



Paths To Peace

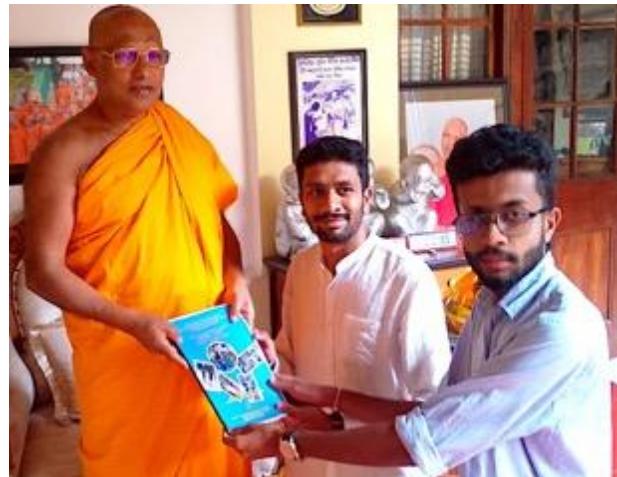
December 2025

Youth Dialogue with Mahanayaka Theros

The grassroots concerns of marginalised rural youth in the Kandy District were elevated directly to the highest levels of Sri Lanka's Buddhist spiritual leadership.

The process began with inclusive youth dialogues across ethnically and religiously diverse communities in Hunnasgiriya, Heeloya and Teldeniya in Kandy where young people articulated barriers to social inclusion and unity. These insights were formally compiled and presented to an assembly of the nation's most respected religious leaders headed by Most Venerable Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thero, Mahanayaka Thero of the Asgiriya Chapter, alongside other senior prelates including Most Venerable Dr. Niyangoda Dharmakeerthi Sri Sangarakkitha Vijithasiri Thero, Anunayake Thero of the Malwathu Chapter and Venerable Wedaruwe Upali Thero Anunayake Thero of the Asgiriya Chapter, among others.

This direct engagement not only legitimised youth perspectives within a revered institutional framework but also secured high level moral and spiritual endorsement for fostering inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony. By bridging community voices with the authority of the Mahanayaka Thero and senior clergy, this initiative demonstrates a powerful model of advocacy where spiritual leadership is mobilised to amplify inclusion, validate grassroots experiences and strengthen the national commitment to unity and social cohesion.



Women's Leadership and Community Resilience During Disaster

NPC's Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) project was affected due to the adverse weather conditions caused by Cyclone Ditwah. Several project activities were postponed to next year. But women leaders engaged in the project demonstrated commitment and civic responsibility by supporting communities affected by the disaster.

Although several women leaders were directly impacted by the cyclone, they gave priority to collective wellbeing despite the personal hardship and mobilised resources for emergency relief. This voluntary initiative was characterised by both financial and labour contributions made at the district level to assist disaster-affected people. Such actions highlight the transformative role of women's leadership in times of crisis, particularly in fostering solidarity and responsive community action.

Under the leadership of the Eksath Lanka Welfare Foundation, humanitarian assistance was extended to affected communities in the Nuwara Eliya District including dry rations, cooked meals, clothing and hygiene items. Meals prepared by the women leaders were distributed in the Kotmale area and cooked meals, dry ration packs, clothing and hygiene items were provided to people housed at two relief camps.

In the Kegalle District, women's groups distributed dry rations, cooked meals, school bags and educational materials for children as well as hygiene kits and other essential items. Throughout these activities, close coordination was maintained with the District Secretariat and Divisional Secretariat offices. Despite facing personal difficulties, members of the women's group contributed to repairing the Kalugala-Debathgama road.

The women's group in the Matara District collected and distributed dry ration supplies with the participation of the youth group. Although a majority of the women leaders were affected by the disaster they distributed meals, dry rations and hygiene packs.

A volunteer group of women leaders from the Monaragala District cleared canals and rehabilitated roads in the area and contributed financially.



The women's group in the Polonnaruwa District extended financial and labour support to disaster-affected communities including the provision of dry and cooked meals as well as participation in voluntary activities such as road rehabilitation, debris removal and support to relief teams.

In the Kandy District, one of most severely affected areas, women leaders contributed to rescue operations, the coordination of accurate information and the distribution of relief assistance. They have initiated psychosocial support programmes aimed at promoting the mental wellbeing of affected people.

The core objective of the project is to enhance women's participation and leadership in addressing broader social challenges. The collective response to the cyclone demonstrates the effectiveness and social value of women's leadership, reaffirming its critical role in building resilient, inclusive and compassionate communities.



Mobilisation, Dialogue and Action for Change

From the flood-affected communities of Monaragala to the vibrant plantation estates of Nuwara Eliya over 2,100 participants including youth, women leaders, religious authorities and government officials came together to strengthen the foundations of peace, inclusion and resilience under NPC's Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Social Justice (PAIRS) project funded by Misereor and co-funded by CAFOD.

Guided by the principles of participatory governance and inter-community solidarity, initiatives ranged from high level advocacy with senior clergy to grassroots problem solving in marginalised villages. Women and youth came from Anuradhapura, Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, Kurunegala, Puttalam, Polonnaruwa, Galle, Monaragala, Colombo, Ratnapura, Matara, Badulla, Kegalle, Batticaloa, Jaffna and Vavuniya engaging as not only participants but as architects of their own development, identifying local challenges and co-designing solutions. District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs) evolved beyond dialogue into active agents of disaster response, economic empowerment and social cohesion.

The stories that follow are a testament to what is possible when communities lead, institutions listen and collaboration becomes the cornerstone of sustainable peace.

The DIRC meeting in Monaragala marked a historic step in local governance when the Rathugala Vedda community, led by Suda Wannila Aththo, joined the committee, ensuring indigenous representation. The meeting focused on practical action: the DIRC mobilised funds to renovate a flood damaged temple and coordinated support services for landslide-affected families. This transformed the committee from a discussion forum into an active agent of disaster response and reconciliation. Organised by NPC and Community Resource Protection Centre (CRPC), the event highlighted the DIRC's role in fostering social harmony, inclusive dialogue and community resilience.

“This is the first time I have participated in a meeting like this in Monaragala. It is encouraging to see people coming together beyond caste and religious differences. The recent disasters have taught us important lessons, especially the need to respect and love nature. Through this gathering, many people have gained a better understanding of one another,” said Suda Wannila Aththo.



“When the Kumbukan Oya overflowed, it caused severe damage to our temple, village and school. From that difficult moment, the Monaragala DIRC became stronger. We worked together through shramadana activities. Let us continue to work together and gather at the temple for future discussions,” said P. Subumaniyami Kurakkal from Monaragala.

Year-end meetings of DIRCs forged a unified, strategic network out of previously isolated groups. By assessing achievements and challenges, each DIRC has established a powerful new baseline for accountability. They are moving forward with district-specific priorities for the year ahead, ensuring that every inter-religious initiative is targeted and responsive to local needs. This coordinated push engaging leaders across the districts marks a decisive shift from periodic activity to sustained, strategic action. The committees mobilising as a cohesive force for harmony, equipped with clear lessons and a shared resolve to build more peaceful and cohesive communities.

Facilitation meetings for women Local Government Authority (LGA) members and community leaders empowered women leaders in the districts of Polonnaruwa, Matara, Kandy, Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Jaffna and Ratnapura created a dedicated space for their perspectives on peace and security. The dialogues shifted women's roles from passive participants to recognised analysts and strategists in local peacebuilding. By facilitating the identification of district-specific threats and the exchange of intervention strategies, the meetings have strengthened a regional network of women leaders equipped with shared knowledge and a reinforced mandate to act as frontline agents in conflict prevention and community cohesion. The meetings enabled the women to identify key issues affecting peace and harmony, share experiences and strengthen networks for collective action. The discussions reaffirmed the critical role of women in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and fostering social cohesion at the local level.

“I welcome the cross-religious learning and the concrete planning for peace and harmony initiatives, committing to ongoing work in this area,” said Gajeepan Puvanarani, LGA women leader, from the Eelam People's Democratic Party.

Targeted interventions have transformed dialogue into concrete action, tackling the root causes of marginalisation across Sri Lanka. In Digala Estate, a bridge was built between a vulnerable community and national services. This initiative directly countered substance abuse and economic exclusion, resulting in six people enrolling in vocational training and five starting business registrations. A communitywide anti-drug sticker campaign provided a visible, lasting platform for change.

In Badulla, governance was made inclusive and responsive. The DIRC advocated for trilingual signage at the local hospital, a critical move to prevent emergency care delays for non-Sinhala speakers. A free health clinic transformed a point of potential tension into a demonstration of collaborative problem solving. Consultations with grassroots women leaders from across political spectrums have forged a unified advocacy front. They crystallised a clear blueprint for empowerment, prioritising economic independence for Malayaha Tamil women through targeted support for self-employment and equitable access to government services.

In Puttalam, women leaders defined the future of inclusive development by consensus. They established two strategic pillars: creating sustainable livelihoods through a dedicated marketplace and ensuring broad-based equity by championing inclusive services and spaces for people with disabilities. These actions show a decisive shift from discussion to delivery. They are building community driven stability by addressing specific social harms and economic root causes, ensuring future interventions are precisely targeted, owned by the community and fundamentally effective.



PSTA Consultation Is a Test of System Change

The National Peace Council welcomes the government's decision to allow a two month period of public consultation on the proposed Protection of the State from Terrorism Act, intended to replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Given Sri Lanka's long and painful experience with national security legislation, this consultation period will provide a valuable opportunity to prevent the repetition of past mistakes. Meaningful public engagement prior to the enactment of a new anti-terrorism law is essential if the promise of system change is to be realised and if Sri Lanka is to avoid entrenching yet another draconian law whose consequences may be felt for decades to come.

When in opposition and in their election manifesto, the JVP and NPP pledged to repeal repressive laws such as the PTA, citing its repeated misuse against ethnic and religious minorities, political activists and journalists. The continued application of the PTA, where individuals have been detained for prolonged periods even for non-terrorism related reasons, such as in the Eastern Province in Valachchenai over alleged forest land encroachment demonstrates how easily exceptional powers are extended to ordinary disputes.

A preliminary review of the draft PSTA indicates that it retains core features of the PTA that have enabled serious abuse over decades. These include provisions permitting detention for up to two years without a person being charged before a court of law. In addition, the broad definition of terrorism under the draft law allows acts of dissent and civil disobedience to be labelled as terrorism, thereby permitting disproportionate and excessive responses by the state. Such provisions replicate the logic of the PTA rather than mark a clear break from it.

The PTA itself was enacted as a temporary law, intended to operate for only six months, yet it has remained in force for forty six years. This history shows how difficult it is to remove national security laws once they are enacted. For this reason, special care needs to be taken with regard to the new law on two counts. The first is the observation that power corrupts. The second is that laws must protect citizens from future governments, not only the current one. Institutions and laws are designed to endure beyond the lifespan of any one government and need to safeguard the public interest when political circumstances change.

The two month consultation period on the PSTA therefore carries special responsibility. The National Peace Council urges civil society organisations, the legal community and in particular the Bar Association of Sri Lanka to study the draft law carefully, to draw on Sri Lanka's experience and international standards, and to place their considered views before the government to incorporate in a well balanced law. These would include provisions for speedy judicial actions to release those improperly and unfairly arrested under its provisions and compensation to those who are discharged without legal action after many months or years.

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National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

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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