

Reflections on the Current Situation in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

The government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has currently achieved several successes in its combat operations against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). It captured the LTTE controlled eastern province, established its control there, and destroyed a number of LTTE arms shipments. These military offensives against the LTTE have also killed many civilians in the north and the east. If the LTTE were pushed against the wall, one could expect that their resistance could be stiff and suicidal. The LTTE seems to have been staging attacks in southern Sri Lanka in the form of claymore mines and suicide bombings, mainly targeting civilian populations in their attacks. Both sides seem to use people as human shields in their logistical operations to minimise casualties to their rank and file. Thus the populace are increasingly being used into directly supporting the offensive or defensive military operations of both the government and the LTTE. Nevertheless this situation has so far kept the expectations of the Sinhala nationalist morale extremely high, though some military observers are now predicting a prolonged military stalemate rather than an outright victory for either party. No outright victory to the Sri Lanka state will be perceived as a victory to the LTTE because such a situation could lead to a similarly high public disillusionment due to unmanaged nationalist expectations. The cost of the war excluding the costs to the GoSL¹ and ultimately to all the people in the island is estimated to be about SLR 166 billion (USD 1.5 billion).

Sri Lanka has been in a state of war since 2005, in particular, a high intensity war since August 2006. The unilateral abrogation of the 2002 ceasefire agreement (CFA) by the GoSL in January 2008 was the final nail in the coffin of the moribund peace process paving the way for an all-out war between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state. One side is fighting the war for a Tamil homeland and the other for securing an already fractured unitary state within the bounds of Sinhala hegemony. Each side alleges that their enemy is targeting civilians but the truth is that civilians in the south and the north of the island are targeted by all the parties to the current conflict. Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people, majority of them Tamils, not only languish in temporary shelters, but are also being continuously forced to move from one location to another mainly due to rapid escalation of the war and targeted killings and brutalities committed against them. Ethnic cleansing through evictions, forced evacuations and colonisations have been reactivated showing the contradictions that exist within the island's bourgeois nationalist forces.

During the period between the establishment of the CFA in February 2002 and the November 2005 Presidential election, there were about 200 reported killings in the island whereas over the last two years there were about 7,000 reported killings. With a high intensity war and without any monitoring of human rights violations one could easily imagine what this year might bring. The CFA was signed when the LTTE had achieved parity with the GoSL in terms of military strength. This was obviously disadvantageous to the GoSL as it undermined the government's claims of sovereignty over the whole island. The LTTE on the other hand, had many advantages; its control over a swathe of territory in the north was recognised while the disarmament of non-LTTE Tamil groups and the access given to LTTE political cadres to the government controlled areas strengthened the LTTE's chances of gaining control over the Tamil speaking people. It also disadvantaged the people living in the LTTE controlled areas due to lack of opportunity to exercise human and democratic rights and freedoms. The LTTE

¹ Excluding the costs to the LTTE and its proxies

went on a killing spree and the GoSL for its part, was able to create a major split within the LTTE ranks in 2004 and an international safety net to help the GoSL when the armed conflict reignited. Both sides also rearmed themselves in preparation for a future war, the GoSL in particular, succeeding in boosting its firepower and air power considerably during the years of relative peace. The current government has reaped these benefits by the capture of the Eastern province from LTTE control in 2007. So, on balance, the CFA has had its advantages and disadvantages to both the GoSL and the LTTE.

Political settlement and Military victory

The President has said on numerous occasions that the government is committed to a negotiated political settlement. Despite these statements, the government and its Sinhala nationalist collaborators do not seem to have any such intention. The Sri Lankan state has given its forces a blanket order to march on the enemy territory at any cost. Contrary to frequent reiteration of its commitment to a political settlement by the GoSL to pacify international community, the Sinhala nationalists claim that this conflict is purely a terrorist issue. For these elements there is no ethnic conflict or national question, As long as the war is progressing successfully, everything is hunky-dory and the conflict does not warrant a negotiated settlement and needs to be finished by war.

All the parties to the conflict insist that the current phase would be the final phase of the war for achieving their ultimate objectives. According to the LTTE, this year will be the commencement of their final push to establish Tamil Elam. According to President Rajapakse, the LTTE is fighting its last battle before the government takes over the north and east. According to the military top brass this year will be celebrated in both the south and the north after the elimination of the LTTE. However, the government security forces seem to have established August 2008 as the self-imposed deadline to complete their objective. Evidently many plans are being laid to achieve this objective.

The APRC and 13th Amendment

The All Party representatives Committee (APRC) appointed by the President has now recommended the full implementation of the 13th amendment to the constitution as per the President's instructions. Many looked forward to a set of concrete constructive propositions particularly in light of the 2006 Majority Report of the Panel of Experts. Such a set of propositions could have been pursued towards a constructive dialogue for achieving a negotiated political solution to the national question. However, all such expectations have been dashed. It is unfortunate that Sri Lanka continues to lack a political leadership even of a bourgeois democratic calibre. Our bourgeois leaders have shown 'reverse leadership' in pulling back from accords or spoiling any initiatives to address the national question by urging people to look inward and march backwards.

Despite the huge noises made at its launch, the recommendations in the present proposals are even less effective than those included in the original India-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987. The new proposals will give effect to the de-merger of the northern and eastern provinces without having a referendum and the removal of police powers conferred on the provincial councils by the 1987 Accord. Though these proposals have been presented as the consensus view of all the parties², the United National Party (UNP), the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the Janatha

² The parties who seem to have finally agreed with the APRC proposal were the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), United National Party – Democratic (UNP-D), Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), All Ceylon Muslim Congress (ACMC), Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), National Unity Alliance (NUA), Upcountry People's Front (UPF), Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL), Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP), National Congress, Western People's Front (WPF) and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP). However, at least some members of the JHU, SLMC, CWC, UPF, CP, WPF, LSSP had expressed either dissatisfaction or dissention to the proposal though all the parties except WPF finally gave into the demand of President agreeing with the APRC proposal.

Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Western Peoples' Front (WPF) have not contributed to it. The UNP has denounced the proposal as a deception. The TNA has dubbed it a farce saying it means to create confusion and buy time for the government and its allies. Leading members of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CP) who are in coalition with the government have dubbed these proposals as a joke and an attempt to mislead Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people and the international community. In light of the high-intensity war environment and the war euphoria created in peoples' minds, it is highly unlikely that the APRC would be able to present any final conclusive and constructive set of proposals to address the legitimate issues and bring fairness, justice and equity to the all the peoples in the island.

The APRC's decision to "fully" implement the 13th amendment will not be effective as evidenced by the historical political and bureaucratic experience in Sri Lanka. An APRC was not needed to deliberate on a 13th Amendment as it was already incorporated in the statute books. Nevertheless, the Accord which brought the 13th Amendment to the Constitution failed to deliver any meaningful devolution of power because the executive presidency had rigid authority and control over the functions of provincial councils and the parliament had power to legislate on matters pertinent to provincial councils and to reverse any of the devolved powers and its concurrent list. In some occasions, provincial councils had to seek the approval of the highest authority even on minor funding matters. So the recommendations of the APRC would not be accepted by a broad section of the Tamil political spectrum.

The new President and the three previous executive presidents had all the authority since 1987 to fully implement the 13th amendment if they wished to do so even though they did not have two thirds majority in parliament to amend the constitution. However, they did not do so. The GoSL called an APRC with much fanfare, pointing to it as proof of the government's commitment to a political solution to the national question. This tends to confirm our previous assertion that the 13th amendment proposal of the APRC may be a window dressing used for the time being to cover up the military agenda of the state. If all of a sudden the government has come to know the importance of devolution of power, then either those people who drafted Mahinda Chinthanaya at the last presidential election had not studied the national question or the previous proposed solutions or why those were not successful. Or else, they had gone on a deceitful campaign simply to grab political power. The Tamil peoples' demand to address their legitimate grievances is six decades old. If the government initially took to the path of fully implementing the 13th amendment rather than advocating against devolution of power, Tamil people would have looked at the government at least slightly more favourably. However, the way the government has approached the issue has done quite the opposite by alienating the Tamil people further from the government.

Though the 13th amendment was already incorporated in the Constitution, the state and the bureaucracy purposely ensured its non-implementation. Historically this amendment was viewed as a positive measure adopted by the government in moving forward. Yet, it was opposed by those who are at the front benches in the current government and its supporters. Though the UNP is blamed for not implementing the India-Sri Lanka Accord in full, the blame squarely lies also with those who are now in power and their close allies. These proposals did not intend to devolve power to any particular political or military group but to devolve power to provincial councils elected by the people. However, there are disturbing signs that current attempt at "devolution" aims to hand over power to political groups of the government's liking rather than to the people.

Furthermore, the 13th amendment was not recognised as a political solution adequate and sufficient to address the issues raised by the national question. The LTTE totally rejected the

Accord and the amendment calling it an instrument of "perpetuation of the domination, oppression and exploitation" of Tamil people. The JVP led an armed insurrection opposing the 13th amendment resulting in the state, its paramilitary and vigilante forces and the JVP and its paramilitaries exterminating about 70,000 lives within a period of the two years in 1988 and 1989.

The Role of the JVP

The JVP leads the opposition to human rights monitoring in Sri Lanka. The GoSL and the JVP seem concerned about the statements the UN and other agencies had made to the effect that human rights violators could 'entail individual criminal responsibility' and be charged in international criminal courts. Some staff working for humanitarian agencies have been assassinated or have just 'disappeared'. Others have been threatened and intimidated. Their premises and means of transport have been attacked. Any slight criticism of the fundamental rights violations carried out by the state and its proxies are interpreted and re-interpreted as attempts to discourage military operations against the LTTE, or as an agenda to topple a 'progressive' government. Sadly this is not something new, for human rights violations of this calibre have been taking place in Sri Lanka since the 1970s.

In the seventies and the eighties the JVP itself was at the receiving end of the state repression. Those who spoke up to protect the human rights of the JVP and its cadres during those years have now become the targets of the JVP. At that time it was these same persecuted humanitarian organisations that expressed their concern on violations of human rights of the JVP and its cadres by the Sri Lankan state. Many appeals by concerned parties to stop violence by the parties to the conflict and commence negotiations went unheeded. This repression had chilling parallels to what is taking place now. Though the JVP speaks loudly at their annual April and November commemorations of the sacrifices made by their comrades, they have never taken up the issue of human rights violations committed by the state against these comrades, even when they were holding powerful cabinet posts in the government. This is shameful behaviour by a political force that was built with the blood, sweat and tears of those who demanded justice, fairness and equity for the working people of all nationalities.

The JVP has now become a major instrument in helping to maintain the status quo of the bourgeois ruling elite and in defending the bourgeois state against all its critics. The party has become a chauvinist organisation supporting the autocratic rule of the bourgeoisie. Since the nineties it has politically lined up with those very same individuals who led the paramilitaries of the state³ against the JVP. Comrade Rohana Wijeweera, in spite of his opportunistic deficiencies, must be turning in disgust in his grave where his corpse was said to be buried by the state after he was allegedly tortured, shot and burnt alive. Now the JVP leaders are talking about their eternal preparedness to defend those very same human rights violators 'over their dead bodies'. They are now allegedly prepared to sacrifice their rank and file to prevent people from accessing the democratic right to determine their political destiny. How else can one politically explain their talks about sending 50,000 of their comrades to the war theatres? What an extraordinary turnaround!

On one hand the JVP is a critic of the so-called war against terrorism led by the United States and its coalition of the 'willing'. It is no secret that many corrupt practices were adopted to get the UN and its Security Council to adopt resolutions in favour of the US military strategies of world domination. With their threats to suspend their assistance packages and with their payment of colossal amounts of assistance to those who support them, the US and

³ Some of these groups were forced to become involved in paramilitary activity due to the assassinations and other violence carried out by the JVP itself.

its allies has bought and continue to buy over the votes of many developing countries at the UN. When one compares the scale of the buying of votes that took place when the USA forced upon the UN Security Council the decision of the neo-liberalist ruling elite to launch military offensives against Iraq, the buying over of MPs in Sri Lanka is a trivial affair. In the middle-east, in particular in Iraq, the neo-liberal coalition led by the US carried out aerial bombings in 'shock and awe' operations using bunker busters, incendiary bombs and claymore mines, thus expelling whole communities out of their habitations, and then sent in heavily armed ground troops and special forces to occupy their land. They also imposed a new constitution drafted by the US lobby and held premature elections threatening the Iraqi people at gun point, thus forcing a populace already devastated by their military actions to elect a pro-neo-liberal government that would hand over Iraqi petroleum resources to their neo-liberal masters. The US government is quite open and frank about this; they have repeatedly stated that if it is necessary they will use military force to carry out regime change to protect their economic and strategic interests.

The APRC proposals have recommended the holding of provincial council elections in the East, where there is not even a semblance of peace and the people are at the gunpoint of militias and paramilitaries. They intend to do the same in the North with the establishment of an interim provincial council. This will be done without the participation of the main Tamil protagonists of the conflict, the TNA and the LTTE. The humanitarian situation in the eastern province is appalling. The GoSL claims it is going to 'fully implement' the 13th amendment to restore 'normalcy' in the East and to help monitor and respond to basic human rights issues at the provincial level. According to the government 'the restoration of civil administration, rehabilitation and development' requires a political authority mandated by the Constitution. Accordingly on the 10th of March, provincial council elections will be held in the east for the first time in 14 years while tens of thousands of people remain displaced in temporary shelters. It seems Sri Lanka, in proposing the full implementation of the 13th amendment, is following the military and political strategies adopted by the neo-liberalists in Iraq. The consequences of such an erroneous policy is already evident by the carnage taking place in Iraq.

Sri Lanka has many experiences where people have been deprived of their right to vote through various means. Notable recent examples are the 1982 referendum to extend the life of the parliament, the 1982 district development council elections in Jaffna and the 2005 presidential election in the north and east. Despite the claim that the government has restored normalcy in the east, there have been many reports that indicate otherwise. The reality is that the eastern province is not yet ready to hold any kind of democratic election. With people held to ransom by paramilitaries it is doubtful that the people in the province would be able to have any say in this election. The political parties in government have signed up an electoral alliance with the TMVP. The TMVP has allegedly been behind many human rights violations in the east. The UNP and the TNA have refused to take part in the election. So it is not surprising that violence has reared its ugly head immediately after the acceptance of nominations. If the people in the east have to cast their votes at gunpoint, it is highly doubtful whether such an election would lead to normalcy at all. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this exercise will buy the much needed time for GOSL to conduct its military agenda before going silent on the implementation of the amendment⁴.

The Tamil political entities and India

⁴ This is based on hitherto unfortunate experience of reneging upon many agreements and accords once launched with much fanfare

It appears that the new proposition to fully implement the 13th amendment is sufficiently attractive to make the Indian political leadership and the Indian government openly fall in line with the current military push of the Sri Lankan government. The President has expressed the government's preference for India to play a role in the resolution of the current conflict. The Indian leadership has welcomed the recommendation by the President for implementation of the watered down 13th amendment as a first step towards a final settlement of the national question. This allows the Indian political elite to tell its population and the expatriate Tamil community that as the GoSL has now proposed something similar to the 1987 India-Sri Lanka Accord as a solution to the national question. If necessary, India may take part in this war on the side of the government with determination, even to the extent of taking part in another intervention if the need arises.

The relations between the two governments have been described as "the best ever" by the GOSL sources. This is not surprising, given the close working relationships established by their respective security forces, the most recent being the laying of minefields between Kachchatheevu and Neduntheevu in the Palk straits for the first time in this conflict. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and the Eelam Peoples Liberation Front - Padmanabha Faction (EPRLF-P) have expressed their whole-hearted support for the implementation of the watered down 13th Amendment as a first step to solving the armed conflict. Their views on the merger of the North and the East and a solution based on the federal concept have not changed. However, the TULF leader has compared the 13th amendment to a treatment for an ulcer whereas the national question has now become a cancer and needs treatment accordingly.

The only way to politically challenge the LTTE is for the GoSL to come up with a reasonable power sharing solution that will meet the aspirations of the Tamil people in terms of fairness, justice and equity and at the same time will not adversely affect the aspirations of the Sinhala and Muslim people. If such a solution can be developed and genuinely implemented with the consensus of the majority of the population then the social, economic and cultural environment for the current armed conflict will cease, in the process negating the objective conditions required for the nationalist militant political forces to exist. Unfortunately, up to now, successive governments in Sri Lanka have failed to present such a solution. Even the minute concessions made in terms of District Development Councils and Provincial Councils were not genuinely implemented. The cause for this political malaise lies with the political culture and constitutional and legislative make up of the state of Sri Lanka.

Political Culture and Constitutional Change

It is extremely important to note that for the previous scenario to become a reality, the current hegemonic nature and corrupt culture of the political leadership of the country and its bureaucracy need to change. This new political culture needs to accept the diversity of the people and communities in the island and also their right to enjoy fairness, justice and equity. One of the major obstacles for such a development is the current executive presidential system established under the 1978 unitary constitution, which is not accountable to anybody and not transparent to the populace. For the 'allegedly' high levels of bribery and corruption at all levels of governance is a result of the situation where no government can achieve a two thirds majority through general elections or by consensus, which is a pre-requisite to change the leadership culture of the country and its constitution. Also government sources have stated that the GoSL had to rely on implementing the 13th amendment because it lacked two-thirds majority in the parliament to amend the constitution. However, this had been the situation since the end of the 1980s.

It is less than truthful to state that the government was not aware of these circumstances when it appointed the APRC to develop consensus solutions to the current conflict. As was the practice since the 1980s, the presidency or the government never made any attempt to keep the opposition on its side at least on this specific issue. It is clear that the sudden reliance on the 13th amendment was not due to any other reason other than to avert the increasing international criticism of the government's launch of its all out war against the LTTE and its desire to hand over the Eastern Provincial Council to its preferred paramilitary group with whom it had formed an electoral alliance and to hand over the Northern interim council to another similar group. This is the only viable explanation one can come up with in trying to understand the sudden decision of the APRC to consider the 13th amendment after '63 sittings over a period of 1½ years'.

Some of the political forces who advocated and dragged pledges from previous presidential candidates to abolish the executive presidential system have ironically now become mere appendages of the state fighting to safeguard the executive presidential system with all the might they can muster. The alleged high levels of bribery and corruption at all levels of the bureaucracy and their political masters is a result of the situation where no government can achieve a two thirds majority through general elections or by consensus, which is a pre-requisite to change the leadership culture of the country and its constitution.

International Balance of Forces

The international balance of forces has shifted over the past two years. The government has opportunistically shifted its collaboration more towards India, Pakistan, China, Iran, Russia, the Czech Republic and the United States. This is not the first time such an alignment has come into being. In 1971, the then coalition government of the SLFP, the LSSP and the CP were able to convince the western governments and China that the JVP was a KGB initiated Communist force trying to topple the capitalist system in Sri Lanka while simultaneously convincing the socialist governments that the JVP was a CIA assisted force trying to topple the socialist government in Sri Lanka! Internationally similar situations have taken place elsewhere exposing the opportunist nature of many ruling elites whether they are bourgeois-democratic or socialist.

At the moment, the Sri Lankan security forces are working in close collaboration with the security forces of many countries including those of India, Pakistan, America and Russia. As mentioned earlier, Indo-Lanka relations have never been so close as India has covertly become increasingly involved in the war against the LTTE. It is in this political and social context this paper will explore some of the possible scenarios that may affect the future of the country and its people, the scenarios being a future without the LTTE in the political mix, a future with the LTTE strengthened even more and a future with the ballooning economic crisis engulfing the island.

A Future without the LTTE

The LTTE is a creation of the unique social and political forces that erupted out of post-colonial Sri Lanka since 1948, in particular, the way the bourgeois parties and the old left exploited the national question to hide the economic and social inequity among the people⁵. The machinations used involved targeted discrimination of Tamils in terms of language, social status, jobs, economics and dignity. Instead of constructively engaging with the bourgeois leadership of Tamils, the state either ignored or violently suppressed them or aroused violent attacks on Tamil people and their property. In the 1980s the LTTE came into being out of this hot house, particularly strengthened after the July 1983 riots. The Sri Lankan

⁵ Bopage L 1977, A Marxist Analysis of the National Question, Niyamuwa Publications, JVP, Colombo

ruling elite representing mainly Sinhala nationalistic forces used violence to suppress the Tamil nationalistic demands for fairness, justice and equity for their people leading to the current armed conflict which was then, as elsewhere across the globe, utilised by overseas neo-liberal and other external forces to their strategic, political and economic advantage.

Nonetheless, the sources of this conflict cannot be attributed to these external forces. To do so is to deceive the people and prevent them from understanding the social reality facing them in Sri Lanka. For once these external parties get involved the status of the conflict becomes much more complex. The development, intensification and solution to such conflicts depend mainly on the internal social dynamics of the country and the extent of influence those external forces are capable of exerting. Sri Lanka is not immune to these social dynamics as the world moves into a closely knit global market economy where national sovereignty becomes increasingly narrow and countries and people become more and more mutually dependent.

Before the LTTE emerged, many Tamil political movements had been in existence. As early as 1931, the Jaffna Youth Congress demanded dominion status for Ceylon from their colonial masters. When the early post war governments squashed the aspirations of the Tamil people, a diverse group of Tamil parties peacefully demanded parity of status. Successive governments refused these demands and used violence to repress them and their peaceful protests. As their demands were either ignored or suppressed these demands gradually moved from a demand for equity to a demand for federalism and then to a demand for separation. As the struggle of the Tamil people became intensified, external bourgeois and neo-liberal forces saw an opportunity to use this struggle to their advantage. At various stages of the Tamil struggle for justice, fairness and equality, external bourgeois forces influenced the equation of socio-economic and political balance of forces in the Indian sub-continent.

The spectrum of political views held by the Tamil people and their leadership mainly comprises the demand for a separate state of Tamil Eelam as advocated by the LTTE and the Tamil National Alliance and supported by a majority of the Tamil community and federalism as advocated by former militant groups and other Tamil parties. Tamil groups that demand devolution of power within a unitary state are peripheral in their influence within the Tamil community. While other non-LTTE groups are with the government or supporting the government because of their disagreements with the LTTE or their anti-LTTE positions, or because of their difficulty to politically or economically survive without the support of the Sri Lankan state. Lastly there are small political groups which are critical of both the government and the LTTE and they also form part of the Tamil political equation.

On the assumption that the LTTE leadership and/or the LTTE power base can be eliminated from the Tamil political equation, many Sinhala nationalist elements will, as evident now, aggressively pursue a political line not to grant any new rights to the Tamil speaking people, or forcefully pursue a solution which they think would fit the Tamil speaking people without taking in the views of the Tamil people into consideration. Also their argument that the demand for a just and equitable solution to the national question will be met after the elimination of the LTTE is politically spurious. For such a situation will only create an opportunity either for the other Tamil groups or a new Tamil group to assume the leadership of Tamil people in their struggle to achieve their legitimate rights to live in dignity as equals with the major community in the island. This fallacious policy of the Sinhala nationalists will therefore take the country back to square one.

The neo-colonial ruling elite, who have been in power since 1948, have opportunistically encouraged and actively supported those political forces, which were and are against recognising Tamils as equal citizens. This policy involved not recognising their rights and not

allowing them to live in dignity. This elite and their supporters refused to devolve power in areas where the Tamil speaking people were predominant. Those who comprised and propped up this elite are the main parties responsible for the current situation.⁶ This was and will continue to be a self defeating strategy for it did not and will not deal with the legitimate demands of the Tamil, Muslim and Malaiyaha people⁷. This is also the main reason why the elimination of the LTTE leadership or defeating the LTTE (and the Tamils) by war will not bring an end to the national question and continue to perpetuate the agony and the misery of ordinary Sri Lankans.

A Future with the LTTE strengthened

Every group has its own political or social agenda. The LTTE has pursued the cause of achieving Tamil rights through the establishment of a separate state of Tamil Elam. In pursuit of this goal the LTTE have physically eliminated many of those who differed with their ideology. It is politically apt to condemn the terror acts carried out against the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim civilians by the many parties to the conflict including the LTTE and the security forces and their paramilitaries. However, condemning alone will not help in stopping such acts being perpetuated. For when there are no independent mechanisms and arrangements in place to monitor such human rights violations it becomes extremely easy for all parties to the conflict to manipulate, distort and falsify such incidents.

During the last presidential election campaign and afterwards the president and his supporters denied that Sri Lanka has a national question. This tendency came to a peak during the recent budget debate with ultra Sinhala nationalist groups trying to make the government succumb to four demands: the annulment of the CFA, abolition of the APRC, stopping the United Nations' interference in the internal affairs of the country and defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Having abrogated the CFA, the government is now under pressure not to discuss the most basic decentralisation proposals, not to amend the constitution even by an iota, to dissolve the APRC, to have no third party involvement in any future negotiations with Tamil representatives and to remove the current third party facilitator Norway. The forces that push these demands have become deaf and blind to the socio-economic suffering of working people as witnessed by the curtailment and abolition of their fundamental human and democratic rights. What then are we to make of their demands to provide socio-economic facilities such as health and education to the people in newly established para-military controlled areas in the east, when the government cannot make such facilities available even to the people in the south where there is no armed conflict, at least for now!

What would be the outcome if the government has over-estimated its capacities (based on the rhetoric of the JVP who have disastrously over-estimated their military capabilities several times before) in light of its recent military achievements in the East? If the LTTE bounces back with a guerrilla campaign island wide, or if the majority of the Tamil people remained committed to a minimum demand of a federal solution? Such a scenario is not unrealistic. For example, in 1995, the then government took control of Jaffna from the LTTE who had made it its administrative capital. Afterwards the war escalated with the fall of the government's major military camps, the loss of millions of dollars worth military equipment to the LTTE and the death of thousands of security personnel. That military disaster was the genesis of the now abolished CFA.

⁶ By political devolution I mean that the Tamils can mind their own local affairs without harming the interests and rights of the Sinhalese and other citizens resident in the island.

⁷ Plantation workers in the island who originate from the Indian Tamil workers brought to work in the plantations by the British colonial rulers.

In such a scenario, the GoSL will have less bargaining power while the LTTE will be bargaining from a position of strength. The current tendency of increasing support to the LTTE among the Tamil people will come to a climax with the non-LTTE political forces and the pro-government groups becoming feeble and marginalised. With the international sympathy towards the Tamil struggle growing, the international isolation of the GoSL will become stronger. There will be stronger calls for mediation by the international community. In light of further devastation caused to the Tamil speaking people socially, culturally and economically, the demand and tendency for separation will be further strengthened accompanied by the weakening voices of moderates.

Economic Crisis

The Implementation of neo-liberal policies since 1977 in Sri Lanka has aggravated major problems such as poverty, unemployment, hunger, suicide and disease. The gap between the rich and the poor has increased further. The state withdrew from its welfare obligations leading to the lack of medical facilities, lack of appropriate educational and training facilities, increased illiteracy levels, exploitation of children through child labour, prostitution, consumption of drugs and alcohol, money laundering, the lack of drinking water, the scarcity of housing, shortage of power and communications facilities and the intensification of the national question. Liberalisation policies also have negatively affected the aspirations of the people for sustainable development. These policies have caused merciless destruction of the environment, nature and the social fabric through war, deforestation, soil and sea erosion, pollution of water and the atmosphere; extinction of local flora and fauna including traditional plants and medicinal herbs and plagues such as malaria, dengue and chikungunya fever and sexually transmitted diseases.

Neo-liberalist capitalism has created an unsustainable and substantially imaginary 'wealth' through speculation. By manipulating currency exchange rates an open economy has made it impossible for local business to compete with MNEs. Sri Lanka's currency is been annually devalued with the explanation that local new export industries need support through the realignment of the currency exchange rate. The U.S. dollar, which had an exchange rate of SLR 3.50 in 1950, now has an exchange rate close to SLR 110.00. Business in Sri Lanka began to sputter and slip and needed more loans. Obviously paying interest on loans needs more borrowing. The Central Bank printed currency to a value of SLR 24.8 billion in 2006 and another SLR 15.9 in the first quarter of 2007 to finance the budget deficit. SLR 373 billion is allocated for debt repayments in 2008. With the borrowing of USD 500 million from the international financial markets at high interest rates will increase the debt burden further. The total budget deficit is projected to be SLR 293 billion but some analysts have assessed that the total borrowings would be high as SLR 884 billion. According to the Central Bank, foreign debt increased by SLR 174.4 billion in 2006 mainly due to the continued depreciation of the rupee against the US dollar. In 1950 Sri Lanka's total debt burden was SLR 529 million, a per capita debt of SLR 73. Currently, the total debt is SLR 2,771 billion, a per capita debt of SLR 120,000.

In an environment of war it will be easier for the economy to be mismanaged and for rampant corruption to permeate to all levels of society, thus paralysing the everyday functioning of the government and its provision of services. This situation will further contribute to increased human rights violations with the government and its nationalists allies labelling anyone opposing their policies as unpatriotic traitors to hide their mismanagement of the country and the economy. Prior to signing of the CFA, certain areas of the island were controlled by the LTTE. The CFA demarcated and designated the territory that the LTTE controlled. Even after its abrogation the LTTE still controls certain areas. Without speculating on the outcome of the

current phase of the conflict and relying on the current status of the balance of forces between the Sinhala and Tamil sides, the LTTE has been in a weaker bargaining position for sometime. Now it controls less territory but still maintains its quasi-statelet with its armed forces, judicial system and administrative setup.

The current government's economic agenda to continue with the internationalisation of capitalist production is driven by a neo-liberal economic programme accompanied by handing over land and other resources captured from the LTTE to the control of the international capital so that the international safety net established during the CFA against the LTTE could be raised up to another level. Without establishing state ownership of the CFA designated LTTE territory, big international businesses would not be interested in making any large scale foreign direct investments in these newly captured areas. On the other hand, the state invitation to Indian big business to invest in these areas would have been the circumstance that led to the abrogation of the CFA. The economic reasons for the abrogation of the CFA may lie in this scenario.

The war has been funded at the expense of the living standards of the ordinary Sri Lankans. A majority of the people in the south and in the Diaspora has been mesmerised by the psychological war propaganda and the resultant war euphoria to the extent of supporting rampant militarism. This will continue to be so until they are hit by a whirlwind of an economic crisis that the armed conflict could generate in future. An all out war will be accompanied by huge military expenditure, which will be financed by further borrowings leading to extraordinarily large debts and instability in the economy accompanied by high inflationary pressures. If the war were to be won by the GoSL or if the LTTE were to become more powerful, both these scenarios will put enormous pressure on the neo-colonial elite to meet the economic expectations of the ordinary people in Sri Lanka. The Central Bank reports indicate an economic growth rate of more than seven percent of the GDP, mainly due to the growth in the services sector.

The current economic growth was accompanied by a 22 percent island-wide inflation rate, the highest trade deficit in the country's history, an exponential increase in the balance of payments and the depreciation of the currency. So it is not surprising that ordinary people continue to suffer⁸ due to the soaring oil prices and huge government debt fuelled partly by increased defence spending. The majority of the population survives on two US dollar a day per person in a country where the daily military expenditure is about USD 4 million⁹. About a quarter of the population live below the poverty line. Sri Lanka has the highest income inequality in South Asia confirming that economic development is skewed resulting in the rich getting richer, and the poor poorer. The burden of the war is unfairly borne by the poor be they be peasants or working people¹⁰. The unemployment rate is about 6.5 percent according to government sources but youth unemployment has risen to 19 percent. The Sri Lanka Consumer Price Index (SLCPI) increased by 26.2 per cent year-compared to last year.

The GoSL spends SLR eight billion per year for about two million Samurdhi¹¹ recipient families, who are the poorest families in the island. The Central Bank reported that the paddy

⁸ The Sri Lanka Consumer Price Index (SLCPI) rose to 281.8 points in November 2007, up from 223.3 a year earlier. This works out to a 26.2 per cent year-on-year increase.

⁹ Estimated defence expenditure for 2008 is SLR 167 billion, an increase of about 20 percent from the previous year. It is currently about 16 percent of the total government expenditure in 2008.

¹⁰ About USD 2.8 million of foreign exchange remittances made in 2007 by more than a 1.5 million Sri Lankans were used to balance the trade deficit. Over half of them were from workers who toil abroad, 90 per cent of them in the Middle East

¹¹ Samurdhi Programme is aimed at poverty reduction by ensuring participation of the poor in the production process. Implicit in the strategy is the enhancement of the health and nutritional status of the poor.

harvest reached a record high in 2006 with a 2.9 percent increase over the figure of the preceding year. However, due to the diminished paddy harvest this year 75,000 tons of rice are to be imported. The price of rice has reached SLR 100 per kg but many farmers could not sell their produce at the guaranteed price. As a result, farmers either sold their crop to private traders at lower prices or could not sell their crop at all. The price of paddy should have been about SLR 50 per kilo but a farmer receives only about SLR 16 per kilo. The price of paddy vividly illustrates the shameful neglect of the peasant community in Sri Lanka. They constitute about 70 percent of the population. Nearly 80 per cent of the peasants are recipients of the Poverty Alleviation Program. Since the introduction of the free market reforms in the 70s, our major foreign exchange earnings have been from the garment industry, making value-added products and the labour market in the Middle East for housemaids.

On the positive side, globalisation through its open economy and free trade has increased the participation of women in the labour force but relegated them to low-paid employment rather than improving their socio-economic status. In general, many rural women have faced sexual harassment and violence while working in free trade zones or after leaving to Middle-Eastern countries as housemaids. In the last year the number of women sent to work in the Middle-East is said to be reduced in percentage terms, though foreign employment has grown by 14 percent, mainly in the provision of domestic services. The remittances are in reality a reflection of the poverty of the people rather than their prosperity. The hard earned foreign currency is wasted in a war that will not be economically sustainable in the long run given the level of the crisis. Also the labour market in the Middle East may shrink given the turbulent situation in the Middle-East. The garment factories could be closed down at any time for international capital reserves the right to move to any country which provides opportunities for maximising its profits. This situation blackmails the government to continue to depress labour pay rates and provide better infrastructure facilities at the expense of the people and better return of investment guarantees. Though exports are a large component of the government's economic program, it declined from 10.2 percent in 2005 to 8.4 percent in 2006 while imports increased by 15.7 percent. These trends can intensify with the intensification of the war.

Since the seventies militarism has grown out of proportions and the armed conflict has created an economy of its own in Sri Lanka. To most of the rural male population, both in the south and in the north, the only readily available means of employment is to enrol¹² in the armed forces or the paramilitaries. Being alive and in the forces will bring revenue to the family in terms of salary and other perks. In death or missing in action the family will be financially compensated though loss of a loved one to a family cannot be measured just in monetary terms. The expansion of the economy is mainly due to the expansion in the defence related services. The militarisation of the economy has had not only an incalculable effect on the national psyche but also on the health of remaining little democracy in the country. It has increasingly caused the political and military elite immune to any form of accountability. The economic situation of Tamil and Muslim communities has been compounded furthermore by the fact that the conflict is being fought in their backyard.

Sinhala nationalist groups believe that their heritage in the northern and eastern provinces needs to be reclaimed. This objective had been the basis of colonisation schemes carried out by successive governments and Sinhala nationalist groups. Even now, in the northern and eastern provinces allegations have been raised on attempts to grab land for re-engineering the

¹² A decision to join the forces may not be based solely on economic grounds but also due to forced recruitment, brain washing, emotional attachment to antagonistic nationalist causes, or sheer feelings of revenge and anger for what the conflict has inflicted on one's family and friends.

ethnic composition of those provinces. The lack of a secure socio-economic environment has made it difficult for people in these provinces to earn a decent living. Tamil and Muslim people have been prevented from carrying out their normal day to day professions to financially sustain their families as a result of fishing been banned or tightly controlled and/or land is forcibly seized to establish high security zones, military camps, new places of worship or multi-national business operations. Many Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala people have been displaced from the lands they had settled in for generations due to campaigns of aerial bombardment, suicide attacks, ethnic cleansing, forced deportations and resettlements.

Contrary to the economic facts, certain nationalist elements have stated that if the government conducted the war properly, they can make people prepared to withstand starvation and economic vicissitudes. This is nothing more than chauvinist wishful thinking because the economic and social fissures have been cloaked by an ideology of Sinhala nationalism and the false need to pull one's belt in to win the war. However, if the state were to win the war this will raise the expectations of the people for a fairer economic deal. If the state were seen to loose the war it will make their anger and disillusionment even greater. Either way it will force the Sri Lankan state to pay more attention to the needs and expectations of the ordinary people.

The war versus meaningful power sharing

The GoSL and the LTTE due to lack of a social, economic and political vision have primarily focused on achieving their political goals through war. The many political opportunities and challenges posed during the last six decades since 1948 were not utilised to develop strategies to achieve a tolerant and respectful society where national diversity could have peacefully coexisted within a united country. In a traditional sense, one can argue that war is the highest form of political negotiation. This may hold true where the rule has become autocratic and dictatorial, but needs not hold true where political negotiation through dialogue and discourse is possible. Successive governments have attempted to impose monocultural social and unitary constitutional models of governance on a multicultural society using its Sinhala majoritarian legislative power, military force and violence in an attempt to change the multicultural nature of the society. In turn the LTTE also attempted to impose a sole representative and unitary political model on the entire Tamil population through violence.

All parties to the conflict are expanding their armed forces with new recruitment and weaponry. Sinhalese are joining the security forces in the belief that the government is winning the war against the LTTE. Tamils are joining the LTTE ranks due to the injustices and atrocities committed by the state and its paramilitary groups. All parties to the conflict resort to killings and human rights violations and blame the other for the escalation. As happened during the 1988-89 period, nobody would know who is doing what to whom. As happens in any war parties to the conflict blame each other for assassinations and explosions. In such situations, gross human rights violations will become the norm. The High Security Zones will expand, house to house searches and arrests will continue. Not only the groups who oppose war and advocate peace in the form of a negotiated settlement and the groups provide relief to the needy and conduct advocacy on behalf of them, but also the Supreme Court judges of the country and the international community including the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Human Rights Abuses are not immune from being branded as being pro-Tamil, pro-LTTE or even LTTE agents! These attacks on these groups and agencies are nothing but attempts to discredit and damage them, and thus prevent any international scrutiny of human and democratic rights violations that have become predominant in the island.

The so-called progressive and nationalist political elements in Sri Lanka while shouting wild anti-US slogans, military strategies and tactics can be seen covertly following the same strategies and tactics in handling political issues of its own people. The government stated that statements of the UN on human rights violations in Sri Lanka were ‘untimely, inappropriate and unacceptable’ while pledging to do everything possible to protect civilians and take action to prevent any human rights violations by its forces. However, its nationalist protectors are doing the talking on the government’s behalf by discrediting international agencies and expelling them from Sri Lanka. Yet human rights situation in the areas affected by the conflict is deteriorating at an alarming rate. Bashing the international community will not help in restoring the normalcy in those areas. The nationalist forces led by the JVP, which fought to transform the existing status quo, is now fighting to keep the status quo through a rapid military victory. All parties to the conflict are resorting to the rhetoric of patriots and traitors in order to strengthen their assimilative and integrative positions and jeopardise the voices of the moderates.

We cannot deny that the western nations involved in the scrutiny of the conduct of the war are also blamed regarding democratic and human rights issues¹³ in their own backyards. Also we need to bear in mind that most of the current conflicts in the developing countries are a result of the colonial divide and rule policy. Despite all the faults of these former colonial and now neo-liberal regimes we cannot put the whole blame on them or other human rights advocates and their agencies. We need to be cognisant of the fact they have played a significant role in bringing some civil wars to an end. They have provided relief to the people suffering from natural and man-made disasters. These human rights agencies have not provided arms to the protagonists in the conflict. What they have done is to bear witness to the atrocities committed by the parties to the conflict and to provide succour and relief to the civilian population caught up in it.

As mentioned earlier the APRC after a long and delayed consultative process, the APRC has produced nothing concrete and positive so far. The 13th amendment proposed by the APRC has generated more divisions and confusions and destroyed the confidence and credibility placed on it by many. This process could have been used to generate a dialogue among the Sinhala people regarding the measures that need to be taken for the Tamil and Muslim people to remain united with them. However, the process seems to have come to a dead end despite the talk of further proceedings to develop a final outcome. To maintain hegemony of one group, national debate on the national question has to be scuffled at any cost as evident from the silencing of many institutions, media, intellectuals and political leaders who were able to expand the debate. The state has committed itself to a military solution to a political problem. Yet, what the country needs to develop is this very debate on the national question at all levels of the society without leaving it alone to the state and its bureaucracy. If majority of the populace were consciously and intellectually convinced that genuine devolution of power will be the only way to keep the people and the country united and that such devolution will not harmfully affect them, then they will exert pressure on the political elite to act upon such propositions despite the harmful influence of the nationalist groups.

The GoSL has proposed a solution based along the lines of the India-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987. The LTTE proposed its Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) proposal¹⁴, and the previous All Tamil representatives had consensus on the statement of Thimpu Principles as the basis for any reasonable solution. When the LTTE presented their ISGA proposals the

¹³ For example, treatment of aborigines, Muslims and refugees

¹⁴ The ISGA proposal of the LTTE was and is seen by the Sinhala side as nothing short of a demand to establish Eelam and lacked much support.

government walked out of negotiations. Now the government, the LTTE and the other stakeholders to the national question such as Muslim people and Malaiyaha people are able to commence working towards a negotiated solution through dialogue based on the propositions of all the parties to the conflict. This is the only 'roadmap' to peace. It is a political imperative for unless a political model is found that meets the legitimate aspirations of all the people in the island, the future will continue to be bleak. If the political elite do not do so, the ballooning economic crisis could also overtake the national question and force the people to seek solutions on their own.

The government strongly believes it can deliver a major military victory. This is a high risk strategy. If this strategy failed – and it is very likely that it will - the government will be in a devastating crisis for it will not be able to rule the way it used to do, and the people will not be willing to be autocratically ruled the way it used to be. With the economy collapsing the people could be marching on the streets. Given the deteriorating economic climate the government may have only until the end of its self-imposed deadline of a year when the socio-economic and political dynamics will start changing in the most unfavourable manner to the current system of governance.

In this uncertain political atmosphere, it is not surprising that conspiracy theories abound. A plausible scenario gaining prominence is that Sri Lanka might follow the Burmese or Pakistani model i.e. with a military government and an Executive President in power. This tendency is evident in the fact that the current political processes are subordinated to the military demands and operations whereas previously the political process drove the military operations. Another plausible scenario is if the government wins the war it will go for a general election and consolidate their hold on power. Whatever way we look at it, a severe economic crisis may pave the way to the most horrific and devastating situation in the island socially, economically, politically and morally. The costs for the GoSL could become unbearable, for on one hand it will face a restive populace in the South, an accelerating economic crisis and a resurgent LTTE in no mood to negotiate on the other.

Autonomy as a solution

All parties to the conflict have used terror as a tactic of achieving their objectives rather than attempting to achieve a breakthrough by genuine and sincere implementation of a political solution to the issues behind the conflict. As mentioned earlier, right through its history the Sri Lankan state has refused to constitutionally recognise or accommodate the national diversity that constitutes Sri Lankan polity. The LTTE in turn similarly refuse to recognise the diversity in the Tamil and Muslim polity in the northern and eastern provinces. While the state adopts the concept of sovereignty as a pretext to destroy the aspirations of all people it represents, the LTTE adopts a similar tactic to achieve its monopoly over the Tamil population.

Many Sinhalese, mainly Buddhists believe that if Hindus, Muslims and Christians are provided with equitable opportunities, then they would lose their access to power¹⁵. Sinhala nationalists who represent this view propagate the idea that given the opportunity, the minority communities will join hands with the larger Tamil population in India and grab power in the island thus marginalising the Sinhalese. To reinforce this conceptualisation they add that Sri Lanka is the only homeland of the Sinhalese whereas the Tamils are spread and live across many continents. It is this deep-rooted fear psychosis that is being aroused and used by the bourgeois politicians and their Sinhala nationalist forces in their game plan for

¹⁵ In fact, the ordinary people do not enjoy power or have access to power centres.

achieving political power. This is what led to the divisions within the Ceylonese population who were earlier united against colonialism.

The Tamil militant movements including the LTTE have been fighting for autonomy for the ethnic majority Tamil areas in the north and east of the island. The JVP in its policy declaration laid out in 1972 laid out a policy framework to address the national question by granting regional autonomy to accommodate the diversity of the population. Unfortunately, they moved away from this policy framework after the presidential election in 1982. In the current environment of opportunism, the JVP seems to survive only on raising the slogan of extreme Sinhala nationalism in competition with the other Sinhala nationalist forces. For this to be successful the JVP has to depend on and coexist with the survival of the current government.

The killing of political leaders will not bring in a solution to the national question. The war strategy of the GoSL itself will be creating more fighters for Tamil nationalism. Anyone when pushed against a wall will react in a suicidal fashion. This happened in 1971 with Sinhala youth rising up against state repression. It is still happening with the Tamil youth who are willing to stand up and die rather than to live in a subjugated socio-economic and political environment. A better Sri Lanka is possible but not through suppression of human rights but by providing equal opportunities to all irrespective of their social, cultural and linguistic background.

Conclusion

In any conflict resolution exercise the main focus should be the pursuit of a political settlement. However, the APRC or the GoSL do not seem to have any urgency or seriousness of purpose. It has chosen to gamble on a military victory rather than meaningful power sharing as its formula for peace. The government's only priority this year will be waging war in which one will be forced to become a patriot or a traitor following the Bush Doctrine. The LTTE itself never gave up its campaign in the pursuit of its maximalist demand of separation through violence. Both Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms in Sri Lanka and in the expatriate community suffer from the weakness of the exclusion of the other by pursuing an all-or-nothing strategy.

The current situation arose due to the CFA not having any mechanism to deal with escalating hostilities and to enforce protection of fundamental and democratic rights by the parties to the conflict. The LTTE outrightly rejected incorporation of human rights protection mechanisms in the CFA. Since signing the CFA, the LTTE continued using terror tactics as a tool to eliminate opposition instead of resorting to peaceful political negotiations with them. The response to this situation lies in developing a genuine and meaningful power sharing model between the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim nationalities. It will be a complex and long drawn out process but the need for it is inconvertible. A good start would be to implement and strengthen the CFA by establishing an effective mechanism like well entrenched human right protections to deal with such escalations. The experience gained from the CFA would be to strengthen it by establishing an effective mechanism to deal with such escalations. The war need to end with a CFA strengthened with well-entrenched human rights protection mechanisms. In order to find a fair, just, equitable and lasting solution, the parties to the conflict need to stop the war, sit at the negotiating table, work out a human rights protection framework that all the parties can abide by. This will be the only way the country and its people can look forward to a better future.

First of all we need to accept the fact that a national question exists and it needs to be resolved through a genuine power sharing arrangement. If we fail to address this vital question on our own we will need assistance of a third party such as the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth

can play an open and constructive role in resolving the national question as it is an association of 53 countries including Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and India. The Commonwealth has the largest foreign direct investment in the island and the largest number of Sri Lankan expatriate communities. If the GoSL wishes to rule out a separate state as a solution to the national question as proposed by the LTTE, the government has a political obligation, responsibility and duty of care to the people of the island who have elected them to power to present a viable and just solution to the national question. My view is that by designing, developing and implementing a suitable socio-economic, political and legal environment that provides fairness, justice, equity, respect and dignity to all the Sri Lankan people at individual and community level, genuine long-term co-existence can be made possible between all the communities in the island.

We need to generate a national dialogue on the national question at all levels of society in that all social strata have been affected by the national question. Our duty as expatriates will be to use the challenges and opportunities posed by the current desperate situation to help develop this dialogue at all levels of the society including the expatriate community. Such a dialogue should leave enough room to engage with anybody and everybody who would be willing to constructively and credibly take part in the process. It is high time for those of us who are not so close to or affected by the day to day incidents of the conflict to concentrate on a viable political process. We need to develop ideas on how to achieve a win-win solution. To do this we need inter community dialogue. This dialogue could generate sufficient momentum within the community to make the cultural transformation to achieve a long lasting and credible political solution. A solution that does not discriminate in favour of any one community but benefits all the communities that makes up the multicultural mosaic of the island.

It is high time for those who are not so close to or affected by the day to day incidents of the conflict to concentrate on a viable political process. We need to develop ideas on how to achieve a win-win solution. To do this we need inter community dialogue. This dialogue will generate sufficient momentum within the community to make the cultural transformation to achieve a long lasting and credible political solution, a solution that does not discriminate in favour of any one community but benefits all the communities that makes up the multicultural mosaic of the island.