tamil students, which set the ethnic powder keg alight. With this 'standardization', Tamils had lost

the education and employment opportunities which had conditioned their commitment to a unitary Ceylon in the first place. This led to large number of young Tamils to the conclusion that their socio-economic aspirations could be fulfilled only in a separate Tamil state.

The bloody terrorism that has ravaged Sri Lanka since 1983 is fuelled by the refusal of Tamils to operate within a state system that denies them political power, employment and educational opportunities whilst engendering socio-economic disparities.

As Hattotuwa Sanjana states in her report, the history of conflict in Sri Lanka is long running and complex. For the past 20 years and more, the conflict has been fought in the north and the east of the country in a conventional/guerrilla style. Despite two previous attempts at ceasefire in 1989 and 1994, the war has dragged on.

### **1.3 Ceasefire and Peace Talks**

The signing of an indefinite ceasefire between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in February 2002 led to the most secure and promising period in the Island's troubled history. Formal peace talks between GOSL and LTTE began in Thailand on September 16, 2002. Subsequent sessions have been taking place on an approximately monthly basis in Asia and Europe, helping further solidify the peace process. However, the fifth session of talks held in Berlin on February 8-9, 2003 was the latest peace talk, which has been suspended since.

The LTTE explained that the decision to suspend the peace talks was neither a withdrawal from peace talks nor a hostility-driven action. The primary motivating factors the absence of significant progress in alleviating the hardships of the people caused by the war.

If solving the hardships of the people is the goal, there is no alternative to the negotiation table.

## 2. THE DISCUSSION

WITH A VIEW to sharing experience with Dr Paikiasothy Suravanamuttu<sup>1</sup>, Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA)<sup>2</sup> about Sri Lankan peace process, a discussion programme was organized at the office of the Friends for Peace (FFP)<sup>3</sup>, Baneshwor, Kathmandu, Nepal on July 1, 2004. The Director of FFP, Dr Bishnu Raj Upreti, welcomed and briefed the invitees about the FFP programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu holds a PhD degree (1986) in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), University of London. He has been associated with the University of Colombo and the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies as a visiting lecturer. He has also worked as Research Consultant with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies and the Centre for Policy Research and Analysis at the University of Colombo. Dr Saravanamuttu was a member of the Foreign Affairs Study Group of the Foreign Ministry of Sri Lanka and of the Advisory Committee of the Free Media Movement. He contributes a political column to the Sunday Leader newspaper and is quoted widely on Sri Lanka in both international and local print and electronic media.

Dr Saravanamuttu has contributed to a variety of international conferences organized by academic and policy-oriented institutions on subjects ranging from governance and policy reform to ethnicity, international politics and conflict resolution.

<sup>2</sup> The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) was formed in 1996 with the firm belief that there is an urgent need to strengthen institution and capacity-building for good governance and conflict transformation in Sri Lanka and that non-partisan civil society groups have an important and constructive contribution to make to this process. The primary role envisaged for the Centre in the field of public policy is a pro-active and interventionary one, aimed at the dissemination and advocacy of policy alternatives for non-violent conflict resolution and democratic governance. Accordingly, the work of the Centre involves a major research component through which the policy alternatives advocated are identified and developed.

<sup>3</sup> Friends for Peace is a non-governmental and non-profit organization registered under the Societies Registration Act 1977. It was established in May 2004 with a view to facilitating research in the field of peace process and conflict transformation in Nepal. It works with local and international specialists on specific issues of concern in Nepal, convenes workshops for the sharing of experience on peace processes and caters to the need of information and resources on conflict-related issues.

He introduced the guest, Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu. Dr Saravanamuttu is a key Sri Lankan involved in Sri Lanka peace process.

## **2.1 Topics of Discussion**

The following topics were discussed at the discussion programme:

- Sri Lanka's experience on achieving and monitoring ceasefire agreement and how to ensure continuation of ceasefire even after the failure of talks as observed in Sri Lanka
- Sri Lanka's experience on third party involvement in negotiation and mediation
- Sri Lanka's experience on ways to bring political parties in the active peace process
- Sri Lanka's experience on mobilizing religious organizations and individuals (eg Buddhist monks) in a peace process
- Role of regional powers in negotiations
- Lessons for Nepal from the Sri Lankan peace process and negotiation

## **2.2 Participants**

In addition to Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, the discussion programme was participated by, among others, several personalities active in the peace process in Nepal. They included:

1. Mr Padma Ratna Tuladhar
2. Dr Dwarika Nath Dhungel

3. Mr Laxman Prasad Aryal
4. Dr Bishnu Raj Upreti
5. Mr Narad Nath Bhardwaj
6. Mr Shiva Kumar Dhungana
7. Dr Karna Bahadur Thapa
8. Ms Sujata Thapa
9. Mr Shiva Sharma
10. Ms Shreshna Basnet
11. Ms Sabina Shrestha

### **2.3 Proceedings**

Thanking the FFP for giving him an opportunity to share his country's experience and his opinion with FFP and invitees, Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu began his presentation. A summary of his presentation follows.

With regard to ceasefire, it is a minimum basis for the peace process and has lasted for two years. Nevertheless, there have been 2,000 incidents of its violation. It is basically no war, no peace situation. Nevertheless, none of the parties is willing to tear up the ceasefire agreement. The principal reason for ceasefire to continue is that both the government and LTTE have calculated that they don't have enough physical and material resources to go back to war. The reason is that the ceasefire agreement is not for peace but in both the parties' political interest. If the interests of both the parties are not involved in the agreement, it will not last long. The ceasefire cannot continue without government recognizing the de facto situation, ie two-thirds of the land is under the control of LTTE. The ceasefire agreement is very much a real political agreement. Now that it has gone on for two years, it is difficult to galvanize the support of people to go back to original situation. However, the agreement doesn't say both the parties should disarm. It has accepted a notion of induced stalemate.

The agreement sets up a monitoring mission called the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) that monitors the implementation of ceasefire agreement. 'It consists of monitors from the Nordic countries of Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland, and has headquarters in Colombo. SLMM did not take part in the peace talks between the parties held in Thailand. The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL), LTTE and the Royal Norwegian Government decide the agenda and dates for these talks. SLMM is not enforcing peace in Sri Lanka. The parties themselves have made a ceasefire agreement and are determined to find a permanent solution to the conflict through peace talks.' ([www.peaceinsrilanka.org](http://www.peaceinsrilanka.org))

The Norwegians insist that they did not want to take the role of heading the SLMM; however, both the LTTE and GOSL wanted to do so. The Norwegians did not want to facilitate the peace talk or monitor the ceasefire.

The SLMM has three characteristics:

- In territorial terms, it doesn't go into LTTE-controlled areas.
- It is relatively silent with regard to naval factor.
- The SLMM has no punitive powers; therefore there is no question of its going in and punishing.

The two-year period of ceasefire has made changes that have its own dynamics. However, the eastern command of LTTE has split from LTTE, saying that the northern base has discriminated against the past base. Therefore, the thought is why not come up with a region-based organization. An important factor to be considered here is that the majority of recruitment has been from the east for the past several years. Because of the human

resource shortage, the LTTE continues child conscription. The problem is similar with the Sri Lankan Army. It has 25 per cent desertion. There aren't people or the will to fight. Research also shows that people do not want to go back to war. The split of LTTE and human resource issues have impact on LTTE's ability to go back to war. And the metamorphosis of political military operation to ceasefire situation has thrown challenges to deal with day-to-day issues.

There has been no acknowledgement of pluralism in Sri Lanka. There is the LTTE and the government and no space for the third. The Muslim community, which is an important community constituting nearly 7 per cent of the population in Sri Lanka, has been ignored. If it is left out, Sri Lanka will never attain peace.

There is also a need to focus on relief rehabilitation under the general idea of normalization. If one looks at Sri Lanka's dispersion of aid, it is characterized by inefficiency, corruption and so on. The donor absorption in the south is very low. A sub-committee on the reconstruction of north/east was formed with the representation from government and LTTE. When it comes to donor funds, all the money needs to go through the government: parliament, Auditor General's Department and so on. The donor community couldn't give money directly to LTTE. It is against the law. Therefore, the move was to be vested in the World Bank and audited by international auditors. Government's problem was that it would be unconventional and it also was something new for the donors.

## 2.4 Excerpts of Discussion

**Q.** *How does LTTE manage its financial resources?*

**A.** They manage their financial resources from three major sources:

- Money they raise in terms of taxes
- Contributions from Tamil Diaspora
- To some extent, they take commissions from relief/rehabilitation work plan.

**Q.** *Is Tamil Nadu still a factor there?*

**A.** The Tamil Nadu factor is still there and is a part of the wider Indian factor. LTTE is pretty desperate to establish better relations with India. In our context, all the actors are accepted in the Indian land. When the question of the location of our peace talks came up, the LTTE said because the key LTTE negotiator lives in London and had a kidney transplant, it is important to have the talk to be at a place where there is easy and quick access to good medical treatment. They wanted the talk to be located in south India. This was a ruse to get a true hold into India and try and reverse the bowl of problems they have had in the conspiracy in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The Indians of course said no. The LTTE have tried at every term to reverse the negative situation they themselves created with the Rajiv Gandhi assassination.

**Q.** *There is an accusation that the Norwegians maneuvered the split of LTTE. Is it true?*

**A.** Honestly, I haven't heard that. This is the first time I am getting to hear it. The more common accusation against the Norwegians is that they are pro-LTTE and that at the end of the day, they are people who are so enamoured with the LTTE that maintaining them as negotiators, as facilitators, etc is going to produce an agreement that there was LTTE at the expense of Sri Lanka is starting to exist.

**Q.** *My assumption is, since Karuna is under the protection of Sri Lankan Army, when I say under the protection of Sri Lankan*

*Army, you should understand what I am trying to say, so that is my guess.*

- A.** I think your guess is right.
- Q.** *Two or three years back, Karuna was still a part of LTTE. Is there any single factor in his separation from LTTE?*
- A.** Karuna's explanation in what he did is this: first, the LTTE was asking for reinforcement to the north and he felt that why should the Eastern province—which had sacrificed so much—be constantly having to send cadre and whatever to fight the battle for the north. Second, the political assassinations, which were coming under tremendous criticisms, both locally and internationally, were being ordered by the LTTE's northern leadership through its intelligence and he was taking all the blame. Third, it was the general argument that any money coming in terms of relief, rehabilitation, etc, and coming in through LTTE sources, was going to the north and not to the east.

The LTTE's counter-argument is that Karuna was being investigated within the organization for fraud and that he struck and created this whole political argument for his split to obscure what was basically very base fraud and corruption investigation against him.

But he certainly chooses his movement very strategically. He released his information to international news agencies in the context of the election campaign and he carried out his public relations in a politically shabby way. Where he faltered at the end of the day was, the LTTE outsmarted him in military terms. There is the argument that the GOSL and Norwegians did not support him in the way he expected. They allowed the LTTE to enter the risk in violation of the ceasefire agreement. The GOSL is not as yet totally clear in its mind what exactly it wants to do

with Karuna. But at the same time, it doesn't want to lose that option.

**Q.** *What was the impact of ceasefire on general election?*

**A.** This is an interesting question because I am also involved as a co-convener of the monitoring organization and we asked the election commissioner to annul the election in Jaffna because we felt there was widespread malpractice. The law of the land says that a general election has to be an all-island election. And of course, there have been times when we have had elections when the LTTE has actually controlled the northern province. And we had people elected to parliament from those areas on the basis of 100 votes, 200 votes, 1,000 votes, etc and we maintained that. This time round, we found that the LTTE was very very keen to get involved in the election. They were looking at these elections as a way in which they could answer their critics who said, 'Look, you don't have any popular relations. The last time you claimed some sort of mandate was in 1977.' So, they were very keen to be able to get a mandate for the ISGS. The relationship between the mainstream political parties—this includes parties that never took up power as well as those who did but re-entered political mainstream—has been of four parties coming together into Tamil National Alliance (TNA), who say that the LTTE is the sole representative of the Tamil people in the north and east for the purpose of negotiation. They support the ISGS and in fact they have subordinated to the LTTE for the negotiation. A couple of practical issues came up:

First, the electoral roll registered for the north and the east is an electoral roll that was based on the census of 1981. All Tamil parties, including the LTTE, have refused to allow a census to be conducted in the north and the east. Frankly, one of the major reasons for this is that they have over

800,000 people who have fought either as IDPs or refugees for them. The actual figure for voting in the north, in Jaffna in particular, will come down to about 250,000, whereas the 1981 census says 600,000 ballot papers will be sent out to the north. If you leave the census in terms of delimitation, you will probably reduce the number of seats from the north in the Sri Lankan parliament. So, Tamil political parties have no interest in a census and the electoral commission is committed by law to send out over 300,000 ballot papers in excess of the number of people actually living there. So, the scope for malpractice is quite great.

**Q.** *Have they not taken the census by themselves?*

**A.** They have of their own but they are not sharing it because, they feel, the consequences that will have on delimitation in the Sri Lankan parliament will not be in their favour.

**Q.** *Based on the 1981 census, what percentage of these figures might be inside north/east and outside?*

**A.** It's difficult to give exact figures, but we are talking of 800,000 IDPs, plus about another million who have left since 1983, who are refugees outside in Europe and other places. I would say, about 40-50 per cent.

Second, LTTE is interested in taking part in the election and has decided the candidates are going to be of the TNA. Can you actually conduct elections in the LTTE-controlled areas? Can you actually put polling booths, etc? There is a big debate with regard to these. The election law says that every polling booth has to be guarded by two members of Sri Lankan Armed Police Force. This could have come in direct violation with the ceasefire agreement about the ability of one side to carry arms to the territory. So, after much discussion, it was decided that between LTTE-controlled

areas and the government-controlled areas there would be a strip called 'No Man's Land'. The election commissioner agreed to trust them: polling stations at the closest point of government-controlled territory to LTTE controlled territory. Then the question was how are the poor voters going to get there? There was again a debate on this. Some people said that the international community should help, provide transport, etc. Others said they should not involve international community in this at all. First, because we know that the LTTE will put people into vehicles or get them to come and go in a particular way. Second, other political parties do not have access to LTTE-controlled areas. They cannot go and campaign. Anyway, the LTTE organized its own transportation. They transported people as much as they could. Others walked there. Most of them had to walk back and serve the LTTE's purpose. So what you got was a defective way of election where there was stamping. This is not to say that the TNA could not have emerged as the single largest party, but it may not have 22 seats. And the way our electoral system works is that you vote for a party and you tick off preference for individual from that party's list. So, the more pro-LTTE, people may not have got as many preferences in any other situations. So, you now have 22 TNA MPs in the parliament who are the proxy of the LTTE. So, what is interesting is that the LTTE has seen utility in the Sri Lankan parliament.

**Q.** *What is the ratio of male-female militants in LTTE?*

**A.** I don't know. I cannot tell you the exact figure, but there are quite a number of female cadre and elite female regiments of LTTE who have very distinguished records. There are women's wings. There was also a subcommittee that was set up during the peace talks, subcommittee of gender. But there are no women in important executive decision-making capacity.

- Q.** *What is the role of media in Sri Lankan peace process?*
- A.** The role of media in Sri Lanka is not different from that of the media in Nepal. The media in Sri Lanka is very much a part of the problem in many respects. We have three language media: English, Sinhala and Tamil. We also have media that is state-controlled as well as private. What happens is that we have partisan-political tension, etc, unrelated to the ethnic conflict. On top of that there are media divided along the ethnic lines as well. Another thing, there are situations of censorship, but there are also situations where self-censorship is being imposed. Because of the television, average of Sri Lankan has seen more pictorial evidence of what war has done in Bosnia, Somalia to Sudan to wherever in the world, but has not really seen what has happened in Jaffna. So, it is another world. It is a conspiracy of silence in which media has also got important role. Media can also create hype and play a provocative role. For example, once during a procession, an elephant killed a person. The next day, one of the leading newspapers had it on the headline that 'Elephant killed a Tamil'. This provokes the ethnic group.
- Q.** *What is the role of religious leaders in the peace process of your country?*
- A.** In Sri Lanka, it is said, only it is a cliché-but in all clichés there is a larger element of truth-that we have a majority community with a minority in conflict. The Sinhala Buddhist grieve, the 25,000 square miles in the island of Sri Lanka is the only place they can call home. The Buddhist monks have started entering politics. The Muslim community can go anywhere else, Muslims are all over the world. The Sinhalese are majority in Sri Lanka, but if you go to the north and the east, they are the minority there. So, you have a deep psychological problem with regard to identity or clinging on to the identity; vice versa to the Tamil community. They claim

to be the majority in the north and east of Sri Lanka in comparison to Sinhalese. But within the 25,000 square miles in Sri Lanka, they are a minority. At the same time, amongst the Tamils, the Roman Catholic Church is very influential and that is largely because, although the vast majority of Tamils are Hindus, the Hindu religion is not organized in that way. It doesn't have that hierarchy. The Catholic Church has been there for a long time and has been associated with the Karaya community, the coastal caste community, from which the LTTE leadership comes. They have always been with the people, and have done a lot for the people. They have the organization and also have international links. So, they are seen as being pro-LTTE. In terms of getting an inter-religious dialogue, there are some organizations that are coming to view. The most important one is called the Congress of Religion, where you have important members of religious faiths, who come together in trying to be a force for peace, do activities together to emphasize the commonalities rather than differences. So, the space has opened up, but still the major challenge is because of the number as such (as 75 per cent of the people are Buddhists) to actively get Buddhist priests involved. There are Buddhist priests who are travelling up to the north, bringing delegations from the north to their areas and vice versa. One important point of this ceasefire is that you have people to people movement after 20 odd years.

**Q.** *Are they trying to build pressure on the Buddhists?*

**A.** They are trying to bring pressure in terms of being an inspiring influence at the civil society level as well as at political level to mediate tensions that arise at the ground between the Tamil and Muslim communities. But there is another important dimension, which is that the hardliner in the Sinhala community has an article of faith that the ceasefire was a process that favours the LTTE, that was

really a way of reducing the strength and importance of Sinhala Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. So, there has been a movement of Sinhala Buddhist political researchers, and what they have latched on to is what they call unethical conversion. It is in effect something that has been exaggerated and built out of proportion. The threat, if there is a threat of conversion, is within the Christian community itself, rather than the impact on the Buddhist community. This involves attacks that have actually happened on Christian places of worship over the last two years. And the argument was that the internationalization of our conflict, the favouring of the LTTE, all this was a part of an international Christian plan to divide Sri Lanka, etc and that has now led to demand for legislation against unethical conversions. The GOSL, which is trying to be 'more Catholic than the Pope', has at the same time come up with its own legislation, which doesn't deal with unethical conversions; it deals with all the conversions. So, there is a danger here whilst there is a kind of historical trend towards power sharing devolution in the ground for the majority Sinhala community to be able to accept that they look for another access on which to assert that majority identity. So, it is not going to be easy for us. There will be a fair amount of picking and swinging, and hopefully not killing, as well to move towards the answer of new Sri Lanka.

- Q.** *Has civil society or any group of eminent persons (locally) been able to pressurize the conflicting parties or been influential over them?*
- A.** The short answer is no. The problem that we face in Sri Lanka is simply that the kind of conflicts that we have involves the entirety of society. And the major problem we have in regard to civil society is that civil society has taken positions according to the party political lines. Therefore, because they have taken the lead from political parties and

are allying themselves with political parties, there are very few, if any, who can really say, 'look we don't care whatever political party you come from, this is what should be the people's agenda, this is what civil society agenda is and we are willing to criticize both of you.' And by doing so, earn the respect and credibility in sufficient manner. If you look at civil society as being made up of professional associations to business communities, you see that each of them has made their deals with political parties. The level of political patronage and the way that has seeped through all our institutions in Sri Lanka is a major challenge that we face.

**Q.** *Suppose the civil society gets united for the cause of peace and decides XYZ as the facilitator, will this ever help Sri Lanka?*

**A.** I think there is absolutely no substitute for organized united civil society. The political actors will have to respond to that. At the end of the day, they are politically shabby enough to realize that they cannot turn their actions.

**Q.** *LTTE and civil society?*

**A.** I think the LTTE took the position that the civil society was more partial to the political forces in the south. And the type of organization the LTTE is, it is very suspicious of civil society organizations. In fact, the LTTE has no notion of civil society. It is a very totalitarian organization. Civil society too seems to be more caught up in the politics of the south than in making linkages with the LTTE and the north.

Dr Dwarika Nath Dhungel, Director of Institute of Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), shared his views and put his questions.

**Q.** *Conflict has been a part of South Asia: Kashmir, eastern parts of India, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Sri Lanka, Maldives,*

*etc. We are a part of conflict too. We have been hearing more on Sri Lanka because there have been contacts between peace activists of the two countries (Sri Lanka and Nepal) as well as the donors who have been taking some of us to Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan friends coming here and giving us talks. I know more about the conflict situation in Sri Lanka than that in Northeast India. Based on your sharing of last almost one and a half hours, one thing that struck me is that the LTTE and GOSL have decided to accept the de facto control over the areas. The military balance has been the main factor contributing to sustain the ceasefire and both the parties are not willing to go back. You also mentioned that the naval factor through which arms are coming to LTTE has been left open. And Norwegians are trying their best. But the fact remains that both have accepted to remain side-by-side. That seems to be the main factor. If someone is to make a comparison between Sri Lanka's and Nepal's situations, the former is limited to the north and east of the country and it is more of an ethnic issue. Here in Nepal, it is not confined to a particular area and is not basically an ethnic issue, but there is an inclusion of it. Here, the issue is the overthrow of the establishment and trying to replace through the barrels of the gun. I think this is the difference between the two countries' situations.*

*Having said that, we could listen to you and learn from your experience, but because of the fact that our situations are completely different, we probably have to work out our own way of peacefully sorting out our problem. For example, Maoists are there in and outside the Kathmandu valley. They are there in the east, west, north and the south of the country. They are not confined to one area. If security forces had not played a role, Kathmandu could have been surrounded long back. The situation is that bad. In this context, I don't know how far we can benefit from this experience.*

**A.** I take all your points and I think at the end of the day, all our conflicts are distinctive in their own ways and the way out of them has to be chosen by the people involved in it. One thing I want to emphasize is, in both our cases we are looking in terms of a way-out, we are looking in terms of the structure. In Sri Lankan situation and also in Nepal, we are talking about social contour; we are talking about constitutional reform. In fact, there are similar challenges in terms of the question of the role of political parties, the unity that they have, other forces that have vested interest in maintaining the existing constitutional status quo, the legality, legitimate modalities of doing it. In a sense, I think we all share a particular kind of South Asian predicament of trying to be able to design a just and democratic political structure to accommodate the aspirations of all the people living in our countries. There are commonalities in that respect. From what information I gathered after talking to people in Kathmandu, I have sensed that there is a major challenge with regard to political parties and civil societies. And we have a similar challenge in Sri Lanka's context, in terms of what it is, how relevant and constructive they can maintain themselves in terms of final outcome and solution. There are big differences in military terms, geographical/territorial locations and conflict. But we have common intent and objective in moving a society to a complete change of the status quo.

**Q.** *What are the merits and demerits of third party mediation?*

**A.** Without third party mediation, the two conflicting parties in Sri Lanka would not have come to the discussion table. It was absolutely necessary. When there is a mediator or a facilitator, it becomes a part of the process. The USA has also been supporting the Norwegians and working in close contact with Indians. Being a part of the international security net on behalf of the GOSL, there are training

exercises with the military—non-lethal military assistance as they call it.

One of the disadvantages of third party mediation is that it might not understand the dynamics of the locals, may not have in-depth knowledge or understanding of the situation. And, if there are more than one third party, it will be like too many cooks spoil the broth case.

At the end of the discussion, Dr Bishnu Raj Upreti thanked Dr Saravanamuttu for sharing his experience. Dr Upreti also thanked other guests for their enthusiastic participation.

### 3. CONCLUSION

BASED ON the discussion, one of the major differences between Sri Lanka's and Nepal's conflict situations can be said to be that, in the case of the former, the LTTE is limited to the Tamil-dominated areas in the north and the east, whereas in the case of the latter, the Maoists are everywhere in the country. This has led to further differences, which are:

- Sri Lanka can still conduct its general elections even in the Tamil-dominated areas though in those areas, the elections are based on 100 to 1,000 votes. In Nepal, there have been several changes in the government, yet no government has been able to conduct polls.
- Because of the demarcation of LTTE-controlled and government-controlled areas, and because of the LTTE's demand as well, there is a constant threat of division of the country in Sri Lanka. Though there is concentration of Maoists in the Far Western Region, in the hills and there are pockets of Maoist-controlled areas, they do not control a section of the country like the LTTE.

This leads us to the fact, which is another major difference on ethno-political issue, whereas the minority Tamils demand equal rights, equal status and dignity with the majority Sinhalese, and go to the extreme of dividing the country to achieve it; in Nepal, it is a so-called class struggle of the poor and the peasants against the feudal, capitalists, privatization, modernization, globalization and to establish Communism. It is also a struggle for power, overthrow the establishment and set up their own government. Though both LTTE and Maoists have common means

of getting to the end, which is through the 'barrel of the gun', the former has seen 'utility of the parliament' and taken part in election. The self-righteous Maoists see little good in the election and are adamant on preventing it. The other commonality is that, both the countries have seen the period of ceasefire, but at the same time, there are many incidents of its violation from both the protagonists. Yet again, it is the foreign third party mediation that brought about peace talks between the two protagonists in Sri Lanka. The Nepalese are one step ahead and the two protagonists came to the discussion table with no foreign mediators. However, as it has proved to be unsuccessful now, there are calls for foreign mediation; especially the UN mediation, which has been accepted by the Maoist side. To be little positive of our situation, it took roundabout 20 years for Sri Lanka to come to a ceasefire situation, though there had been two more—in 1989 and 1994—and coerce the LTTE to join the mainstream politics. If the Maoists think that they have gone too far and there is no turning back, the LTTE had gone farther than that and are turning back. If they can, so can we. Targeting other parties in an effort to eradicate their existence will get us nowhere. Revengeful attitude is only an eye for an eye and it continues. Groundwork needs to be done by both the protagonists; make space for each other for co-existence and let politics be for a country and the people; not for self and one's party or organization. The groundwork on our side, to start with, can be just, democratic and nationalist political system; accountable, constructive and committed civil society and progressive opportunity creating and the nationalist business community. The civil society has a major role to play in bringing the two protagonists together.

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