



Paths To Peace

October 2024

District Dialogues on Transitional Justice and Truth Telling

NPC held district-based meetings in Vavuniya, Anuradhapura, Mannar and Ratnapura through its People Unite for Justice and Accountability (PUJA) project, bringing together government officials, local leaders and members of the NPC network aimed at fostering dialogue on Transitional Justice (TJ) and truth telling, addressing complex grievances that continue to affect communities impacted the long standing conflict.

A common message was the need for inclusivity in decision making. NPC Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera said, “Decisions should not be made based on majority rule alone. It’s important to include everyone in the discussion to ensure fair implementation nationwide.” His comments underscored a crucial theme that genuine reconciliation requires input from all affected groups to prevent future divisions.

Participants voiced specific, long standing grievances that demanded recognition and redress. In Mannar, they highlighted issues such as the forced displacement of Muslim communities from the Northern Province. K.M. Najeed, a member of the Mannar Local Inter Religious Committee (LIRC), noted that dealing with these painful memories remained essential to achieving real reconciliation and justice. Others echoed this call, pointing out that addressing such historic injustices was critical to avoiding renewed social tensions.



A consistent theme across the districts was the need for a formal mechanism to support victims of the conflict. In Mannar, Grama Niladhari M. Rexon Vinoth emphasised the importance of creating a structured compensation system, ensuring that victims and their families receive tangible, ongoing support. Participants agreed that a TJ process must go beyond symbolic gestures, with a sustainable resource allocation framework to meet the needs of affected families over time.

Practical barriers to implementing TJ initiatives surfaced in discussions across the four districts. Many participants, including Ratnapura’s Additional Government Agent Mrs. Gayani Karunarathna, emphasised the importance of training officials on laws on enforced disappearances. Mrs. Karunarathna noted that without a thorough understanding of the legal procedures, officials would struggle to assist families seeking answers about missing relatives.

The discussion of a draft bill proposing a TJ commission also revealed concerns. Participants in Anuradhapura and other districts voiced strong opinions that an effective commission must operate free from political influence to establish credibility. Participants suggested refining the selection process for commission members, proposing that appointments should prioritise impartiality and transparency to strengthen public trust. The need for an independent truth commission emerged as a priority.

W.C.J. Erangika, an Integration Officer, pointed out the importance of a commission that could provide victims with a platform to share their stories, stating, “All victims’ families should receive fair financial compensation and restitution for property damage.”

The sessions provided a forum for representatives to voice their concerns, discuss solutions and forge a collective path forward. The conversations underscored that achieving true justice required a dedicated, independent process that reflected the complexities of Sri Lanka’s history and respected the perspectives of all communities. Through PUJA, NPC remains committed to amplifying these voices to build a foundation of peace, trust and understanding across the country.



A Bridge For Peace

A residential workshop on inclusion, reconciliation and social justice was conducted in Colombo under NPC's project Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation and Social Justice (PAIRS) for 32 youth leaders from 16 District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs), creating a space for learning, sharing experiences and working together. Participants represented various ethnic groups and religions.

Participants were taught to understand key concepts such as pluralism, inclusion and social justice, focusing on group activities to show how these ideas could be applied in their work. Prof. Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri from the Department of History at the University of Colombo connected these concepts to historical contexts and the challenges of developing effective reconciliation policies. His insights on the past encouraged participants to engage with the present. Researcher Shashik Dhanushka De Silva shared insights grounded in narratives.

At a cultural event, youth leaders from different districts had the opportunity to connect, share their backgrounds and appreciate the diversity that strengthens their group. They learnt from one another and deepened their understanding of each other's traditions and experiences, helping to build a sense of unity. The cultural celebration highlighted how diversity enriched their collective identity. Language was not a barrier, allowing everyone to share ideas freely.

Navod Mohiranga, an active youth member from Ratnapura District, said, "Young people directly contribute to the country's survival. When we think of peace and reconciliation, we imagine everyone sitting together, talking and working together. However, the true essence of reconciliation has not reached the ground level. Reconciliation means respecting everyone's identity and creating an environment where justice is available for all. Inclusion is the right answer for this."

Sivaganam Abhirami, a youth leader and lecturer at the University of Jaffna representing Vavuniya District, said, "Even after 30 years of war, there are still unhealed wounds. Admissions are necessary for healing. If inclusion is not possible, the wounds will fester, causing more harm instead of resolution. Everyone deserves equal opportunities and rights. Misunderstandings, mistrust and fear remain due to these unresolved issues."



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Strengthening Research Skills and Engaging Civil Society

NPC's Mobilising University State Engagement for Reconciliation (MUSTER) project conducted two district-based training workshops at Sabaragamuwa University and Jaffna University aimed at building research skills among students and encouraging dialogue on socio-political issues.

The training at Sabaragamuwa University focused on developing students' skills in conducting research based on issues identified in prior meetings with government representatives. Facilitated by Prof. Premakumara de Silva from the University of Colombo, the session provided students with practical knowledge on research methods, data collection, ethics and presenting findings.

Prof. de Silva, known for his work in social research, offered students insights into both theory and practice, helping them understand the broader relevance of their research topics. "Prof. de Silva gave us a fresh outlook at the research process. His real life examples and clarity on qualitative methods have helped me to understand not only the 'how' but also the 'why' of our research," said one student.

At University of Jaffna, the workshop covered research and case study techniques with a focus on clarifying common questions. The session gave students a clearer understanding of research design and the distinctions between general research and case studies. "This workshop was very beneficial for us," said R. Lidharshanan, a research student. "In our university, we often learn about research methods in theory but this programme gave us a hands on understanding of how to apply them effectively. I now feel more equipped to tackle real world problems through my research."

A key part of both workshops was a half-day session by the Sri Lanka Barometer (SLB) facilitated by representatives from the SLB team from GIZ Sri Lanka. The session included university students, civil society members, religious leaders and members of Local and District Inter Religious Committees (LIRCs and DIRCs). The SLB team presented findings on regional socio-political issues, sparking discussions on challenges such as resource distribution. The session provided a platform for students and civil society members to engage with recent data and discuss the findings' impact on their communities.



"The SLB findings bring important issues to light. The discrepancies between the north and south are evident. Despite the rule of law and land ownership rights, people in the north face ongoing challenges that require a fair resolution," said A. Kalaivany, a DIRC member from Jaffna.

Each workshop brought together participants from different backgrounds. This diversity contributed to a well-rounded approach to social research and fostered collaboration among students and civil society members. They marked an important step in NPC's efforts to build stronger ties between universities and local communities.

By combining research training with open discussions, the project aimed to encourage a thoughtful and community-oriented approach to addressing local issues. Through these district-based workshops, NPC and GIZ Sri Lanka are encouraging a new generation of researchers to engage in research that addresses community needs.

By improving students' understanding of research methods and engaging civil society, the workshops highlighted the value of evidence-based research in promoting positive change.



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Inspiring Leaders to Harmonise Freedom with Respect

The Action for Religious Coexistence (ARC) team conducted a Training of Trainers (ToT) session in Minuwangoda bringing together 43 participants from 14 Local Inter Religious Committees (LIRCs) across 13 districts. The session was designed to equip NGO representatives with theoretical and practical knowledge on advocacy, activism and the complexities of hate speech.

Participants engaged in interactive discussions and exchanged insights. Mr. Antony Jesudasan, Executive Director of Voice of the Plantation People Organization, touched on the delicate balance between freedom of expression and the boundaries that protect against hate speech. "We all value our freedom of expression but often ignore the potential harms of unchecked hate speech. If we encourage measures against hate speech, we may see our freedoms restricted. Yet understanding this balance is essential for a healthier society," he said.

Mr. Jesudasan's observation sparked an exchange where participants discussed the nuances between safeguarding freedom of expression and fostering a respectful, inclusive public dialogue. Stories emerged throughout the training, showcasing the diverse perspectives participants brought from their communities and highlighting new ways of thinking that contribute to advocacy and peaceful coexistence.

The session not only deepened participants' understanding of these critical issues but also empowered them to take the discussions back to their communities, supporting ARC's mission to promote religious coexistence and social harmony.



Targeting Youth Networks for Election Participation

Under NPC’s Active Citizens for Elections and Democracy (ACED) project funded by the European Union, a series of 12 training sessions were conducted in Ampara, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Galle, Kandy, Kurunegala, Mannar, Matara, Monaragala, Polonnaruwa, Vavuniya, and Kilinochchi Districts to enhance youth engagement in the electoral process.

Each training programme targeted 30 youth participants in each district, divided equally between male and female youth, who were active and interested in politics and the electoral processes.

The programme focused on thematic areas such as political literacy, voter education, election related laws, youth quota, active engagement and strategies, participation in elections and politics through media and social media, and campaign finance.

The sessions were facilitated by resource persons in Tamil and Sinhala along with the ACED project team. Collaborative efforts were made with district partners and coordinators to ensure the selection of the suitable participants and the effective delivery of the training.

During the sessions it was noted that many participants lacked basic awareness of fundamentals including the proper use of ballot papers. As a result of the training programme, some participants shared their knowledge with different community groups.

The ACED Project remains committed to empowering youth, women, local leaders and enhancing their participation in the electoral processes.



Reactivate Elected Provincial Councils for North and East

In his election manifesto, as well as in his election campaign, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake pledged to take forward the national reconciliation process through several measures, including implementation of the 13th Amendment. His election manifesto commits the government to conduct provincial council elections within a year “to provide an opportunity for the people to join the governance.”

The provincial council system was established in 1987 as part of the peace process agreed with the Indian government to resolve the ethnic conflict. The significance of the provincial council system is that it permits the Tamil and Muslim communities, who are a majority in the Northern and Eastern provinces, to have decision-making authority in those parts of the country by electing those who will be making decisions in the province. Similar systems of power devolution are to be found in most successful countries, including India and Switzerland, to which Sri Lanka was compared with at the time of its Independence.

The National Peace Council believes that the centralised system of government inherited from the departing British colonial rulers has prevented effective power-sharing between the ethnic majority and minorities. Centralised governance has also created vast economic disparities between the capital territory and the provinces. This has led to large segments of the population being economically marginalized and politically disempowered. We need to proceed to “system change” that includes power devolution.

The president’s recent advice to the Governors and officials of the Provincial Councils to be more effective in their work is commendable but does not deal with the issue of elected provincial councils where the people’s representatives make decisions and not the president’s representatives. The governors are directly political appointees of the president. Arguments that the provincial council system is too costly and burdens the country with an unnecessary tier of government are not relevant to its purpose. NPC points this out as some of the recent statements by governmental authorities seem to lose sight of the purpose of provincial council system and its role in addressing the ethnic conflict.

NPC congratulates President Dissanayake on his election victory. We wish him the best and stand ready to support his right-minded efforts to develop the country to be a prosperous and thriving one in accordance with his election manifesto. We also call on him to demonstrate commitment to the national reconciliation process which would make this pledge a reality to all people of all communities living in all parts of the country.

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Our Vision:

A just and peaceful Sri Lanka, in which the freedom, human rights and democratic rights of all peoples are assured.

Our Mission:

To work in partnership with different target groups with an aim to educate, mobilize and advocate the building of a rights conscious society of people that work towards a political solution to the ethnic conflict, reconciliation and equal opportunities for all.

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