

2017 National Report

The ACRP Chapter of Sri Lanka presents to the ACRP Executive Committee its National Chapter Report throughout 2015.

Overview of all the activities carried out by your chapter between January, 2015 and December, 2016

The primary objective that falls within the vision of SLCRP is to restore, sustain and consolidate multi-religious peace, harmony and unity among different sections of the society of Sri Lanka with the onset of peace after 30 years of a turbulent & debilitating period. In achievement of this mission, the Sri Lanka Council of Religions for Peace played a leading role by implementing different programs and activities in almost all of the 14 Inter Religious District Councils set up across the island. Among these programs, much focus has been given to youth and women and empowering them taking into account their potentials and skills so that they could play a leading role in future peace building endeavors at different levels.

1. CHILDREN AS A CATALYST FOR PROMOTING PEACE, UNITY AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN SRI LANKA

a) Date of Program:

From 1st January to 31st June 2015

b) Contents and context of the program:

The children of all communities irrespective of their ethnic background or racial identities in Sri Lanka invariably suffered an immense trauma and harassment during the turbulent period in the last 30 long years due to civil war and terrorist activities which had put the whole nation at risk. The long term psychological impact on the minds of children caused the younger generation to live in enmity, disappointment and utter frustration. This situation has improved now dramatically to a level of complete social transformation with the children of all communities being involved in peace building and allied social activities.

The Government has recognized the fact that the children in the country could be used as a main catalyst for promoting peace and unity in the country in this new era of social transformation. Bearing this in mind the Sri Lanka Council of Religions for Peace conducted a similar program recently with the idea of promoting peace and unity by involving 83 multi religious school children and their teachers and caretakers as a conduit to deliver the peace message across the island on 13th and 14th June 2015 at the Construction Equipment Training Centre (CETRAC) in Battaramulla, Sri Lanka. The Children were selected from Schools in Vavuniya (North) and Ampara (East) and together with children from the schools in the outer Colombo region took part in this valuable program.

c) Targeted goal(s) of the program:

- To build the capacity of the younger generation to combat various forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children. This initiative would be taken further through awareness raising campaigns and networking with other child protection entities.
- To identify real life situations in terms of discriminatory elements due to ethnic and religious issues and identify synergies, share resources and accordingly the development of advocacy plans.
- To share views of the children on how to promote peace, unity and friendship through the personal experiences of the children and thus ensure their active participation for future peace building initiatives.
- To build a youth wing and promote peace and harmony in the island.

d) Perceived significance and impact of the program:

The closing session of this program was a vital part of the program which culminated in the presentations of the respective group reports by the group leader selected by the group members and two others representing other religious/ethnic groups. Accordingly, 3 reports were submitted at the closing session containing a number of proposals. These proposals were summarized by the Director Projects who identified the key common proposals of all 3 groups which were:-

- To establish a Youth Wing under the SLCRP and to create a network among all districts. This proposal was put to the vote by student participants and was unanimously approved.
- The proposal was the appointment of an interim national committee for the youth wing. The following office bearers were selected:
 - President – Mr. S.K.Prasanga De Zoysa of Kandy Road, Irattaperiyakulam, Vauniya
 - Secretary – Ms. Ushanandini of 210/116, Baseline Road, Dematagoda in Colombo 9.

Participants of the program consisted of the following numbers.

Vavuniya (North)	26
Ampara (East)	27
Colombo	49
Total participants	102

Their ideas and views on future peace promotion campaigns are taken in consideration in planning the action plans.

- The SLCRP facilitates coordination between the religious leaders and the government officials.
- Children are given leadership in promoting peace in their areas in partnership with Govt. officials handling child care and development.
- School children of all ethnic and religious backgrounds are used as the main catalyst in promoting peace and reconciliation.
- The multi religious youth wing to be established and they will be involved with total commitment towards peace building efforts.



e) Articulated issues, problems and challenges of the program:

- Lack of opportunities in peace building efforts through the children and need for an effective mechanism for such initiatives at national level.
- Need for an effective coordination network with other stakeholders in peace building activity
- Addressing issues of every social segment endangering children in terms of education, employment and other social needs with timely action in order to ensure such issues are minimized.

f) Recommendations for future activities:

SLCRP facilitates the coordination between the religious leaders and the government officials.

- Children are given leadership in promoting peace in their areas in partnership with Govt. officials engaged in child care and development.
- School children of all ethnic & religious backgrounds are used as a main catalyst in promoting peace and reconciliation.

YOUTH FOCUSED INTERACTIVE PEACE BUILDING PROJECT

2. **ADVANCING CHILD PROTECTION THROUGH MULTI RELIGIOUS COOPERATION**

a) Date of Program:

7th November 2014 with follow up activities up to 15th January 2015

b) Contents and context of the program:

The religious leaders of the four major religions in Sri Lanka namely Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity enjoy a distinct advantage when it comes to advancing the cause of child protection, conflict resolution and peace building through social action.

The extensive and well established religious networks and institutions in Sri Lanka are very valuable channels of communication and action. In fact, religious leaders have an extensive reach and influence within the Sri Lankan society, as 99% of the population belong to the major religious community and

are accessible through the religious network. SLCRP has organized 3 workshops at national as well as regional level to educate the religious community on how to identify child protection issues and take appropriate action to address them at the community level. These workshops are conducted by SLCRP in association with the Child Protection Authority, the Commissioner of Child Probation and Welfare and NGOs with similar objectives.

c) Targeted goal(s) of the program:

- To build the capacity of the religious community to combat various forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children. This will be done through awareness raising campaigns, networking with other child protection entities.
- To network with various national as well as regional level child protection agencies and programs to identify synergies, share resources and development of advocacy plans.

d) Perceived significance and impact of the program:

- 1) The knowledge gained through this workshop will be disseminated to the faithful at Sunday Services, Church festivals, Sunday Schools, Poya Day sermons, Hindu religious activities and in the mosques for Islamic devotees.
- 2) These activities were carried out in the places of religious worship and Sunday Schools between the periods 10th November to 15th January, 2015. The monitoring was carried out by the Director Projects and Administrative Officer of SLCRP with the assistance of religious dignitaries. During the 5 Sunday Masses, the messages had been delivered to 2000 devotees in the Catholic churches. Buddhist temples too had conducted special preaching on Poya Days and at Daham Pasalas (Sunday Schools) to the devotees consisting of more than 3000 persons. The Hindu Kovils had conducted programs at special festivals and the Muslims at the Friday (Jummah) prayers. Around 2000 Hindu devotees and 1500 Muslims at Friday prayers benefitted from these programs.
- 3) 60 religious leaders participated in the program out of which 20 were Buddhist Clergy, 15 Hindu clergy, 15 Muslim Moulavis and 10 Catholic/ Christian Priests. The religious leaders confirmed the good work carried out by the SLCRP. The SLCRP intends providing information and guidance in carrying forward the good work in the field of child protection.

Their ideas and views on future peace promoting campaigns are taken into consideration in formulating action plans.

The officials of the Ministry of Child Protection hailed the services of the SLCRP in the field of Child Protection and assured all assistance possible through the Ministry. They further stated that SLCRP has established a very strong link with the government agencies to protect the children from all forms of violence. This was a unique opportunity for the Ministry to work closely with the multi religious & multi-cultural leaders of our society.

e) Articulated issues, problems and challenges of the program:

- We have brought together religious leaders of all four major religions. At the moment all religious

leaders are giving their fullest cooperation for this process. It is a challenge to maintain this momentum.

- The religious leadership has been found to be valuable channels of communication. Within a period of 3 weeks we were able to deliver our message to more than 6000 devotees of all religions.

f) Recommendations for future activities:

- The SLCRP facilitates coordination between the religious leaders and the government officials.
- Carry out an Advocacy Plans along with the Ministry and the religious leaders of the area for the reforms of the child protection regulations in Sri Lanka.
- SLCRP take action to work closely with the government and the religious leaders to strengthen the participants of religious leaders.
- Enlist more and more religious leaders in to action under the umbrella of SLCRP.
- Provide more information to the religious leaders to be communicated to their followers.
- Bring all religious leaders together for the common purpose to build multi ethnic cooperation.
- It is intended to carry out similar programs in other districts to be selected.



YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM

3. JAPAN-SRI LANKA YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ7tO-uABhY>

a) Date of Program:

21st to 29th August, 2015

b) Contents and context of the program:

This project was the brain child of Rev. Norio Sakai, To Male Chair Person, and Board of Directors of Kosei Gakuen Girls' Senior High School, Japan. 16 Japanese girl students aged 15-16 participated in

the program along with Rev. Norio Sakai, 2 female teachers, 10 Sri Lankan female students and their parents

c) Targeted goal(s) of the program:

- To build up inter personal contacts between Japanese with Sri Lankan students.
- To provide an opportunity for the Japanese students learn about the Sri Lankan lifestyles, cultural habits etc. by staying with the Sri Lankan families.

d) Perceived significance and impact of the program:

- This program facilitated the Japanese students to learn about the lifestyles of the Sri Lankan families, family relations, their customs and traditional values.
- Enjoyed the Sri Lankan hospitality as the parents of Sri Lankan students gave them love, care during their stay with them.
- Almost all parents have taken the Japanese young ones and did shopping with them to buy gifts.
- As commented by the Japanese children, “It was an unforgettable life time experience we have heard about Sri Lanka. We have heard that the Sri Lankans were very kind hearted and helpful, always with a smile. We experienced that in practice in our temporary homes, shops which we have visited, even on the streets where the people always treated us even though we were strangers to them. We feel sorry to leave our friends from Sri Lanka, their parents who have treated us like their own children. We hope to come back to Sri Lanka if we get an opportunity once again.” Tears flowing down the cheeks of the Japanese and Sri Lankan students and even in some parents was a testament of the strength of emotional bondage and friendship between the guests and the hosts.

e) Articulated issues, problems and challenges of the program:

- The Japanese children along with their Sri Lankan counterparts visited the ancient cities of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya to get a glimpse of our ancient past.
- They also had an opportunity to climb the famous Sigiriya Rock Fortress.
- It was a thrilling experience for the children to visit the Elephant Orphanage at Pinnawala. The process of the bathing of the Elephants was a unique experience for the children.

Their next visit was to the Tachibana Rfp Pre-school in Periya Ulukkulama in Vavuniya (North) where they were entertained by the little children with their exhibition of traditional songs and dancing. For 4 days the Japanese children were hosted by the Sri Lankan families.

f) Recommendations for future activities:

- The visit of the Japanese children ended with the closing ceremony organized by SLCRP. The Chief Guest at this function was His Excellency, Kenichi Suganuma, and Ambassador for Japan in Sri Lanka. The occasion was graced by religious leaders of the 4 religions.
- The Chief Guest addressing the gathering expressed his great satisfaction on observing the contented and happy faces of children of Japan & Sri Lanka. He said that this was a clear

indication of the lasting bonds of friendship created within this short period and he was happy to be associated with this very successful program which defies borders between countries. He thanked Rev. Norio Sakai for his wonderful contribution towards the promotion of peace and harmony in the world through children's participation.

- He also thanked the SLCRP for inviting him to be the Chief Guest at this Youth Exchange Program.
- A brief presentation of Japanese traditional dances and music followed the address by H.E.



4. INTERRELIGIOUS ADVISORY BOARD TO THE SRI LANKA GOVERNMENT

a) Contents and context of the program:

On the advice and request of the Most Ven. Bellanwila Wimalaratana Anunayake Thero, the advisor to SLCRP, an Inter-religious Advisory Committee to the government, was appointed by the His Excellency President Maithripala Sirisena, to resolve religious, cultural and social issues which would arise in the country from time to time.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyg0fMG1mfI>



5. TACHIBANA INTERRELIGIOUS PRE- SCHOOL

Tachibana RfP Pre-school has seen an important project initiated by SLCRP with a view to providing pre-school education for the underprivileged children of multi-ethnic and multi-religious background. The essential message of getting together in unity, love and brotherhood irrespective of either ethnic or religious differences is inculcated in the little minds from the very formative years of their lives. 62 children in this multi religious environment are provided preschool education .

Vesak for the Buddhists and X Mas Celebrations for the Christians, Thai Pongal Day for Hindus and Ramadan Day for those of the Islamic faith are equally important events for the kids to gain experience and knowledge about each other's faith



6. SUPPORT TO CLEAN POLITICS PROGRAM BY PAFFREL ORGANIZATION

Speech made by the Most Ven. B. Wimalaratana Nayaka Thero

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EE4Itvs5Ow>

CAMPAIGN FOR CLEAN POLITICS

A vigorous campaign was launched by a number of Civil Society Groups headed by the Peoples Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) which is the premier election monitoring body in Sri Lanka. This campaign for Clean Politics was inaugurated on 12th March, 2016. Marking a historical achievement in the history of politics in Sri Lanka PAFFREL forged an agreement among parties across the political spectrum on a criteria for selecting candidates for elections. Representatives of political parties both from the government and the opposition including the Prime Minister & the Leader of the Opposition gathered at the BMICH to endorse the Document which was termed the March 12 Declaration. This document evolved through a series of discussions with different stakeholder groups including prominent Religious Leaders of all four Religions. Amongst these Religious Leaders were members of the executive Committee of the SLCRP The opening day of the First Anniversary of this Movement termed as the “M12 Movement” was held on 13th. March 2017 at Independence Square and was addressed by the Most Ven. Prof. Bellanwila Wimalaratna Anunayake Thero who was a distinguished invitee together with a number of prominent Religious Leaders, High ranking Politicians & Civil Society Activists. The anniversary celebrations took the form of a 25 day March throughout the entire country from North to South and East to West. Mrs. Christobel Saverimuttu, Treasurer of the SLCRP who is also a Director & Treasurer of PAFFREL also participated at these events and was one of the Invitees who along with His Excellency The President was invited the light the traditional oil lamp at the closing ceremony on 07th. April 2017.



Thanks

Ven. Prof. M. Dhammajothi Thero
Secretary General-SLCRP