

Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process

July 2009

At the end of this month, the Peace Secretariat is closing down, in recognition of the new situation in the country. After several decades of fighting, in which many thousands of people lost their lives, Sri Lanka is at peace. We have celebrated the end of the terror that threatened us for so long, and the country is now looking to the future, confident that it is going to be bright.

The Peace Secretariat has been through many different incarnations since its establishment in 2002. Initially, we were supposed to facilitate negotiations with the LTTE, while liaising with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission who were meant to ensure that the Ceasefire Agreement was adhered to.

In the first couple of years, it was generally thought that the LTTE was serious, and the Peace Secretariat therefore also facilitated what were intended as conflict transformation measures in the North and East. These were not productive, while negotiations were broken off and the Ceasefire Agreement was very obviously breached.

Following the change of government in 2004, the Peace Secretariat did not have to facilitate official negotiations, but we contributed to informal attempts at talks, while continuing to liaise with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission and trying to promote positive attitudes in the LTTE. This too proved unproductive.

When H.E. the President came to office the following year, negotiations resumed, giving the Peace Secretariat a renewed role in facilitation. The Government was now much more circumspect than it had been earlier. As the LTTE kept avoiding talks and then withdrew again, the Peace Secretariat was asked to facilitate discussions amongst democratic parties, with a view to proposing political reforms. We also continued to liaise with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, although the Ceasefire Agreement continued to be violated by the LTTE, contributing to a renewal of hostilities in 2006.

The liberation of the East in 2007 brought a new dimension to the promotion of peace in Sri Lanka. In addition to working together with new democratic forces in the East, to ensure conformity with international norms, the Peace Secretariat also developed a forceful media strategy to highlight the need to distinguish between the LTTE and the peace process. We repositioned ourselves also as a confidence building institution that promoted interaction between communities, and developed initiatives to strengthen pluralism and human rights, as well as contributing to the economic and social development of the North and East of the country.

Our final publication looks back at the most recent incarnation of the Peace Secretariat, covering the last two years or so, to identify the major achievements of the institution and highlight initiatives that could be taken up by others. While the closure is appropriate in symbolic terms, much of the work that we have been doing must continue in one form or another. Sri Lanka is at peace, but there is still much to be done to ensure that it stays with us for good.

Remarks by Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha



When asked unexpectedly to take charge of the Peace Secretariat, I thought the rationale was my work in political philosophy. The revised edition of 'Ideas for Constitutional Reform' had just come out, and I felt those ideas could be useful for nation building. They served a purpose, since electoral reform and a second chamber to promote the periphery at the centre also got into the mainstream of APRC deliberations, but those were for politicians. Apart from facilitating them, the Peace Secretariat had a minimal role to play.

More important in the public eye were responses to unfair criticism. Initially asked to embark on this by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I realised that writing skills in English were lacking, as was the capacity to analyse. Though the barrage did not stop, prompt responses lowered pressure, and in some cases led to routs.

There were other significant initiatives too. By engaging actively with NGOs, we established that most had good intentions and were happy to discuss and contribute to improvement. Though a few kept away, the process of building up partnerships for the future was useful. The same went for official bodies. The campaign to make the UN and others more accountable began at the Peace Secretariat. Though executive branches of government had to follow through, we contributed much to promote due consultation on the use of aid.

We helped to promote recruitment of minorities into the Forces, and to encourage training on human rights. Increased attention to language, and English for areas previously deprived of it, were also encouraged. We did much too to facilitate economic interaction, exchanges between young people and plans for rehabilitation. Ultimately, if we are to maintain peace, these areas are vital, since it is through empowerment of people and improved communication with each other that problems will diminish. I hope the pictures of the Peace Secretariat's last visits to Vavuniya, and our interactions with former combatants, show what can be achieved.

Getting the policies right



The Peace Secretariat has played a vital role in policymaking processes within Government, contributing very particular expertise in many subject areas.

As military operations have drawn to a close, our primary focus has been on the future of the combatants. Many thousands of young people have been involved in the fighting in some way, voluntarily or otherwise, and the Government has long known that a coherent policy and detailed plan of action would be needed to provide them with the assistance that they required to go back to their communities.

The International Labour Organisation has been supporting a process of consultation led by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights and managed by staff from the Peace Secretariat. A number of different working groups, involving high level government officials, policymakers, representatives of the Security Forces, United Nations agencies and others, have prepared a draft that will be finalised in the coming weeks after discussions with other stakeholders.

Given that considerable attention has been paid in this process to improving the employability of the former combatants, the Peace Secretariat has made recommendations to a number of other agencies of Government on their own policies and how they could be enhanced to assist in establishing a durable peace. For example, we have contributed to the Technical and Vocational Education Training Policy, Strategy and Plan of Action for Vulnerable and Underprivileged Groups for the Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training. We have promoted training for foreign employment, proposing the combination of language training with vocational education to increase incomes of migrant workers.

We have also made suggestions for rapid interventions that would inculcate basic skills and introduce socialisation amongst youngsters forced or drawn into combat at an early age. Working for instance with the National Olympic Committee, we have encouraged the provision of sports training for former combatants.

Internally Displaced Persons have been an enduring concern of the Peace Secretariat. While some of the hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankans who have been compelled to leave their homes and livelihoods, often with nothing more than the clothes on their backs, have returned to their original residences over the years, many others are still waiting to be resettled.

In addition to the direct support for recent Internally Displaced Persons that is described further on in this publication, we have been working on some of the very difficult issues thrown up by the lengthy periods of displacement for others.

The Peace Secretariat has provided advice to the Resettlement Ministry and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights in their consultation process on durable solutions for Internally Displaced Persons on land issues, particularly as relates to Muslim communities exiled from the Northern Province for almost two decades. We have also put forward suggestions to the Law Commission regarding the Amendment to the Prescription Ordinance on the protection of the land rights of Internally Displaced Persons.

We have been asked to write issue papers on a wide range of other topics, to be presented and discussed both within Government and outside with partner agencies. Some of these have included what are referred to as confidence building and stabilisation measures, post conflict security, minority protection issues, civil military relations, children in armed conflicts and the role of peace secretariats in post conflict situations.

The Government has obtained assistance from the Peace Secretariat in compiling various official documents. These have included the third and fourth periodic reports on the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the sixth periodic report under the Convention on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. We have also contributed to the Government's

The Best of British Bluff

In this book, a collection of essays written over the last year, the Peace Secretariat exposes the deluge of accusations made by the 'international community' against Sri Lanka. Taking apart press releases and reports one by one, they reveal a concerted and insidious effort to denigrate the Sri Lankan government, led by elements in Britain.

The Secretary General is well placed to do this. With several degrees from Oxford University, many British friends and what often comes across as an almost paternalistic affection for its people, his understanding of British culture and literature comes across in regular references and comparisons made throughout the book. He makes use of many of his own contacts to explain much of the British action, and has a thorough grasp of both British and Sri Lankan politics.

Accusations of all kinds, from all sides, are tackled, to show some disturbing facets of Sri Lanka's would-be critics. The writings explain the underlying forces affecting NGOs and the distribution of aid, and attempt to untangle the web of allegiances binding much of the British press with politicians, NGOs and the LTTE.

The book dwells particularly on the financial incentives for the politicisation of international aid. It describes,



through multiple high profile examples, the slow erosion of the principle that aid should be philanthropic and without agenda, and postulates that the rising salaries of aid workers is contributing to a less than charitable attitude, where NGOs vie to create the most panic and fear amongst donor nations. It also ruthlessly analyses the special compulsions of ostensibly idealistic organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International that contradict themselves and the principles they claim to uphold in attacking Sri Lanka selectively.

'The Best of British Bluff' is a nine-part excoriating attack on attempts to characterise Sri Lanka as a failed state, which Prof. Wijesinha implies is a neo-colonial project to boost the power of a fading nation. While British media and NGOs get plenty of attention, British politicians are thoroughly dealt with too, and the hardest bits of invective are reserved for government politicians indebted to constituents with terrorist connections.

application for the renewal of the GSP Plus trading concession from the European Union.

On the request of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, we have provided expertise on women's issues in the National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights.



The Peace Secretariat has also worked in the area of child rights, particularly on the question of victimisation by conflict. Indeed, we recognise that ensuring a better situation for the next generation is vital for enduring peace. We have stressed the importance of addressing and engaging youngsters in all our policy work. This has also been a common theme in our other activities.

All Party Talks

Although the Government attempted to engage the LTTE in ceasefire talks, when this was proving difficult, a parallel initiative was started to bring together all democratic parties to discuss a political solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka.

Under the leadership of the Hon. Minister Tissa Witharana, the All Party Representatives Committee has been engaged in deliberations for the last three years. Having discussed each issue from the perspective of the different communities and parties, agreement has been reached, and the group is in the process of drafting its report.

The Peace Secretariat has facilitated the meetings of the All Party Representatives Committee since its inception.

Encouraging development



When it comes to peace building, economics matters. People get frustrated when they can't provide for their families or when they see no opportunities ahead for their children. Over the last few decades, the conflict in Sri Lanka has taken lives and destroyed homes, businesses, public services and infrastructure, primarily in the North and East, while holding back development in the country as a whole. The Peace Secretariat has been working with ministries and other agencies to engage the private sector in initiatives designed to address these problems.

Making sure that essential goods are available in the conflict areas at reasonable prices is one of the many tasks that we have undertaken.

Until military operations began in mid-2007, the Peace Secretariat had been facilitating the transport of essential goods by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka to Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. We also intervened to bring down prices in Jaffna, arranging for a vessel to be chartered by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka to transport goods on behalf of the private sector. In early 2007, rice was being sold at Rs. 160 per kilo, lentils at Rs. 83,

milk powder at Rs. 300 per packet, and soap at Rs. 100, but within six months these had dropped to Rs. 80, Rs. 65, Rs. 225 and Rs. 30 respectively.

The other major task of the Peace Secretariat has been to encourage the private sector to go back to the North and East, both for corporate social responsibility initiatives and to do business.

We have conducted extensive research and held regular discussions with local business representatives to identify opportunities and constraints. On the basis of this work, we have published numerous articles and studies, as well as answering specific queries from individuals and companies.

Particular attention has been given to parts of the country that risk being forgotten. Most recently, we highlighted the situation in Mannar, identifying opportunities in high value fisheries, rice milling, boat manufacture and repair and several other industries. Having discussed constraints with policymakers, solutions were found. Fishing restrictions were lifted and telecommunication connectivity restored. Several banks later visited the district to evaluate the feasibility of opening up

branches, which could help to resolve another problem, that of the lack of credit facilities.

Our most important partnerships have been with the various chambers of commerce, with whom we have organised several key conferences. For example, we supported the International Chamber of Commerce in putting together the event 'North East Economic Opportunities' at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, attended by some 250 Chief Executive Officers and Chairmen of leading companies. Representatives of the Peace Secretariat have addressed more than 40 such gatherings in the last couple of years.

We have also been instrumental in facilitating trips by the private sector, particularly to Jaffna. These efforts have led to eleven local distributors being appointed, with a further eight companies setting up operations in the Peninsula.

Another key role for the Peace Secretariat has been in lobbying within Government for constraints to be addressed. This has included the opening of the A9 highway, the ending of power cuts in Jaffna and the simplification of the approval process for new businesses.

The Peace Secretariat has coordinated a monthly meeting with the chambers of commerce to discuss problems encountered in working in the North and East, and to pursue investment in new projects.

One of the biggest events that we have organised over the last couple of years was the Jaffna Industrial Exhibition and Trade Fair, on the initiative and in partnership with the Security Forces. Some 170 companies from Colombo and surrounding areas participated, with sponsorship from leading companies such as Mobitel, AMW, Munchee and Hayleys. Over 300,000 people attended over three days, and many trade partnerships between the North and South emerged.

Other events targeting Jaffna youth have been arranged. For example, the Peace Secretariat arranged a career development programme for 250 school prefects, entirely sponsored by the private sector. This involved training on management, entrepreneurship and leadership, with contributions from leading business personalities.

We have also played a role in engaging the diaspora, participating in the organisation of the groundbreaking BizPACT Conference of the Business for Peace Alliance. This brought together 30 Sri Lankan expatriates from America, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and Australia, with some 100 representatives of the Colombo business elite and 40 heads of chambers from around the country to look at a range of carefully vetted projects of regional entrepreneurs. Now that military operations have been completed, Sri Lankans who moved overseas during the years of conflict may want to return, or at least invest their savings in businesses here, anticipating a spurt in growth.

Finally, the Peace Secretariat has been encouraging the private sector to get involved in the sponsorship of sporting activities, as described overleaf. In particular, we would like to thank Coca Cola for supporting an extensive cricket programme, while also noting the most recent undertakings by Prima and Elephant House to sponsor football and basketball tournaments respectively.

Taking care of the displaced



The conflict in Sri Lanka has displaced thousands of people over the years, often several times, and the Peace Secretariat has been involved in both monitoring the situation and facilitating aid work.

Most recently, the LTTE compelled some 300,000 people living in areas under its control to move with its cadres as they retreated from the Mannar and Vavuniya districts, through Kilinochchi, to the very edge of the Mullaitivu district. When they escaped, this presented the authorities with a major emergency.

The Peace Secretariat has arranged the transport and distribution of relief goods to IDP camps, mostly from private sector organisations. We have also played a role in the initiation and coordination of psychosocial activities, from counselling to sports programmes and the construction of play areas, to materials for vocational education.

While contributing to this urgent effort, the Peace Secretariat has worked to ensure that groups who have been compelled to spend years in IDP camps weren't forgotten.

Of particular concern have been the Muslims in the Puttalam district, forced out of the North by the LTTE in 1990. In collaboration with both official agencies and the private sector, the Peace Secretariat has been instrumental in organising a number of programmes, including a microcredit scheme and various training workshops.



Reaching out to the people



One of the recent highlights was the English teacher programme organised with the Ministry of Education and the Presidential Initiative on English and Information Technology, with the support of the US Embassy and the National Commission for UNESCO. This brought 30 teachers from Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa for a three week training session in Colombo with specialist instructors.

As well as improving the quality of English teaching in conflict and poverty affected regions, the programme was an opportunity for participants to meet and discuss, establishing support networks with their colleagues elsewhere. The teachers were

The Peace Secretariat has been one of the key links between the Government and civil society on matters related to peace building, participating in coordination meetings and organising joint activities. A particular focus in this work has been the promotion of dialogue between communities.

greeted at Temple Trees by H.E. the President, where they shared their comments and ideas on the situation in the country and plans for development, especially the Cities of Excellence Programme, one of the major initiatives of the Government in promoting the learning of English.

Lest We Forget

Published to coincide with the twenty fifth anniversary of the events of July 1983, when Tamils in Colombo and elsewhere in the country were attacked in unprecedented numbers, this book is about remembering.

In poetry and prose, some of Sri Lanka's foremost writers and journalists, including the late Richard de Zoysa, recount the horror of those dark days. The dead are commemorated with much sadness. Equally importantly, through a collection of political commentaries by intellectuals of the calibre of the late Kethesh Loganathan, how these events came about and why they were allowed to continue for so long is reviewed.

The book reminds us that the events of July 1983 were the result of the agendas of particular elements in the government of the time. One of the most hideous episodes, the Welikada prison massacre, is covered in depth, to show how a few politicians got out of control, how they influenced public servants including junior army personnel, how a few public servants tried to resist but were crushed, and how a senior army officer stopped the mayhem and dealt firmly with the murderers.

This is important, because extremists from both the Tamil and Sinhalese communities have tried to depict what

happened as a natural outburst of Sinhalese resentment against Tamils, which has fed the violence of the LTTE.

We are also reminded of how Cyril Mathew, a close ally of President Jayawardene, first began equating democratic politicians with terrorists, in a speech reprinted in the book. The collection also includes a speech by Ranil Wickremasinghe, then a Cabinet minister, which demonstrates how even those who would never dream of doing such evil things can end up justifying them.

This provides lessons for us today, but we should also remember that there is room for dissenting voices, and communications are such that things cannot go unnoticed. Today's government is subject to normal criticism, whereas at the time of the July 1983 events, this was not the case. When elections were postponed for six years, for example, The Times claimed that 'Capitalist tea tastes sweeter'!



The scholarship programme of the Business for Peace Alliance, Learn and Lead, has been another important collaboration for the Peace Secretariat. This has provided a number of bright students from conflict and poverty affected regions with the financial and other necessary support to pursue their Advanced Level studies in leading private schools in Colombo and other major cities. This is in the process of being expanded with the addition of leadership and skills development workshops, career guidance services and exchange programmes. Young Asia Television made a documentary about one such event, a three day residential course organised by the Business for Peace Alliance and the Peace Secretariat, targeting Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim youth from the Polonnaruwa district.

We brought the Learn and Lead scholars together with a broader group of students from host schools on the occasion of the International Peace Day last year, to exchange ideas on peace. This was supported by the National Commission for UNESCO and the Business for Peace Alliance.

The Peace Secretariat has also contributed to efforts by civil society to organise exchanges between communities. For example, we supported the Marga Institute in its programme of dialogue on development, democracy and peace in the Eastern Province last year, which provided an opportunity for District Civil Committees to share their opinions on development in their areas. Meanwhile, we played an active role in the One Text Initiative, and we organised a series of panel discussions on peace related issues with the Ministry of Media and Information, some of which were televised by the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation.

We have maintained contact with many different organisations. Of particular value was the work done with the Muslim Peace Secretariats, which helped to assuage fears of communities that felt themselves overlooked when peace negotiations began.

The Peace Secretariat has been responsible for writing the annual report on peace building activities by the Government and Non-Governmental Organisations for the United Nations General Assembly, reporting on the implementation of its resolution on the 'Culture of Peace'.



Peace through sports



Support is an excellent means of fostering goodwill, understanding and mutual respect between our communities, as well as encouraging in participants a desire to prevail in the face of challenges. The Peace Secretariat has organised a series of events for young people from the conflict areas to interact with their counterparts from the rest of the country, all of which have been hugely popular.

In the last year, this programme has included a cricket tournament in Galle, football matches in Badulla and a three-day festival including volleyball, basketball, football and cricket in Batticaloa. Participants have come from all over Sri Lanka, many of them travelling outside their home areas for the first time in their lives. Most recently, we have organised a seven-a-side football tournament in Colombo, bringing 50 school teams from as far afield as Jaffna, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Ampara.

The Peace Secretariat has also encouraged investment in sporting infrastructure in the conflict areas. In particular, we have been involved in work to rehabilitate the Weber Stadium in Batticaloa, scene of the infamous Tiger attack on foreign diplomats a couple of years ago. Bringing student architects from Moratuwa University together with local planners and elected representatives, we initiated a process that will bring lasting benefits to the young people of the area.

Countering the propaganda



A discussion at a rehabilitation centre

Attacks on the Government came from every direction in the final stages of the conflict. The Peace Secretariat took the responsibility of looking into negative publicity, to separate reasonable concern from sensationalism and deliberate propaganda. We responded, with facts and logical arguments, making the real situation clear to those who were genuinely interested in the future of the Sri Lankan people.

We wrote to the editors of foreign newspapers and websites, we debated with members of parliament, ministers and other assorted dignitaries, we exchanged letters with an ever increasing number of non-governmental organisations and lobby groups, and we penned literally hundreds of articles that were published on our website, in our monthly bulletin and quarterly newsletter, and in various Sri Lankan newspapers.

Our publications were distributed in this country and with the assistance of Sri Lankan embassies across the world. We redesigned our website to make it more accessible and relevant to the current situation, with regular updates of text and photographs, while maintaining archives covering past efforts to resolve the conflict through negotiations.



The Secretary General gave countless interviews to both foreign and domestic media and, as the campaign against the Government gravitated to the United Nations and its Human Rights Council in Geneva, he participated in many dozens of lobbying meetings and official sessions, speaking on behalf of the Government.

This work in responding to criticism was balanced by efforts to draw attention to the many positive developments happening in the country, thanks not only to Government initiatives, but also to the private sector, some non-governmental organisations and international agencies. In recent months, this has included a daily column for a Sri Lankan newspaper reporting on humanitarian work done by the Security Forces.

A final word from Mr. C.S. Poolokasingham

I took over as Deputy Secretary General at a difficult time. My predecessor, Kethesh Loganathan, a well known Tamil intellectual and civil society activist before he joined the Peace Secretariat, had been assassinated by the LTTE, and there were many people who urged me not to come.

During the last two years, I have experienced what I can only describe as mixed feelings. The Ceasefire Agreement fell apart and was eventually abrogated, and there were no peace talks to speak of. These were sources of anxiety, but we could do nothing about them. We focused therefore on the other parts of our mandate, building confidence amongst the people and between communities, and I am happy to say that we have been able to do some very useful work in that field.

I would like to highlight the activities that we have undertaken in the cultural, educational and sporting arenas, plus microfinance. We have organised many different events over the last two years, a good proportion of them in former conflict areas, bringing people together and helping them

to understand each other. Having staff who could work in all three languages, with experience of handling people from the different communities has been a great help. The freedom that we have been given as a semi-government institution was also key.



Although the Peace Secretariat is closing down, the work that we have been doing must continue in some form. There is also much to be done in terms of resettlement, rehabilitation and development. We have to mobilise everyone, and I believe that the Sri Lankan diaspora can play an important role. The years that I spent in the Foreign Service taught me that our people, whether they be Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim or Burgher, always consider themselves part of Sri Lanka, wherever they are. If their enthusiasm can be tapped, our country will have a bright future.