

Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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Greetings from John Eriksson, President, GPS USA

This issue of the GPS Newsletter opens with an announcement of a new attractive GPS website. Two major articles begin with a review by GPS Board Member Kelly Skeith, "Sri Lanka: the Difficult Path to Postwar Rehabilitation and Reconciliation," based on Kelly's month long consultancy in Sri Lanka in October and November of last year, followed by the second installment of a paper by Dr. Krishna Kumar, "Community Level Nonviolent Actions to Promote Change." The first part of this article was published in the July 2013 issue of the GPS Newsletter. The entire paper was presented by Dr. Kumar at a GPS USA Workshop on "Nonviolent Action: Concept and Practice," May 4, 2013. Two GPS-sponsored events are summarized by Dr. Mindy Resier: a picnic on August 3 at the Cambodian Buddhist Temple of Silver Spring, MD, and a presentation on October 13 by Mel Duncan, co-founder of the Nonviolent Peaceforce. The Newsletter issue concludes with a biographical sketch of our newest Board member, Ms. Kelly Heindel Skeith. Kelly has had extensive overseas experience in countries that have suffered from violent conflict. I am delighted to welcome Kelly to our Board and look forward to her contributions to our work – as indeed she already has, with a thoughtful and very relevant article in this issue of the GPS Newsletter.

New Global Peace Services USA Website

GPS has a brand new website! It is attractive and user friendly, with comprehensive coverage of GPS USA activities, resources from relevant literature, all GPS Newsletters since the first issue in Spring 1998, events and workshops, contact information and links to other organizations and websites. We are grateful to Mark Skeith whose invaluable technical expertise, dedication and patience have made this transformation possible. Our website address is still: www.GlobalPeaceServices.org. Do come and visit us! Contributions warmly welcomed.

Sri Lanka: The Difficult Path to Postwar Rehabilitation and Reconciliation

In May 2009, the 26 year civil conflict fought between the Sri Lankan government security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) formally ended. In June 2009, the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) began to implement the Reintegration and Stabilization in the East and North (RISEN) Program for conflict affected populations in Sri Lanka. Four years later, I had the opportunity to go to Sri Lanka as a part of a three person evaluation team (an Australian, a Sri Lankan, and myself, an American) to conduct an independent evaluation of OTI's RISEN Program to assess the relative success of the program in achieving its intended results. We spent four weeks in October-November 2013 conducting our research in Colombo, the country's capital, Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern Provinces, and parts of Sri Lanka that have been closed off to the rest of the world for much of the last 30 years. In addition to the findings of our evaluation work for OTI, we gained both information and impressions of a beautiful and complicated country and the toll of its civil war which I share here. It is important to note that the experience I present here is based on our team's collective experiences and insight.

USAID and OTI

OTI's programming, relative to that of other USAID and international development agencies, aims to provide fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeting critical windows of transition and stabilization opportunities that are responsive to fluid situations on the ground. OTI works with local change agents, including local and national government offices, civil society organizations, indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, media groups, youth, and women's groups. OTI programs intend to promote community-led stabilization and strengthen local stakeholder capacity. For such rapid, immediate responses, OTI provides in-kind small grants for short-term assistance to local entities. Grant (project) proposals that meet program goals are encouraged to be innovative and risk-taking. Small grant activities operate on a rolling basis, based on community engagement while linking communities to local government, private sector enterprises, other USAID programs, and other donor programs.

Rather than a sustainable development focus (the predominant domain of USAID Mission programs), transitional OTI programming aims to lay the foundations and set the preconditions that will lead to longer-term development.¹ Two key objectives provided the RISEN Program's direction: (1) Foster social cohesion to increase participation, community reintegration, and economic viability in the Eastern and Northern Provinces; and (2) Increase civic engagement of conflict-affected communities with the rest of Sri Lankan society, including government institutions. With the program ending in January 2014 (and USAID more broadly downgrading from a Mission to a country office in Sri Lanka), the goal for the last year was "to advance confident, resilient communities able to address issues nonviolently" with the objectives unchanged.

Conflict in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society having a population of a little over 20 million. The island nation gained independence from the British in 1948. Seventy-five percent of the population is Sinhalese, mainly concentrated in southwest and central parts of the country; 11% Sri Lankan Tamils living predominantly in the North and East (considered the country's largest minority group); 9% Muslims and 4% Indian Tamils (working in

tea and rubber plantations in the hill country and southern parts of the island).² The country has grappled with a civil war for almost 30 years, led by government security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Underlying causes of the war were unequal distribution of the benefits of economic growth, post-colonial language legislation, perceived injustices regarding ethnic representation in public institutions, access to land and water, and lack of devolution of central power to regions. The political composition of the Sri Lankan government reflects the historical and political differences between the two main ethnic groups, the majority Sinhala and the minority Tamils, with few Tamils in national or provincial positions or in the military.

After driving the LTTE out of the East in 2007, the Sri Lankan military focused efforts on the North and in 2008 withdrew from a ceasefire agreement citing the LTTE's noncompliance with the agreement. In 2009, the Sri Lankan military put full effort into driving the LTTE out of their last strongholds in the North, and shelled the three Safe Zones (where it had encouraged civilian populations to concentrate), the hospitals on the frontlines, the United Nations hub, and the food distribution lines, resulting in a large number of civilian deaths. UN reports claimed nearly 40,000 deaths,³ 40,000 surgeries and approximately 5,000 amputations. The government still denies targeting civilians and says that it did not shell any areas where they knew civilians were. A Christian clergyman indicated that 146,679 people may be unaccounted for between October 2008 and May 2009, and civilians who managed to escape conflict-affected areas during the war were subjected to further deprivation when detained in overcrowded farmland and public buildings in Vavuniya in the East.

Due to international pressure, the government, which was initially very selective in allowing humanitarian aid agencies and local organizations entry to the region, later allowed some of these organizations to come into the region to meet basic needs. The government established the Presidential Task Force under the Ministry of Defense (MOD) to control all humanitarian and development activities in the North. The NGO Secretariat, which had been a unit under the Ministry of Social Services, was also brought under MOD. Initially, the government did not allow the internally displaced persons (IDPs) to leave the refugee camps established to house them, reasoning that there were landmines in the former conflict zones and LTTE cadres hiding amidst displaced civilians were yet to

¹ OTI (2004) Special Tenth-Year Edition: A Decade of Transition, 1994–2004.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Sri_Lanka.

³ 2011 Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka.

be identified. With mounting international pressure to release innocent civilians, the government released nearly 180,000 individuals in 2009, and in April 2011 approximately 370,000 were allowed to return to their villages. More than 1,000 IDPs from Mullaitivu in the North are still not resettled. Currently, 6,300 acres of land are still being held by security forces in Kankasanturai and Palaly High security zones.⁴ Over 1,000 land and property claims were filed in the past year.

The government claimed at the end of the war that nearly 12,000 ex-combatants willingly surrendered to the security forces for their safety and for rehabilitation. The Bureau of the Commissioner for General Rehabilitation reported⁵ that ex-combatants were facilitated to return to formal education and if necessary were provided catch-up education. Adults were provided vocational rehabilitation. In the last three and half decades, large-scale disappearances – though how many precisely is unknown – have occurred and many war-affected families are still in the process of searching for family members, mainly male members who were taken into custody at the end of the war, but whose whereabouts are unknown. In 2010, the Deputy Minister for Women's Affairs and Child Development announced a registered list of 89,000 war widows – 49,000 in Eastern Province and 40,000 in Northern Province. Most of the widows were young and had no skills or expertise to work or fend for the family.

Post Conflict Environment

Our team found that there are few national level government efforts toward true reconciliation. Political power is concentrated within the majority Sinhalese ethnic group. Freedom of speech and peaceful demonstrations are often suppressed, including all media, public theater, and voter rights awareness-related programming undertaken by donors in the North and East. There are also increased demonstrations of intolerance toward “other religions” other than Buddhism, instances of concerted effort to suppress “religious congregation” among non-Buddhist religious groups, and violent acts directed toward them.

Economically, while the country enjoys a “middle-income” status, we found this categorization to be far from reality. While the economy did rebound after the end of the civil war, weakened global demand and a

large drought affecting Sri Lanka's agriculture sector affected exports and trade. A large trade deficit remains a concern with the economy depending on strong remittances from Sri Lankan workers abroad and high general taxation to help offset the trade deficit.⁶ At present, 9%⁷ of Sri Lankans are below the poverty line, and 1.5 million households depend on the government-driven poverty alleviation program *Samurdhi*. However, there are signs of progress; the service sector is rebounding and has helped push GDP growth to 6.8% in 2013. In addition, other indicators of human development remain high including the national average life expectancy of 74.6 years – among the highest life expectancy levels in the South Asian region, and seventy-seven percent of the population has access to electricity – another high figure for the region.⁸ Environmentally, the country remains vulnerable particularly to floods, landslides, and cyclonic winds, while some areas record a problem of perennial droughts. In addition, Sri Lanka's experience with the 2004 tsunami is an indication of the country's vulnerability to oceanic changes and earthquakes.

The United Nations Development Program's 2012 Millennium Development Goals Report⁹ showed continued development progress in Sri Lanka, in particular noting a high level of satisfaction with healthcare (83% respondents in Sri Lanka indicated satisfaction with health care quality, while globally the average was 61%), and increased Internet usage (almost 30% increase in access and usage), but disparities persist within regions. The report also clearly identifies that when social, political and economic inequalities grow among culturally or spatially distinct groups, they can provide the basis for resentful people to garner political support that can subsequently lead to conflict.¹⁰ Our team found that this is a key concern moving forward for Sri Lanka.

Conclusions

Overall, we found OTI's interventions to be effective because of their visible, demonstrable projects that were so strikingly different from the experience of neglect and abuse to which the state had subjected minority communities in the past. OTI projects provided assistance according to what communities identified as crucial to their advancement, when they needed it, including repairing markets, roads, hospitals and other crucial infrastructure utilized by Muslims, Tamils, and Sinhala

⁴ <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/the-jaffna-air/>.

⁵ <http://bcgr.gov.lk/child-intro.php>.

⁶ Asian Development Bank, Asian Development Outlook 2013.

⁷ CIA World Fact Book, poverty statistics, 2013.

⁸ <http://data.worldbank.org/country/sri-lanka>.

⁹ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2013-report>.

¹⁰ UNDP – 2012 Sri Lanka Human Development Report.

populations in the North and East, election monitoring support, livelihoods training, specifically in the burgeoning tourism industry, and media and journalism training and support. Finally, the interventions were most effective because they helped change the way people thought. For example, grants helped government officials recognize the importance of coordinating their actions to serve citizens of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, and helped citizens recognize the importance of working together to leverage the assistance they were receiving. One key aspect of OTI's programming, known as exposure visits, was particularly popular with youth, but all beneficiaries listed this as a critical success. Almost all the youth with whom we met had never, in their entire lives, left their largely Tamil communities in the North and East. Through the RISEN programming, they were brought on exposure visits or participated in trainings outside of their regions (typically to Colombo or to other areas in the North and East) and all described their astonishment at the similarities between their lives and others in Sri Lanka and expressed a strong desire to maintain connections and work together to resolve the issues they are facing. The idea that they had much in common with other Sri Lankans, and that there was interest in their lives and struggles seemed to have made a marked difference on the youth and gave them increased motivation to work on reconciliation and reintegration projects in their community.

One of our evaluation's findings was that confidence in democracy, governance, and economic growth was found to be increasing with the end of conflict and the recently held, first ever, Northern Provincial Elections in September 2013. However, the ability of the government, particularly in the North and East, to maintain its

increased capacity and services appears low. All government officials or grantees we spoke with in the East and North expressed concern about being able to continue to provide services. While the newly elected officials in the North are currently being recognized by the national government, one local provincial chairman said that the governor and national government "change laws here on a daily basis," and their uncertainty as to their ability to control resources or conduct their work affects the long-term prospects for these initial positive confidence gains amongst the Northern and Eastern populations. In addition, adjudication of land and other rights issues in the North and East is really just beginning, so it is difficult to determine what impact USAID and other international efforts will have in the long term. In the short term, due to mandatory requirements to vote in local and provincial government elections, the RISEN Program has contributed to people gaining national identity cards—and the ability to conduct "normal activities" such as driving, voting, marrying, obtaining passports, and working. National identity cards are the first step toward the ability to access other legal services, such as land restitution, death, marriage, and divorce certificates. Whether these rights are officially recognized by the national government remains to be seen. Finally, with USAID and other donors leaving Sri Lanka, largely due to demands for foreign assistance funds in the Middle East and East and Central Africa, many Sri Lankans in the North and East expressed concerns about being forgotten by the international community and uncertainty for what their future holds.

Kelly Skeith

Community Level Nonviolent Actions to Promote Change – Part II

(The first part of this article by Dr. Krishna Kumar appeared in the July 2013 issue of the GPS Newsletter)

Nonviolent Methods

Nonviolent methods, which can be used at the community level, can be classified in the following five categories: direct persuasion, acts of goodwill and assistance, public education, noncooperation and nonviolent obstruction. However, the dividing line between these categories is thin and there is considerable overlapping among them.

1. Persuasive Methods

The first category includes methods designed to persuade opponents or conflicting parties through discussion and dialogue. Nonviolent activists make sincere efforts to discuss the problem with the concerned parties and seek mutually acceptable solutions. The discussions are always carried out in a civil manner without using

abusive and inflammatory language. Activists appeal to the opponent's sense of justice and fairness. Even when discussions do not succeed, they take every step to keep the line of communication open. Examples of persuasive methods are:

- Individual or group meetings with opponents or conflicting parties
- Joint workshops and conferences to discuss the problem: Often the nonviolent activists serve as moderator or facilitator in the case of inter-group conflicts. Outside experts and leaders may be called to give their opinion.
- Providing common platforms in which conflicting parties can present their views and opinions
- Prayer meetings: In the case of identity conflicts, nonviolent activists have organized prayer meetings in which the leaders of conflicting groups participate. In the aftermath of communal violence after India's independence, peace committees were established by community leaders, which invited Hindu and Muslim religious leaders to address them.
- Mediation and arbitration of disputes by third parties
- Petitions to the local government, community organizations and other groups

2. Acts of Goodwill and Assistance

Nonviolent activists occasionally undertake acts of goodwill or provide assistance to the opponents to engender an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. During the civil disobedience movement in South Africa, Gandhi made shoes for General Smut, who had sent him to jail, a gesture which was appreciated by the general. Simple acts of goodwill can help in healing the wound of violence in the aftermath of identity conflicts. After the partition of India in 1947, there were communal riots in which Hindus and Muslims attacked each other, plunging the country into utter chaos. Gandhian workers formed peace committees consisting of members of the two ethnic groups in conflict ridden cities. One of the activities of these committees was to organize visits by Hindu leaders to the families of Muslim victims and vice versa. Such visits, along with peace marches, fasts, night vigils and strong governmental action, played an important role in restoring peace and order.

In the example of gang violence, community leaders may help gang members' families, who have suffered from the misdeeds of their own relatives. They may assist them in obtaining legal advice or communicating their plight to local authorities. Such acts may convince these families that the community leaders are genuine friends and not enemies, and therefore deserve their cooperation in fighting the menace of gang violence.

Some examples of these methods are:

- Participation in sports, festivities and cultural events organized by opponents or conflicting parties
- Visits to the families of victims of conflict in which members of the conflicting parties visit each other
- Assistance to the victims: For example, in the aftermath of riots in Gujarat, India, many individuals and groups visited victims' houses and provided them assistance. Such gestures had positive effects in healing the wounds of violence.

3. Education of the Public

Public education is undoubtedly one of the most important methods in the arsenal of nonviolent activists. The success of nonviolent action depends upon winning the hearts and minds of not only opponents but also of bystanders, who do not know the problem and have been indifferent about it. Nonviolent activists usually spend considerable time and resources in educating public opinion on the issues. Some of the most common methods include:

- Distribution of pamphlets and leaflets explaining the problem and proposing a solution
- Use of social media to explain the problem and propose a solution. The advent of social media has opened unlimited possibilities for embarking on a public education program. It can be harnessed at both national and community levels.
- Newspaper articles to educate and mobilize public opinion. Although the circulation of national level newspapers is falling, local newspapers catering to the needs of communities are still a major vehicle for public education.
- Marches and processions to create awareness among the people
- Plays and music performances to convey the message of peace and reconciliation

- Participation in the social and cultural events organized by opponents or conflicting parties
- Providing common platforms in which conflicting parties can present their views and opinions
- Television and radio programs: Search for Common Ground, an international NGO, has successfully used television and radio programming to promote mutual understanding in many war-torn societies.
- Advertisements in print and electronic media

4. Non-Cooperation

The next category includes methods in which nonviolent activists withdraw their cooperation from individuals, organizations or groups, which refuse to accept their just demands. These are undertaken when persuasion and public education actions fail. Such methods have been widely used practically all over the world. Their success largely depends upon two factors; first the number of people non-cooperating with their opponents and the extent to which opponents are dependent on the cooperation. Examples of these methods are:

- Boycott of social and cultural events
- Withdrawal or resignation from organizations
- Economic boycott of goods and firms
- Strikes
- Lockouts
- A boycott of the legislature by nonviolent protestors
- Boycott of elections
- Refusal to pay taxes or levies
- Refusal to vacate premises

GPS Encounters

In the summer and early fall of 2013, GPS members and friends in the Washington, DC area had the opportunity to participate in two quite distinctive but equally rewarding events. On Saturday, August 3, the Cambodian Buddhist Temple in Silver Spring, MD was host to a GPS picnic. Following a pot-luck lunch with cuisine from diverse cultures, picnic-goers heard of latest GPS developments from President John Eriksson and learned of current issues

5. Nonviolent interventions

The last category consists of actions that either prevent opponents or conflicting parties from performing their activities or create new institutions which substitute the functions of opposing or conflicting parties. These are undoubtedly the most drastic actions. There is also a question as to whether such actions are legitimate in the case of democratic societies that provide alternative channels to voice grievances and promote change. However, they have been widely used by activists in both authoritarian and semi-authoritarian societies. The most common methods include

- Sit-ins and stand-ins
- Nonviolent occupations of office buildings
- Nonviolent land seizure (Occupation, particularly of idle land by landless laborers so that they can use it for cultivation)
- Preventing workers, employees and others from entering a building
- Creating alternative economic institutions (e.g. when consumer groups create farmers' markets to protest the high prices of fresh vegetables in super markets)

In the end, it should be emphasized that each case of nonviolent action is bound to remain unique, and there is no cookie-cutter approach to selection of specific methods. Leaders and groups embarking on nonviolent actions make their own choices, reflecting their socio-political environment, social and intellectual resources and, above all, the problem which they seek to address.

Krishna Kumar, Ph.D.

concerning women, peace and security from GPS Vice President Mindy Reiser. A highlight of the afternoon was a tour of the Temple led by its President, Dr. Sovan Tun, who also serves as a member of the GPS Board. Venerable Chanhan Ouk, the Abbot of the Temple, gave blessings to the group and answered questions about Cambodian Buddhist teachings and practice.

On Sunday, October 13, Mel Duncan, the co-founder and current Director of Advocacy & Outreach of the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), gave a wide-ranging overview of the history and current international commitments of the Peaceforce. NP's current work in supporting peacemaking in South Sudan was of particular interest to the audience, who engaged in a lively exchange with Mel on NP's strategy, lessons learned over its 12 year history and future directions.

Doris Mariani, the new NP Executive Director, who had just assumed her position, also spoke briefly to the group. GPS has been deeply engaged in the work of NP since its inception and has provided support in many ways to the Brussels-based organization.

Mindy Reiser

Welcome to New GPS Board Member, Kelly Skeith

We welcome Ms. Kelly Skeith to the Board of GPS USA. Kelly has extensive and relevant experience that will enable her to make an important contribution to our Board. She is currently Deputy Director for Performance Evaluation at Social Impact, Inc., a consulting firm based in Arlington, VA. Kelly has specific expertise in the design, implementation, and management of performance monitoring and evaluation projects worldwide. Ms. Skeith manages Social Impact's Evaluation Services five year prime contract with USAID and provides management and technical oversight and support for all evaluation, assessment, and performance monitoring contracts within the contract, in addition to participation on evaluation or assessment teams for numerous task orders. Her recent work includes working on a team piloting a developmental evaluation for USAID's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM), and conducting a final evaluation of the Office of Transition Initiative's (OTI) Reintegration and Stabilization grant program in Sri Lanka following the end of their civil war. Ms. Skeith is proficient in Spanish and lived and worked in Costa Rica with World Vision and Reto Juvenil Internacional. She has a Master's degree in Economic and Political Development with a concentration in conflict and humanitarian emergencies from Columbia University and an International Business degree from James Madison University. Kelly resides with her husband, Mark, in Washington, DC.

Global Peace Services USA

The newsletter of Global Peace Services USA is published regularly. GPS USA is incorporated in the District of Columbia and is tax-exempt. Current board members are: Anna Amato, John Eriksson, Robert Muscat, Mindy Reiser, Ronald Ridker, Kelly Skeith and Sovan Tun. We welcome contributions and comments. To contact us:

Global Peace Services USA
P.O. Box 27922
Washington, DC 20038-7922

Telephone: 202-216-9886
E-mail: johneriks@gmail.com

Web site: www.GlobalPeaceServices.org

Global Peace Services USA
P.O. Box 27922
Washington, DC 20038-7922
www.GlobalPeaceServices.org