

Religions for Peace 
Sri Lanka Council of *Religions for Peace*

The Sri Lanka Council of Religions for Peace (SLCRP) since its constitutionally inception in 2010 came out to be a strong force in Sri Lanka behind the multi religious approach for peace, unity and reconciliation. The multi faith commitment of SLCRP has created conducive environment after the country was liberated from the clutches of terrorism spanning over three decades. Religions for Peace through its peace building endeavors at different levels has contributed much in building relationship among the different ethnic communities through common action to commitment.

SLCRP is a multi religious coalition consisting of eminent religious leaders of all major religions in Sri Lanka. Their advocacy and commitment for permanent peace in the post war reconciliation period has given much impetus to further reinforce our action for peace. It is working under the able and visionary leadership of Most Venerable Professor Bellanwila Wimalaratana Nayaka Thero as the President of SLCRP. At present, with the formation of 14 District Councils island wide, the people irrespective of their diverse religious and racial affiliations are involved and benefited through the different levels of projects and programs. SLCRP have already set up a chain of District Councils in Batticaloa, Anuradhapura, Ampara, Jaffna, Nuwara Eliya, Vauniya, Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Kandy, Badulla, Killinochchi, Mullativu and Colombo North and more are tipped to be formed in near future.

For the people of different religious groups in North and East provinces, we were able to launch a number of programmes since 2011. School competitions; inter religious Peace Festival, Youth Leadership Training Projects, special medical camps in remote villages, Income Generating Projects for unemployed women, Language Training Programmes, Awareness Programmes, Scholarship Awarding Projects for poor children, Blood Donation Campaigns and special projects for underserved community and women empowerment projects to name a few in war torn areas and other areas have been conducted successfully. Medical Camps for kidney patients and for those suffering from visionary impairments have had a tremendous impact on the minds of low income masses and benefited immensely through the programmes of this nature.

Special workshops for child protection have been conducted by SLCRP in association with the Child Protection Authority, the Commissioner of Child Probation and Welfare, NGOs with similar objectives. Similar programmes have been conducted in Vauniya and Ampara districts. The workshop on Advancing Child Protection through multi religious cooperation was conducted on 7th November 2014 at the auditorium of the National Youth Council, Maharagama. 60 religious leaders participated in the program where 20 Buddhist priests, 15 Hindu clergy, 15

Muslim Moulavis and 10 Catholic priests participated. Hon. Minister of Child Development and Women's Affairs was the chief guest and addressed the workshop.

The Youth Leadership Training programmes of SLCRP helped develop leadership skills and knowledge among youth and identified talents required by future leaders. The roles and dynamics of leadership were introduced and the youth were given opportunities to become leaders at village level and harness their skills to become leaders at national level in future.

It is encouraging to see a noteworthy impact on the minds of the beneficiaries through these projects given the opportunities for different ethnic communities in the island to share their thoughts and build up mutual understanding among each other. During the past four years in existence of SLCRP, we were able to implement number of special projects and programmes for different strata of society and special mention has to be made in respect of children and their protection as well as women and widows by way of income generating projects during the years 2012 and 2013. Through the special programmes targeted to the protection of children, their parents have been made aware of the disastrous impact on the minds of children due to domestic violence, rape and harassment against them.

Apart from these developments in peace building front, SLCRP has intervened and contributed to solve national issues which are considered to be detrimental to the multi religious relationship and unity in the country. Some national issues such as Dambulla incident in 2012 and Halal issue in 2013 are the cases in point which have been solved peacefully through multi religious dialogues. This meeting of the leading Buddhist monks and the Muslim religious leaders of All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama, an Islam religious organization and other Muslim religious leaders was held on 29th January 2013 at Bellanvila Raja Maha Viharaya.

In a separate incident, Buddhists and Muslims in Aluthgama attacked each other and destroyed properties. Shops, houses, religious places of both sides and even lost the lives of two persons. SLCRP highly condemned such violent acts and approach to solve problems among ourselves. In national level, the Most Venerable Bellanvila Wimalaratana Anunayaka Thero dedicatedly engaged to cease this ongoing fighting. The President of Sri Lanka, who was out of the country at that moment specially telephoned the Most Venerable Bellanvila Wimalaratana Anunayaka Thero and requested to involve to solve this conflict. Venerable Anunayaka Thero played a big role at the meetings of religious leaders and state authorities etc. to stop the conflict. Because of the curfew nobody was allowed to go to the conflict area. SLCRP religious leaders jointly made a press release condemning this situation.

The Most Venerable Bellanvila Wimalaratana Anunayaka Thero, the President of the Sri Lanka Council of Religions for Peace (SLCRP) was presided over the meeting with the attendance of leading Buddhist monks. This meeting came in for high praise and appreciation by Muslim religious leaders as an ideal way forward to discuss their problems through peaceful negotiations.

The SLCRP is organizing its Annual Conventions and District Level Conferences with a view to evaluate and appreciate the roles played by the District Councils for peace building efforts. In addition, The conference organized by the Sri Lanka Council of Religions for Peace in association with the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA) was held on 23rd August 2013 at the Sri Lanka Foundation in Colombo. The Annual District Councils' Meeting of the Sri Lanka Council of Religions for peace was held at the Sri Lanka Foundation, Colombo in 2013 and 2014.

Therefore, in the backdrop of the prevailing peaceful situation after the turbulent period, the SLCRP has laid strong foundation in creating multi religious unity, harmony and reconciliation in the island with a high sense of preparedness and commitment towards this goal. This commitment has helped SLCRP to build up strong linkages and partnerships with other stakeholders in peace building fronts so far.

SLCRP is no doubt that collective actions of multi religious projects may bear fruits for the people to live in total harmony in days to come true to its vision – “Commitment to Common Action.”

Thank you

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