



# Editors Conference

Centre for Policy Alternatives

&

Academy for Educational Development

8<sup>th</sup> September 2003

## Introduction

---

The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and the Academy for Educational Development organised a conference for Editors and Senior Journalists in Sri Lanka on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2003 at the JAIC Hilton, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Participants at this conference were peace process stakeholders (including SLMM, Norwegians, USAID, EU, World Bank, SCOPP, SNAP and other international funders), Sri Lankan Government and key political parties, newspaper editors and senior broadcast journalists. The forum included presentations by political stakeholders, newspaper editors, the World Bank and European Union. Simultaneous translation was provided in English, Sinhala and Tamil.

The forum will included both presentations and facilitated discussion sessions. The floor language was English with simultaneous translation provided in Sinhala and Tamil. Topics of the forum will included:

1. Sri Lanka Roadmap to Peace
2. Exploring a roadmap for economic reconstruction and rebuilding
3. Interim Administration

This report identifies the themes around which the discussions were based and provides a synthesis of the discussions that took place.

## First Session

---

Mr. Jehan Perera, Media Director of the National Peace Council (NPC) chaired the sessions and gave a brief introduction to the programme.

Mr. Victor Ivan, Editor of Ravaya, speaking first, expressed his sadness about the low level of participation and said that it was reflective of the attitude of Editors and Senior Journalists in the country, who were not interested in engaging with the complexities of the peace process. This was manifest in the coverage against peace overwhelming voices in support of it. He spoke of the need to transform the nature of the State for a process of sustainable conflict transformation, based on a federal model.

The Supreme Court was identified as a key institutional in this process of re-fashioning the State. Mr. Ivan spoke strongly against the corruption and dereliction of the institution and said that serious and urgent reforms were needed to resurrect a dying institution.

Mr. Keith Noyahr, Deputy Editor of the Daily Mirror, who spoke next, said that the media neglected to follow up on the manifestos of political parties once they were elected to Government. He also spoke

about the partisan divisions amongst the Senior Journalists and Editors in Sri Lanka as something detrimental to the development of journalism in Sri Lanka.

The inability of journalists to give proper context to news stories was flagged as a serious problem – this in turn did not help engender a moderate viewpoint amongst readers.

A Senior Journalist from Lakkima newspaper, who spoke after Mr. Noyahr, concurred and said that the media needed to engage constructively with the issues facing the peace process and not just report the facts in a manner that exacerbated the fears and concerns of people on the ground.

This point was further underscored by Mr. Sivaneshelvan, Editor of Thinkkural, who said that the media should serve as a vehicle for change and as a platform for the masses and political parties to come together in support of peace.

Mr. Perera summed up the discussions and said that the media faced a number of issues in Sri Lanka, including, but not limited to, the mindset of politicians, partisan and narrow political agendas, the ossified mindset of Editors and Senior Journalists, the LTTE's own intransigence in coming out with coherent plans for Media Freedom and the Protection of Journalists in the North-East, the role of the Supreme Court as an exemplar of the lack of trust that the masses had in the judicial system in Sri Lanka and the media inability to demystify the crucial tenets of a federal system within a united Sri Lanka.

Hon. Rauff Hakeem, Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), speaking next, outlined the problems of Muslim participation in the peace process till date. He said that the Muslims were promised a separate delegation in the peace talks – a commitment that he felt had not been kept by the Government of Sri Lanka or the LTTE.

The lack of a proper roadmap for peace was also flagged as a major stumbling block in the peace process – coupled with the fact that the Committee on Political Affairs never met. He felt that some government negotiators over exposed themselves to the Press after every round of peace talks. However, he did admit that transparency of the process was vital to its success. He also spoke on some inflammatory headlines that had recently been published and used them as an example of reporting which should not be emulated in a peace process.

Mr. R. Sampanthan, from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) said that the chief problem of the peace process was inter-party rivalry between the UNF and the PA. Re-iterating Mr. Ivan's concerns, he stated that the judiciary played a key role in conflict transformation. He also agreed that Muslim participation in the peace talks was crucial to its long term success.

**“The LTTE has publicly committed to the statement in the Oslo Declaration. There is no reason to think that the LTTE will think differently about the final settlement as opposed to the interim administration.”**

**Mr. R. Sampanthan**

Prof. G.L. Peiris, the Chief Negotiator of the Sri Lankan Government, speaking next, said that the peace process needed to look at bridging the partisan politics of Sri Lanka. He also said that there were certain very sensitive matters regarding the peace process that could not be discussed openly in the media. He also said that the media had its share of responsibility in the conflict and the under-development of Sri Lanka.

In the plenary, both Prof. Peiris and Mr. Sampanthan re-iterated the need for Muslim participation in the peace process. Mr. Sampanthan said that there needed to be a clear recognition that the TNA campaigned during the elections of December 2001 with the clear message that the LTTE would represent the people of the North-East during the peace talks. This was because the TNA felt that the LTTE was best placed to win the aspirations of the Tamil people in the North-East.

Prof. Peiris also said that the nucleus of a final settlement was contained in the Oslo Declaration, where the following principles were agreed upon:

1. Renunciation of a separate state by the LTTE.
2. Substantial devolution of power within a united country.
3. Invocation of the concept of internal self-determination by the LTTE.
4. Federalism as the preferred instrument of governance within a united Sri Lanka.

**“The final solution is not a blank - the nucleus is the Oslo Declaration.”**

**Prof. G.L. Peiris**

The Panellists also recognised that there were very serious obstacles to the full realisation of promises made in the past as part of the peace process.

Some participants said that very little attention had been given to human rights, the freedom of expression etc in the peace process and saw that media and civil society had a role to play in

highlighting the importance of these issues.

Others said that there needed to be an inclusive peace process for sustainable conflict transformation – and that the media and civil society had a great role to play in this.

## Second Session

---

Ms. Sunila Abeysekara, Director of INFORM, gave a brief introduction to the afternoon session, after which Mr. Hannes Seibert, from the Academy of Educational Development gave a brief presentation on the dynamics of the current peace process. In particular, he said that the peace process should not be made a pawn in the upcoming elections.

Although the SLMM, SCOPP, SNAP USAID and Norwegian Embassy were represented at the conference, they all declined to formally participate as speakers during the afternoon session.

Mr. Wouter Wilton, the Resident Representative of the European Union, said that donors were not pushing the Sri Lanka Government into re-drawing the map of Sri Lanka as had been portrayed by certain sections of the media.

However, he also said that after the Tokyo Donors Conference, there was a need for the international donors to monitor and review the disbursement of aid in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, he said that the indicators for progress was very much for the parties to determine.

Mr. Peter Harrold, Country Director of the World Bank in Sri Lanka, said that the development of the North-East could not be held hostage to the process of negotiations. He also said that the delivery of money pledged in Tokyo in June 2003 was contingent upon the progress of the peace process.

Some participants asked whether the World Bank had any experience in the past in administering where there wasn't a failure of the State or a final settlement, to which Mr. Harrold replied that Sri Lanka was indeed a unique case where the World Bank has a more political role than is usually apparent in other countries. He admitted there could never be a fool-proof guarantee that funds were not been misappropriated by the LTTE, but flagged the stringent accountability of the North-East Reconstruction Fund (NERF) and the international auditor who would oversee accounts as steps taken to minimise to the extent possible corruption and misuse of funds.

**"One of the roles the TNA can play is to try and assist the LTTE leadership to understand what is required by the funders and donors to make the institutions in the NE work."**

**Peter Harrold**

He also spoke of the need for the LTTE to come up with a cohesive economic development plan for the North-East.

Mr. Harrold also went on record that if allegations of misappropriation of any money the World Bank has disbursed for Judicial Reforms could be proved, then strong measures would be taken by the Bank to remedy the situation.

**"Progress [must be made] in the peace process and NOT just the peace talks. This is what the donors agreed to in Tokyo."**

**Wouter Wilton**

Mr. Harrold concurred with Mr. Sampanthan and said that it was important for journalists to visit the North-East to see the devastation of the region, the poverty of its inhabitants and the complete lack of any basic infrastructure.

Others said that equal importance needed to be given by the media to issues of governance in the South, human rights and democracy. These, it was pointed out, were pivotal to the long-term success of the peace process.

Other pointed out the difference between the peace process and the peace talks – the disbursement of aid, it was stated, was contingent upon the forward movement of the peace process and not necessarily the peace talks.

# Appendix 1

## List of Participants

	Name	Organisation	Contact Details
1	Agnes Bragadottir	SLMM	0777-712080
2	Rachel Perera	AED	2665765
3	Kjersti Tromsveld	Norwegian Embassy	0777 576 399
4	Amila Balasuriya		2507418, 2599764
5	Brian Smith	ADB	2387055 Ext 33 <a href="mailto:bsmith@adb.org">bsmith@adb.org</a>
6	Lal Mallawarachchi	SLBC	2696128, 2691972 Fax: 2698577
7	S. Kellapotha	Lake House	2429429
8	C. Taylor	US Embassy	2472855
9	S. Jayasuriya	SCOPP	0777 748 261
10	A.M. Naushaad	SLMC	0777 805695
11	A.M. Faiz	SLMC	0777 380955
12	M.S.M. Ayub	Lakbima (Sunday)	071 2208202
13	Uvindu Kurukulasooriya	Ravaya	2851672 / 73
14	Victor Ivan	Ravaya	2851672 / 73
15	Hannes Siebert	AED	2665765
16	Mark Silva	USAID	2472855
17	S. Nadarajah	Virakesari	
18	Devanad Ramiah	UNDP	2500691 Ext 214
19	N.M. Ameen	ANCL Thinakkural	0777 270032 22429207 (O) 2688293 (H)
20	Kethesh Loganathan	CPA	2565304/6 Ext 111
21	S. Senthana	Thinakkural	074 618939
22	Daya Lankapura	Silumina ANCL	0777 304015 2439263 (O) 2784051 (H)

23	Lynn Ockerby	Daily News	2429429 Ext 712
24	Ganasiri Koththigoda	Haraya	2430621
25	Wouter Wilton	Head of European Commission Delegation to Sri Lanka	2695215
26	Keith Noyahr	Deputy Editor, Daily Mirror	2300552 074 714746
27	Jehan Perera	National Peace Council	0777 584744
28	R. Sampanthan	TNA	2559787 026 – 227500
29	Kulasiri Kariyawasam	Shree FM	2573667
30	Frederica Jansz	The Sunday Leader	075 342 553