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இலங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka



Paths To Peace

April 2026

National Symposium Highlights Empowerment of Women Leaders

The Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) National Symposium was held in Colombo, bringing together women leaders from Badulla, Kandy, Kegalle, Nuwara Eliya, Matara, Monaragala and Polonnaruwa, where the project was implemented in its second phase.

The project focuses on strengthening both emerging and experienced women leaders to become effective voices for marginalised communities while fostering unity across communities.

Dr. Kaushalya Ariyaratne, Deputy Minister of Mass Media, was the chief guest. NPC Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera and Sumadhu Weerawarne Perera Programme Adviser also addressed the meeting. A panel discussion with seven panelists representing each district was held and moderated by Ms. Perera.

Dr. Ariyaratne explained the important role of civil society and emphasised that civil society organizations should not rely solely on funding since funds would not last long. Effective and meaningful work would ensure their long term sustainability. She added that civil society must play an active role in influencing governments to bring about positive social change.



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She spoke about the burden of care work, government policy initiatives and their impact on women's leadership and mentioned that the government was increasing the number of safe houses for women and children. Participants suggested that at least one safe house should be established in each district because victims of domestic violence were often forced to return to the same place where the abuse had taken place.

Dr. Ariyaratne said that there were many vacancies for police officers, particularly for Tamil-speaking and female officers, and encouraged participants to inform youth in their districts about these opportunities and to apply so that the institutions could provide more effective and people-friendly services.

Each district depicted its experiences and achievements through creative presentations such as drama, discussions and songs, showcasing the strength and diversity of projects for the empowerment of women and the role that the community could play in improving relationships and fostering support for women in the community.

The presentation from Kandy focused on improving health and community resources. The group identified two problems, one with sanitation and the other with trash and dirt in the canals. It was found that solving the problems collectively created a benefit for the community so they formed a youth and super group to clean toilets and canal infrastructure. The group shared the success of the activity through a song.

The Monaragala group highlighted the issue of access to electricity. It collaborated with a rural village lacking electricity to include it in the power grid. To make this happen, the group involved state and local officials to implement an electricity pilot project that brought electricity to the village and strengthened municipal and state collaboration for shared goals.

The presentation from Nuwara Eliya tackled the issue of domestic violence, identifying an increase in cases and a lack of public education to reduce it. A coalition for women and children engaged schools and state institutions to lead an education initiative about what the term domestic violence means, why it is harmful and ways for community members to reduce it. The coalition advised specific families, particularly men who had engaged in domestic violence, on how to change their behaviour.

The Matara group focused on inclusion of Muslim women in politics, identifying a candidate without a political family background or connections and facing opposition from both the majority party and family members. Outside of traditional support mechanisms, the candidate engaged in direct grassroots advocacy, speaking to constituents about what mattered to them, which allowed her to run a successful campaign.



In Polonnaruwa, the group used innovative agriculture solutions to tackle the problem of elephants moving through at night, making it unsafe for people to walk outside. Knowing that elephants were averse to citrus, the group led an initiative to plant lime trees so that the elephants would move away peacefully.

The Badulla group led a project to empower women to serve as leaders in the society in formal and informal capacities, conducting small panel discussions, and focused on the need for information and education. It determined that there needed to be greater education for women about the laws and political situations on issues like domestic violence so that they could advocate for themselves and others.

The team from Kegalle addressed the issue of caste divisions with a collective of pot makers who had experienced discrimination as a result of their caste. They presented a drama showing the distinction between occupation and identity, emphasising that a job should not determine a person's worth or the level of respect they were afforded in community.

The seven regional presentations showcased the rich diversity of community initiatives that supported women and how projects led by women could have wide reaching positive impacts on the community. The projects cultivated female leaders and role models and provided a model of the kind of progress that could be made through mutual support and collaboration.

Participants expressed concerns about the misuse of freedom of expression and media freedom, particularly in the harassment of women through traditional and social media. It was noted that harassment also occurred within Parliament, targetting women political representatives. Participants urged the minister to take action to ensure a safer environment in the future.

Issues faced by youth in the Malaiyaha community were also discussed. It was highlighted that students in the community had limited access to quality education due to language and transportation barriers as well as financial difficulties.



Strengthening Devolution Awareness and Youth Participation

The European Union funded Active Citizens for Elections and Democracy (ACED) project continued its efforts to promote inclusive governance and democratic participation in Sri Lanka. Three activities were implemented - a television interview series to counter negative narratives on devolution, a youth targetted social media campaign to promote youth political participation and a series of local level advocacy campaigns on youth participation in politics.

As part of efforts to counter negative narratives on devolution and promote informed public dialogue, the project conducted four television interviews broadcast on Swarnavahini. The first interview featured NPC Executive Director Jehan Perera and Professor A. Sarveswaran, who discussed the importance of power devolution and the role of provincial councils in strengthening democratic governance. The second interview brought together Professor Deepika Udagama and former MP M. Thilakarajah, focusing on minority participation in politics, including the representation of the Malaiyaha community. The third interview featured Dr. Crishni Silva from the University of Colombo and Ms. Kanaka Abeygunawardana, who discussed youth and women's participation in politics, including the importance of quota systems. The final interview featured Mr. Sampath Randunna, who highlighted the importance of youth participation in politics, the challenges faced by young people and the historical significance of youth engagement in the political landscape.

The ACED project also implemented a youth-targetted social media campaign throughout April to promote youth participation in politics, particularly through the youth quota system. The campaign was developed by collecting voice clips from youth across multiple districts and compiling them into video content that reflected their experiences, concerns and perspectives.

The campaign gave special attention to the voices of Malaiyaha youth from Nuwara Eliya, Badulla and Ratnapura, highlighting their challenges in accessing political opportunities. Many of them identified barriers to participation, including entrenched family-based political systems, financial constraints and limited access to opportunities within party structures. They pointed out that while youth were often engaged during election campaigns to mobilise support, they were frequently excluded from meaningful political decision making processes.

Despite these challenges, the campaign demonstrated that young people possessed strong political awareness, leadership potential and a willingness to contribute to community development. Five local level advocacy campaigns were also implemented by youth in the Kandy, Kalutara, Matara, Batticaloa and Jaffna Districts.



Rebuilding Communities after Ditwah

The Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Social Justice (PAIRS) project funded by Misereor, co-funded by CAFOD and implemented by NPC with a wide network of partners, responded to Ditwah affected communities across several districts. From distributing essential items to elders' homes and children with autism to restoring documentation for families and rebuilding a school library, the actualisation activities and relief efforts demonstrated the project's tangible impact on the ground.

In the aftermath of Ditwah, the Welcome Village Elders' Home in Kurunegala became the site of a tragedy when 12 residents lost their lives because they could not escape. Responding to a request from the Kurunegala District Secretary NPC, in collaboration with the Kurunegala District Secretariat, Kurunegala DIRC and the Kurunegala Human Rights Organization, carried out a relief distribution at the home with funding from Misereor. Essential items including steel cupboards, plastic tables and chairs and rice cookers were distributed based on the elders' needs.

For the students and teachers of Kumbaloluwa Vidyalaya in Kotmale, access to safe drinking water was cut off when the cyclone damaged the school's water system, leaving 200 students and 23 teachers without clean water. Following a request from the Nuwara Eliya District Secretary NPC, in collaboration with the Nuwara Eliya District Secretariat, Kotmale Divisional Secretariat, Nuwara Eliya DIRC and the Cultural and Environment Society, repaired and restored the water system so the school could function with safe drinking water.

For the Malaiyaha community in Holyrood Estate, Thalawakelle, life was lived in the shadows of official neglect. There were no house numbers, no proper addresses and no reliable postal service. Essential documents and government services remained out of reach.

A field visit in July last year brought civil society representatives to the community. Their experiences were gathered and a short documentary captured the daily struggle. Discussions followed with postal officials and estate authorities, leading to a multi-stakeholder meeting where around 75 participants government officials, religious leaders and community members came together to find solutions.



The engagement produced real change. Government officials became more responsive. During the voter roll revision, they took a historic step by assigning numbers to line rooms and updating the voter registry with proper addresses. With house numbers and updated addresses, the community could access postal services, government documentation and essential services. Voter registration gave them a voice in governance. Trust between the community and local authorities had grown.

Religious leaders from all major faiths, including those not yet part of the DIRC network, came together in Monaragala to strengthen interfaith collaboration. The meeting, organized in partnership with the Community Resource Protection Centre and Future in Our Hand Development Fund, brought together 35 religious leaders from the Monaragala and Badulla districts.

"This programme is very important. I pledge to attend Hindu festivals if invited. I urge collective action for district development," said A.G Nishantha, District Secretary, Monaragala.

The Sri Chethiyarama Temple was never meant to be a shelter but when Ditwah devastated the Wellambada area of Gampola, the temple opened its doors to more than 200 displaced people for nearly two months. Located at the heart of an estate community, it became a shared sanctuary for both Sinhala and Malaiyaha Tamil communities.

Even after the camp closed, many families were unable to return home due to land instability and safety concerns. Recognising the urgent needs, the Uduwara Divisional Secretariat identified 70 of the most vulnerable families. NPC, in collaboration with the Uduwara Divisional Secretariat and the Kandy DIRC, distributed dry ration packs to Malaiyaha Tamil and Sinhala households.

In the aftermath of the Ditwah disaster, families in the Dehiowita Divisional Secretariat area faced not only the destruction of their homes but also the loss birth certificates, national identity cards and other papers that prove who they are. Without these, accessing government services, relief and even daily necessities became impossible. Women community and political leaders stepped forward, communicating to authorities the challenges faced by affected families. NPC, in partnership with the People Development Foundation Kegalle, the Dehiowita Divisional Secretariat and the Kegalle DIRC, organized a mobile clinic in Thalduwa.

The event was led by women leaders and attended by Ms. Madushani de Silva, Acting Divisional Secretary, along with 20 government officers representing relevant service sectors. Over 250 community members participated, benefitting from a wide range of services.

"The primary objective of this initiative was to restore access to essential personal documentation lost due to the disaster. This is the first time such documents have been provided free of charge, reflecting a people-centred approach to service delivery," said Ms. de Silva.

The initiative not only restored critical documentation but also strengthened trust between communities and public institutions, highlighting the impact of women's leadership in identifying community needs and driving inclusive, responsive solutions.

When Ditwah swept through Polonnaruwa, the floodwaters did not spare Al-Mina Maha Vidyalaya in Manikkampitiya. Water entered the school library, destroying a large number of books. In six months, the library was renovated but had no books or cupboards. Responding to a request from the Polonnaruwa District Secretary NPC, in collaboration with the Polonnaruwa District Secretariat, Polonnaruwa Zonal Education Department and the Polonnaruwa DIRC, donated library books and office cupboards with Misereor funding.

"Due to Ditwah, books in our school library were destroyed, affecting students' learning activities. On behalf of our school, I express my gratitude to NPC and the Polonnaruwa District Secretariat for providing necessary books and office cupboards," said K. Kaleelurrahman, Principal of Al-Mina Maha Vidyalaya.



Political Follow Up Needed After Walk for Peace

The conclusion of the international Walk for Peace led by Most Venerable Bhikkhu Thich Paññākāra from Vietnam, that took place in Sri Lanka on April 21-28 generated interest and discussion across the country about the importance of peacebuilding and coexistence in the country. The public response to the walk, including support extended by people from different religious and ethnic communities, showed that there is much space within society for initiatives that encourage dialogue, restraint and mutual respect.

The National Peace Council believes this positive response should be used constructively, while recognising that reconciliation in Sri Lanka remains a long term challenge. More than seven decades of political conflict, ethnic polarisation, violence and mistrust cannot be overcome through symbolic events alone. Lasting reconciliation requires sustained political engagement, institutional reform and consistent efforts to build trust among communities. The underlying political issues linked to power sharing, equality, representation and accountability cannot be postponed indefinitely if reconciliation is to move forward in a meaningful way.

In this context, the holding of Provincial Council elections has become increasingly important. The demand made by opposition parties and civil society groups for these elections reflects the wider concern that democratic institutions linked to devolution and local representation need to be revitalised. The continued delay in holding these elections limits opportunities for inclusive governance, particularly in areas most affected by conflict. NPC believes that the government should take steps to engage all political parties, civil society organisations and communities on the way forward regarding devolution, power sharing and democratic participation.

The Walk for Peace should therefore be viewed not as an end in itself, or as a stand-alone event, but as one contribution within a much larger national process. Future peacebuilding initiatives need to involve broader participation by civil society organisations, inter religious groups, youth organisations, educators and local communities, including stronger engagement with the North and East where the impact of war continues to shape public attitudes and political realities. Continued efforts towards dialogue, democratic participation and political inclusion are needed if the country is to move towards a more stable and peaceful future.

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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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