

Background Guide Topic Three
Post-war human recovery in Sri Lanka

Introduction

In the shape of a tear or even a rain drop, at the southern tip of India, peacefully lies a land of serenity, colorful culture and vibrant smiles, Sri Lanka. But, over the past 30 years, its peaceful serenity has been shattered, its colorful culture botched with blood stains and its vibrant smiles turned into dull, bleak fixated frowns. The world has stood by and watched Sri Lanka take itself through turmoil with what seemed to be a never-ending feud between the 'local' Sinhalese and Tamil factions of Sri Lanka. After three decades of civil war, the Sri Lankan people have been completely ravaged. Thousands have been displaced from their homes, maimed by land mines and left parentless.

Luckily, this war has been ended but as we have seen from history the repercussions of war are often more difficult to deal with than the war itself. The international community has had no choice but to stand up and take notice of the amount of people in Sri Lanka struggling to live in the poor post-war conditions. Furthermore, this issue has been brought to the notice of UNHCR because of the large number of internally displaced individuals who have been without a home for several years. They have been trapped in welfare camps due to the potential dangerous post-war conditions in many parts of Sri Lanka. Hence, it is our responsibility as a global community to aid and provide advice to Sri Lanka about the measures they can take to successfully complete post-war human recovery.

In such longstanding conflicts, it is often imperative to get a complete understanding of the history before even trying to tackle the issues in the present. The history of this conflict is full of mistreatment and prejudice on both, Tamil and Sinhalese sides. It might have started with the preferential treatment towards the Tamils by the British during colonial times but since then there has been continuous injustice done by both sides. As a result of this, long drawn out history of war, several complicated situations have arisen in post war Sri Lanka which stunts efforts of providing the Sri Lankan people with a normal functioning society. So, it is the job of the UNHCR to identify these problems and suggest sustainable solutions which can hopefully retain Sri Lanka's forgotten effervescent calm.

History

A civil war can be described as a power struggle between brethren of the same nation which emerges due to a jealousy of each other. The Sri-Lankan civil war is no different. In this case, the civil war was between the 'local' Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils presiding mainly in the north of the country. The Tamils used higher education as a way of facilitating their own social mobility while the Sinhalese stuck to Agriculture. Due to their better education, the British sided with the minority Tamils, handing them a "disproportionate share of University and government position".¹ Hence, due to their higher incomes and vast amount of remittances from overseas, the Tamils enjoyed greater economic prosperity than the local Sinhalese. This clear disparity in wealth and lack of authority left the Sinhalese betrayed by the government and their Tamil brethren by the end of the British occupation.

As expected, independent Sri Lanka was instantly reformed to suit the needs of the Sinhalese. In 1948, the government in power passed the Ceylon Act Citizenship Act of 1948, which denied citizenship to Indian-born Sri Lankans thus giving all Government power (under the United National Party) to the majority Sinhalese community leaving the Tamils feeling alienated. In 1956, the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) gained power over the UNP making things even worse for the Tamils. The SLFP

1 "Sri Lanka - History ." *Encyclopedia of the Nations* . CD. <<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Asia-and-Oceania/Sri-Lanka-HISTORY.html> >.

approved the change of the national language from Sinhalese to English and in addition established quotas which kept Tamils from participating in government organization and higher education. For almost two decades Tamil education suffered as admittances into engineering and medical schools fell by 50% and 67% respectively and to a mere 11% in 1974. Recruitment in the government for clerical services fell from 41% in 1949 to only 7% in 1963.¹

After 20 years in power, the SLFP was defeated and J.R.Jayawardene of the UNP was brought into power. He was the first executive President as Sri Lanka voted to transition from a Monarchy to a Presidential form of government. Also, the constitution was amended in 1978 to being less authoritarian and advocating proportionate representation. Along with the rise of a new government, there was a rise of new hopes in the Tamil community of reconciliation via the leadership of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). The Tamil community hoped for greater representation in local government in Tamil areas in order to preserve their heritage. However, the Tamil community was once again let down. Despite representation in the government and several talks with Jayawardene, no headway was made towards Tamil-related issues as the government failed to keep its promises. Hence, violence around Sri Lanka escalated in the 1980's with many casualties in and around Colombo. As a result of the failed negotiations the Tamil leadership fell into the hands of more violent extremism rather than patient talks. Violence and fighting between Sinhalese dominant army and Tamil fighters escalated till the government took offensive action in the spring of 1987.

In 1987, the Sri Lankan armed forces launched an attack on the Tamil rebels in the Jaffna Peninsula. In protecting its own Tamil population along the border, the Indian government supported the rebels by airlifting food and supplies in aid after failed attempts of trying to settle negotiations between the two fighting parties. The Indian side of the border also served as a base campus or safe haven from the Sri Lankan forces. India – Sri Lanka tensions rose as the battle grew fiercer until, July 29th, when President Jayawardene reluctantly signed an agreement with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi which gave power to the provinces, gave Tamil official status and set up a semi-autonomous administrative entity in the Tamil areas. In addition, India sent 100,000 peacekeeping troops who would maintain a cease fire in this area. Unfortunately, these measures were too little too late, as Tamil militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) continued attacks killing hundreds (Sri Lanka History & Background). The LTTE were stubborn about accepting protection from the Indian Army which led to the peacekeeping force going on the offensive against the LTTE which went on for 18 months. In 1990, after the assassination of the Indian P.M Rajiv Gandhi by Tamil militants, the newly appointed P.M. of India, V.P Singh agreed to pull out Indian troops from Sri Lanka after a failed operation which ended up taking 1200 Indian lives.²

Amidst this fighting, the Sri Lankan government went through another change as President Premadasa succeeded Jayawardene in 1988. Premadasa was introduced to a tough job as he had to deal with opposing party competition in the form of JVP but also to deal with foreign relations with India. After settling the previous two matters he finally focused on signing a ceasefire. But before the ceasefire could go through, insurgency in the eastern parts of Sri Lanka broke out courtesy of the LTTE. Premadasa scrapped the ceasefire and launched a full army and air force attack on the LTTE situated in the Northern regions. Premadasa continued to conduct ceasefire negotiations but the extremist LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran rejected all proposals. The situation deteriorated as President Premadasa was assassinated in 1993. His successor President Wijetunga could not make any substantial progress

2 "Sri Lanka History & Background." *Sri Lanka History & Background*. Web. 27 May 2010.
<<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1420/Sri-Lanka-HISTORY-BACKGROUND.html>>.

with the negotiations and instead was spending around \$1 million every day on armed forces, in addition to the lives taken due to warfare.²

In 1994, Chandrika Bandaranaike, daughter of previous President, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, was appointed Prime Minister after a seven party leftist alliance won elections. She adopted the civil war as her first priority and tried to appeal to the Tamils by partially lifting their economic blockade and by returning electricity to that region. She also talked about the resolution of dispute which was supported by LTTE's Prabhakaran, who released 10 police constables. Peaceful talks continued during 1994 until some ethnic Tamil rebels attacked from late 1994 until 3rd January 1995. The Tamil forces came to an abrupt stop with the signing of a ceasefire in 1995. After 12 years and 34,000 casualties, the civil war came to a halt with negotiations promised and an aid package worth \$816 million given to the northern territory. After only three months of peace, the government could not meet the deadline and the LTTE proceeded with attack and the war began once again.²

After repeated attacks by the LTTE, President Kumaratunga contacted the Indian government asking for assistance in the form of a navy blockade of the Jaffna Peninsula. Then, the Sri Lankan forces launched a crusade on that area, killing over 300 militants in six days. The government ended the fighting by offering the Tamil their own state. Prabhakaran of the LTTE completely refused the proposal and continued to order attacks which ranged from bombing of government building to hijacking public transport. After the LTTE started attacking civilians, the government had to take drastic action. So they marched into the Jaffna and took over the Tamil base and captured 2000 guerillas. After negotiations were rejected by the rebels, they launched an attack on Colombo injuring over 1400 people leaving the death toll of this 15 year civil war to be over 50,000 people.

In 1997, local elections were underway but the situation with the rebels remained unchanged. In fact, the attacks by the LTTE got even more severe, targeting innocent tourists and bombing the sacred Buddha Shrine the "Temple of the Tooth". After this series of bombings, in 1998, the government announced a state of emergency and gave up their costly mission of capturing Jaffna. Consequently, in 1999, the LTTE in only a matter of a week regained all the territory lost to the Army and in 2000 it captured the Elephant Pass along with over 35,000 troops.²

Due to increased tensions, Presidential elections were held 10 months early in December 2001. SLFP was beaten by the UNP which was backed by Muslim and Tamil factions of Sri Lanka and a new Prime Minister Ranil Wikremasinghe was appointed. Talks were held in Thailand for the first time in seven years between the LTTE and the government and both came to an agreement on the ceasefire. Later on talks were held in Oslo in 2003 where it was agreed that the Tamils would have autonomy in North and East parts of the island but would not get a separate state. Humanitarian talks were held in Berlin and the LTTE agreed to cease the recruitment of child soldiers and to reintegrate them into society. But once again, this peace broke up with resurgent terrorist activity until mid-May of 2009 when the government took under control a LTTE air base. Around that time the influential LTTE leader Prabhakaran was assassinated and a ceasefire was agreed to finally.³

Current Situation

For 10 long, painful and blood-filled years, the people of Sri Lanka and the world alike have watched this beautiful nation implode under severe civil war. But, for the past 3 years now, Sri Lanka, the

³ News, Cbc. "CBC News - World - The History of Sri Lanka." *CBC.ca - Canadian News Sports Entertainment Kids Docs Radio TV*. 19 May 2009. Web. 29 May 2010. <<http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2009/02/04/f-sri-lanka.html>>.

United Nations and several other aid organizations have tried to rebuild and reconnect Sri Lanka in an effort to make her civil war just a faint memory as it moves ahead into an illustrious future. However, reconciling with the densely Tamil populated Eastern and Northern regions has proved to be challenging for the Sinhalese powered Sri Lankan government. The United Nations and its related subsidiaries like UNHCR, UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF are all taking part in rebuilding this nation and ensuring a sustainable future.

One of the most prominent problems of post-war Sri Lanka lies in the communication gap between the language spoken by the majority, Sinhalese and the language spoken by the previously labeled rebel force, Tamil. Sinhalese happens to be the official national language in Sri Lanka but in the Eastern and Northern regions the majority speaks Tamil since it is the language taught in the region's schools. In the predominantly Tamil parts of the North, like Jaffna, Tamil is not only a language but it serves as an indicator of your identity which many Tamils still feel strongly about. Hence, with only 15% of the 15,000 Police officers in that region speaking Tamil it serves as a barrier hindering recovery within the Tamil fractions of Sri Lanka.⁴ The senior deputy inspector general in the Northern Province mentioned, "Winning the hearts and minds is a popular slogan today after the war, but we have to be very practical. We have to understand each other to gain the trust of each other. Language proficiency in the police force is thus critical".⁴ After 10 years of civil war the Tamil population is extremely reluctant in approaching law enforcement in those regions due to the lack of familiarity with the Sinhalese speaking officers. It has reached such a situation because during the civil war the LTTE looked down upon any Tamils joining the police and those individuals were often abducted or even killed to be made an example of, to the other Tamils.

However, the government had suggested a few measures to solve this problem in 2009 but they have shown no progress as of today. The government set monthly bonuses to the salaries of officers who were able to speak Tamil. In addition, Tamil language books were made available in police stations. Also, the Sri Lankan government along with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) provides Tamil language courses for these officers. Many officials are confident that with the building of peace the situation will get better but as of now the police have not gained any trust from the community around them. The Police can only function with the continuous communication and trust from the community around them otherwise keeping the Tamil regions free of recurring violence may be an arduous task.⁴

Even though Sri Lanka's government is trying to cover up the post war atrocities being committed in North and East Tamil regions of Sri Lanka, many NGO agencies have been reporting heinous crimes being committed. A reporter from the Global Post writes how in the East of Sri Lanka many Tamils are in fear of violence, rape and illegal taxation against them imposed by the ruling Government's security forces and government supported paramilitary forces such as the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP). The Tamils and the Muslims in the East are sandwiched between an unofficial power struggle between two Tamil government representatives who are fighting for power in the East and in this process are ravaging the lives of all the innocent Tamils and Muslims in that area. From November 2008 to January 2009 at least 75 people were kidnapped from the Batticaloa district as the Ceylon Human Rights Authority reported. Also, the government security forces are being accused of several human rights violations such as sexual assault.⁵ The International Crisis Group (ICG) reported that

4 "IRIN Asia | SRI LANKA: Post-war Recovery Snagged by Language Hurdle | Asia | Sri Lanka | Economy Conflict | News Item." *IRIN • Humanitarian News and Analysis from Africa, Asia and the Middle East - Updated Daily*. 28 June 2010. Web. 29 June 2010. <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=89651>>.

5 O'Connor, Maura R. "East Offers Glimpse of Post-war Sri Lanka | GlobalPost." *International News | Global News from*

allegedly 50 women were assaulted by the government Special Task Force (STF) in February and March of 2008. According to the ICG, the violence which is ravaging the East is mainly political in nature and the will need a, “careful, democratic and inclusive political response”.⁵

Post-war human recovery does not only entail the human rights violations of individuals but also addresses the hardships many of the Tamils are going through due to insufficient infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, roads, water and electricity storage facilities. Hence, Sri Lankan government needs to look into ways of rebuilding the North and East parts of Sri Lanka. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) suggested that Sri Lanka open trade and try bolster its private sector to drive most of this rebuilding of Sri Lanka. The UNDP in Sri Lanka also mentioned that instead of trying to finance infrastructure through unreliable state sector donors, they should support private businesses in starting projects around Sri Lanka. Also, Sri Lanka’s government urgently needs to settle any lingering tensions in those areas and create a safe environment in those areas so that aid organizations feel assured that the donations are going to be used appropriately.⁶

Amongst other problems, the reason why this topic is being debated in the UNHCR is because of the prevalent issue of internally displaced persons (IDP’s) as a result of this civil war. During the later stages of this war an estimated 280,000 people fled from their homes so welfare camps around Sri Lanka. The majority of these people were Tamils who were in continuous danger as the Sri Lankan army occupied the North and East Tamil strongholds. Hence, a major problem that has developed as of May 2009 when the war ended is the dissolution of these camps leaving thousands of people displaced with no homes. According to the U.N, 214,000 are now living either in their own homes or some form of host accommodation while a staggering 76,000 have moved to camps set up by the government for the displaced.⁷ The government hopes to settle the rest of these individuals but is finding it difficult due to the post war conditions in the North and the East. Many terrorist have left behind unexploded bombs and land mines which make the settling back home for these IDP’s an extremely difficult and potentially life threatening exercise for the IDP’s and government agencies alike. The removal of land mines has always been as extremely costly and time consuming process which is nullifying Sri Lanka urgent efforts of speeding up its post war human recovery. Several U.N agencies and countries have given aid packages to Sri Lanka to help out with this issue. U.N. Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) is assisting in a livelihood recovery programme which is being funded by a two million US dollar donation from Japan. UNIDO also recognized that attracting investment from private firms to set up jobs in these Tamil war areas is the best way out of this situation. Kandeh Yumkella, the director general of UNIDO voiced his opinion on this matter, “there needs to be a strategic plan to bring in industries, infrastructure development, investments and jobs into these areas devastated by war”.⁷ A fresh start is what many of these people seek and if they are provided with jobs and proper roads, bridges and shopping centres etc, Sri Lanka might very well be on its way to eliminating any and all lingering memories of a heinous past.

Many solutions have been mentioned to specific problems short term problems have been mentioned.

Around the World. 1 May 2009. Web. 29 May 2010. <<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/asia/090430/eastern-province-offers-glimpse-post-war-sri-lanka>>.

6 Riffai, Riyad. "Sri Lanka's Private Sector Must Lead Post-war Revival: UNDP - LANKA BUSINESS ONLINE." *LANKA BUSINESS ONLINE*. 10 May 2009. Web. 29 May 2010. <<http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/fullstory.php?nid=824679587>>.

7 Perera, Amantha. "Sri Lanka: U.N. Wants Economic Recovery for Former Conflict Zone" *Global Issues.* " *Global Issues : Social, Political, Economic and Environmental Issues That Affect Us All* " *Global Issues.* 13 June 2010. Web. 14 June 2010. <<http://www.globalissues.org/news/2010/06/13/5967>>.

Introducing more jobs will provide some basic necessities to the people who lost them during the war. And, teaching policemen English will make the Tamils feel more at ease after such tumultuous times. But, neither of those things can permanently eliminate the hate witnessed between the Sinhalese and Tamil people. This intensified rivalry of sorts only started with some preferential treatment by the British but it venomously developed into a 30 year civil war. But what can Sri Lanka do to permanently give the Sri Lankan people peace of mind? Reconciliation is the answer. The government needs to take the lead in eliminating any and all resentment between these two groups of people. Any preferential treatment whether it be politically, socially or economically needs to be eliminated as soon as possible. This includes but is not limited to, increase in the representation of the losing party in the Government's system, end of any reservation of place in the educational system and strict punishment towards any prejudice behaviour shown in the social system. If measures like these are implemented we very well might see the emergence of not only an economically prosperous but a completely united Sri Lanka.

Directive

After a long drawn out civil war, Sri Lanka is on the road to recovery and reconciliation. There are still many problems with the current situation like infrastructure, communication and corruption within the political system. The northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka was where the majority of the war was conducted hence most of the infrastructure was completely ruined. The Tamil people in that region have been left without schools, hospitals and proper roads and without basic infrastructure they cannot move on and forget the war. Many of the homes were destroyed during the war leaving several internally displaced persons who are at grave danger due to the unexploded mines and other potentially harmful substances still in their vicinity. Another issue currently is the language barrier which is continues to split up the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The Tamil people are afraid of contacting police and other administrative personnel since they speak different languages. Lastly, there are rumors that the recent elections polls were tampered with and the current government is gaining power by amending the constitution and giving more power to the president. This completely undermines the Tamil people and puts them in a position of no power.

In discussing this topic delegates must come up with active and sustainable solutions for the issues mentioned above which are jeopardizing the livelihood many Sri Lankans. As the UNHCR the directors would like to see constructive discussion especially from the nations who have gone through a similar experience and have provided a stable environment for their people through certain measures. The directors would also like to see nations who are directly affected by this issue such as India and other nations within the subcontinent are proactive with finding the solutions since issues about migrating refugees has been a problem for neighboring nations. Delegates have to realize that this is a civil war and not to overstep their boundaries with the Sri Lankan officials due to the questionable political state.