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இலங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka



Paths To Peace

May 2026

NPC Symposium Calls for Political Transformation for Reconciliation

NPC brought together over 300 religious leaders, government officials, women and youth representatives, civil society actors and community members from 16 districts for the Religions to Reconcile: Advancing Ethical and Inclusive Reconciliation National Symposium, which served as the closing ceremony of the Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Social Justice (PAIRS) project implemented across the country from July 2024 to June 2026 with the support from Misereor/KZE and CAFOD.

Religious leaders, university students, female leaders and national and local government public representatives involved in operational projects in 16 districts initiating inter religious reconciliation and social justice attended the seminar, which began with the lighting of the oil lamp followed by a welcome address from NPC's Assistant Manager Ayesha Jayawardana, who set the tone for a day of reflection, celebration and forward looking dialogue.

PAIRS Project Manager Nirosha Anthony provided a comprehensive project overview, explaining how the project had networked inter religious groups, capacitated state officers in pluralistic administration and empowered multi-sectoral groups including women, youth, and civil society organizations to advocate for marginalised communities such as plantation workers, indigenous Vedda communities, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ individuals across the 16 districts.



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A documentary screening brought the project's impact to life, showcasing the transformation of District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs) from informal dialogue platforms into robust advocacy networks capable of mediating tensions, influencing policy and promoting social justice at the grassroots level.

Minister of Transport, Highways and Urban Development, Bimal Rathnayake, who delivered the keynote speech said the government's priority since 2024 had been stabilisation after the economic and political crisis, with reconciliation linked to a future stage of transformation.

Mr. Rathnayake declared that Sri Lanka now had a government that does not show racism and does not use racism for elections. "There is a South that accepts the North and a North that accepts the South... Some people have invested in racism throughout history," he said.

In his address, MP Sivagnanam Sritharan acknowledged the critical role of civil society in bridging communities divided by decades of conflict, while emphasising the need for transitional justice and memorialisation. He raised concerns over unresolved land disputes, alleged encroachments and the continuing military presence in the north and east.

Former minister Mano Ganesan highlighted the longstanding housing and land problems faced by the Malaiyaha Tamil community and the impact of the Ditwah cyclone on estate areas.

Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa stressed the need for equality, justice and inclusive governance to achieve lasting reconciliation. He acknowledged the importance of civil society led reconciliation efforts in complementing state initiatives and calling for continued cross party consensus on peacebuilding and pluralism. He said that reconciliation could not be achieved by government alone and that the kind of grassroots engagement demonstrated by the PAIRS project was essential for building lasting social cohesion.

NPC Chairman Dr Joe William said the work of NPC and its DIRCs belonged to the people of Sri Lanka. "It is rooted in our soil, driven by our communities and sustained by the dedication of ordinary men and women who believe that coexistence is not a luxury but a necessity."

NPC Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera said the country had a unique opportunity to move beyond divisive politics and build a more united and pluralistic society, adding that transformation should begin immediately and not in the indefinite future.

Chairperson of the Office for Missing Persons (OMP) Mahesh Katulanda addressed the complex theme of transitional justice, pointing out that truth seeking and accountability mechanisms must go hand in hand with reconciliation efforts if lasting peace is to be achieved.



The segment of the symposium, Showcase of Impact: The DIRC Success Journey, celebrated the achievements and positive impact of DIRCs through creative presentations. Colombo DIRC showcased urban pluralism and policy engagement, demonstrating how inter religious advocacy could influence decision makers at the highest levels of government.

Nuwara Eliya DIRC opened with a documentary highlighting its work with Malaiyaha Tamil plantation communities, addressing generational marginalisation and demonstrating how inter religious dialogue helped bridge ethnic and linguistic divides in the estate sector.

Anuradhapura DIRC followed with a documentary on the experiences and challenges of the Telugu community. It underscored the need for a plural and inclusive society driven by the active engagement of religious leaders, government officers, women, youth and CSO representatives to foster mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence and reconciliation.

Kandy DIRC presented a documentary on minority rights while Badulla DIRC focused on social cohesion in the Uva Province, highlighting successful mediation of land disputes between ethnic communities and advocacy for equitable resource allocation.

Kegalle DIRC challenged longstanding discriminatory practices through a documentary on caste and social inclusion, advocating for the rights of marginalised occupational groups while Monaragala DIRC presented a short drama on marginalised community voices, bringing attention to the challenges faced by remote rural populations often excluded from national discourse.

Ratnapura presented documentaries addressing marginalised groups such as the differently abled and estate communities, and language rights for mediation. Matara DIRC had a documentary on coastal community inclusion and the unique challenges faced by fishing communities affected by economic and environmental pressures.

Vavuniya DIRC captivated the audience with a short drama portraying the emotional journey of families separated by conflict and the role of DIRCs in facilitating cross-community dialogue and trust building while Batticaloa DIRC presented a drama depicting the experiences of Muslim and Tamil communities in the Eastern Province, illustrating how religious leaders had come together to condemn violence and promote collective action for peace.



Puttalam DIRC shared its success in engaging civil society organizations and identifying donors to address infrastructure needs of underserved and excluded communities while also creating market opportunities for people with disabilities and Polonnaruwa DIRC brought traditional Virindu folk poetry to the stage, using art and culture to convey messages of harmony and coexistence in a manner that resonated with the audience.

Jaffna DIRC staged a modern drama that depicted the troubling sword culture prevalent in Jaffna while Galle DIRC's documentary offered Southern perspectives on reconciliation, highlighting how communities in the South had engaged with the project's objectives and adapted them to local contexts. Kurunegala DIRC's documentary focused on rural interfaith cooperation, showcasing how small town religious leaders had built trust across denominational lines.

Throughout these presentations what emerged was a powerful narrative of transformation: DIRCs that had begun as experimental dialogue platforms had evolved into sustainable, community-owned mechanisms for conflict prevention, advocacy and social justice with religious leaders from Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Catholic and evangelical traditions working side by side with women leaders, youth networks and civil society organizations to address everything from domestic violence and access to education to land rights and political representation.

As the participants departed to their home districts, they carried with them not only the memories of a day of celebration but also the practical tools, networks and commitments needed to sustain inter religious dialogue, inclusive governance and social justice in the challenging but hopeful years ahead.

What Minister Rathnayake had declared that there is a South that accepts the North and a North that accepts the South was not merely a political statement but a reality demonstrated by the 300 religious leaders and community representatives who had gathered from every corner of the island, proving that pluralistic inclusion was not just a project objective but an achievable and achieved outcome of the PAIRS initiative.



NPC Hosts Wake Forest University Study Abroad Programme

NPC hosted a short term study abroad programme for eight students from Wake Forest University in the US on pluralism across religious and cultural differences led by Dr. Eranda Jayawickreme, the Harold W. Tribble Professor of Psychology at Wake Forest University, designed as an immersive learning journey through Sri Lanka's complex social, religious, ethnic and cultural landscape.

Coordinated by NPC with the support of partner organisations, academics, civil society actors, religious leaders and local community representatives, the programme reflected NPC's long-standing commitment to coexistence, reconciliation, interfaith understanding and democratic engagement. By combining academic learning with exposure to lived realities, it enabled students to examine pluralism not only as a concept but as a daily practice shaped by history, identity, conflict, memory, resilience and hope.

The visit began in Colombo where students were introduced to Sri Lanka's political and social context and the structure of the study tour. At NPC, they learned about the organisation's work in peacebuilding, religious coexistence, transitional justice, civic education and community level reconciliation through the sharing of experiences by Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera, Chairperson Dr. Joe William, Programme Advisor Sumadhu Weerawarne Perera and staff. This session provided the foundation for the rest of the journey, helping students understand the broader national context within which local experiences of coexistence and conflict transformation are situated.

The Colombo segment included visits to multi-religious and cultural landmarks, including Gangaramaya Temple, St. Anthony's Shrine and Sri Ponnambalawaneswaram Temple, enabling students to observe how religious traditions coexist in an urban setting and how sacred spaces contribute to the cultural and spiritual identity of the city.

From Colombo the group travelled to Hatton to engage with the Malaiyaha Tamil community in the plantation sector. This was an important component of the programme as it offered students an opportunity to understand the historical marginalisation, identity struggles and continuing socio-economic challenges faced by plantation communities. Discussions focused on identity, citizenship, labour, dignity, social inclusion and coexistence, highlighting the need for pluralism to also address structural inequalities and the voices of communities often kept at the margins of national narratives.



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The group then experienced a symbolic spiritual experience with a night climb of Adam's Peak. Revered by Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, the mountain is one of the most powerful examples of a shared sacred landscape. The climb allowed students to experience pluralism in practice as pilgrims from different religious and cultural backgrounds journeyed together in a common act of devotion, endurance and reflection.

The group also visited the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy and historical and religious sites in Anuradhapura that reflect the ancient civilisation and Buddhist heritage and provided the historical depth to the study of Sri Lanka's plural society, showing how religion, governance, culture and identity have shaped the country over centuries. The group then travelled North through Mullaitivu, Mullivaikkal and Nandikadal, locations closely associated with the final stages of the civil war. This part of the journey created space for difficult but necessary reflection on memory, loss, post-war recovery and the responsibilities of reconciliation.

In Jaffna, the programme combined academic learning, cultural immersion and community engagement. The group visited Nagadeepa or Nainativu, an island where Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim religious sites are located in close proximity, offering another example of the multi-religious landscape. At the University of Jaffna, students participated in sessions with scholars including Dr. M. Thiruvarangan of the Department of Linguistics and English, Dr. P. Ahilan of the Department of Fine Arts, Dr. S. Jeevasuthan of the Department of Sociology and Mrs. Kosalai Mathan of the Department of Law. Topics included ethno-nationalist projects and coexistence, state heritage policies and minority rights, pluralism in societies affected by violence, female-headed households, power devolution and the challenges of enforcing the 13th Amendment. The discussions enabled students to engage with perspectives from the North, a region affected by war and its aftermath. The sessions encouraged critical thinking on nationalism, identity, minority rights, devolution, memory, gender and post-war social transformation while helping students connect theoretical learning with the experiences of communities navigating the long term consequences of violence and division.

A highlight of the Jaffna visit was the cultural immersion activity with the Theatre Action Group founded by Dr. K. Sithamparanathan. Through participatory theatre, music, song, dance and storytelling, students were introduced to the use of art as a tool for healing, dialogue and community transformation. The experience demonstrated how cultural expression can help people confront fear, express emotion, preserve memory and rebuild relationships after conflict. The group also met civil society organisations and activists working on post-conflict reconciliation, community recovery and social justice and visited key sites in Jaffna including the Jaffna Public Library, Jaffna Fort and St. Mary's Cathedral.

The students then visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu and met Fr. Peppi Sosai, Administrator of Madhu Church. Madhu is a place of deep spiritual and historical significance, especially for communities affected by the conflict. The discussion with Fr. Sosai offered valuable insights into faith, displacement, humanitarian response, recovery and coexistence in a region marked by both suffering and resilience. It also highlighted the role religious institutions can play in providing refuge, healing and moral leadership during times of crisis.



Back in Colombo, students engaged with academics at the University of Colombo, including Prof. Mohamed Mahees of the Department of Sociology, Dr. Pavithra Jayawardena of the Department of International Relations and Dr. Crishni Silva of the Department of Political Science and Public Policy. The sessions focused on the impact of undergraduate stress on relationships, ethnic harmony and pluralism, diversity and pluralism in post-conflict Sri Lanka and Islamophobia after the Easter Sunday attacks. These discussions allowed students to examine pluralism in relation to contemporary social anxieties, fear, youth experiences and university life.

The Colombo programme included meetings with key civil society organisations such as the Centre for Policy Alternatives and the International Centre for Ethnic Studies. Through these engagements, students gained insight into the role of civil society in democracy, human rights, social cohesion, policy reform and public dialogue and how such organisations help sustain democratic space in a complex political environment.

On the final day the group visited the University of Ruhuna where they met Dr. R.A.S.P. Ranabahu of the Department of Geography and Mr. Upul Sanjeewa Wijepala of the Department of Sociology, who presented on the demographic and spatial dimensions of pluralism and southern perspectives on religious and cultural coexistence.

The programme concluded with a group reflection and farewell dinner where students shared their key learning outcomes and personal reflections from the journey.

The Wake Forest University study abroad programme provided a meaningful and holistic learning experience across regions, communities, histories and identities. It enabled students to encounter Sri Lanka's diversity through temples, churches, universities, civil society spaces, cultural performances, community discussions and sites of memory. More importantly, it encouraged them to understand pluralism as an ongoing process that requires empathy, justice, dialogue, inclusion and the courage to listen across difference.

For NPC, the programme was an opportunity to share its peacebuilding experience with an international student group and strengthen global learning partnerships rooted in mutual understanding. The study tour demonstrated that Sri Lanka's experiences of conflict and coexistence offer important lessons not only for the country but also for young people and educators around the world committed to building more inclusive, peaceful and plural societies.



Promoting Vocational Education for Youth

Under NPC's Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) project, a youth awareness programme on vocational education was conducted at Welipitiya in the Matara District, bringing together 24 participants with the objective of enhancing their awareness of vocational education opportunities, skills development and future career pathways.

The session was facilitated by Premalal Prathapasinghe, Skill Development Officer of the Welipitiya Divisional Secretariat, who shared valuable insights on the importance of vocational training in the competitive job market.

Participants were introduced to vocational education opportunities available for youth and were encouraged to develop practical skills that can support sustainable employment and self-reliance. The discussion highlighted the significance of career guidance, technical training and youth empowerment in addressing unemployment challenges.

The programme provided an interactive platform for young people to engage in discussions, clarify their concerns and explore pathways for personal and professional growth. Participants expressed their appreciation for the informative and motivating session.

Also under the project, a youth livelihood and skills development programme was held in Gal Oya to enhance sustainable livelihood opportunities, which brought together 35 youth participants, including young women who were eager to explore new avenues for self-employment and entrepreneurship.

The training programme featured a diverse range of sessions facilitated by experienced resource persons specialising in beauty culture, online business management, computer-based services, entrepreneurship and waste paper craft production. Participants received practical guidance on starting and managing small businesses, creating and managing Facebook business pages, utilising digital tools for marketing and identifying emerging opportunities in the online business sector.

Participants were introduced to creative and environmentally friendly livelihood options through waste paper craft training, demonstrating how recycled materials could be transformed into marketable products. The beauty culture session highlighted self-employment opportunities within the beauty and wellness industry while computer-based training provided insights into technology-driven income generating activities.

Participants engaged in discussions and shared experiences and gained knowledge on entrepreneurship development and income generation strategies. The sessions encouraged innovation, creativity and self-confidence, inspiring participants to consider new business ventures and livelihood opportunities within their communities.



Social Justice Needs to Accompany Plantation Sector Reform

The government has announced the second phase of its plantation reform programme, aimed at attracting private and corporate investment by opening underutilised land and assets to investment, modernising the sector and generating new employment. The National Peace Council supports these objectives. However, we urge the government to ensure that economic transformation is accompanied by social justice. An Amnesty International report on Malaiyaha Tamil workers released last week documents wage withholding, debt dependency and restrictions on movement in private tea estates. It is a reminder that reform is being proposed against a backdrop of active, ongoing abuse and not merely historical grievance. Economic transformation without social justice will repeat a pattern Sri Lanka must not repeat in which productivity gains and investment profits bypass the very workers whose labour made them possible. NPC urges that pattern must not be repeated.

Inclusion and rights-based empowerment are especially relevant to the longstanding challenges faced by the Malaiyaha Tamil community, many of whom continue to experience economic hardship and social marginalisation that are a legacy of the denial of their citizenship rights in 1948. The National Peace Council calls on the government to recognise Malaiyaha Tamil plantation workers not merely as a labour force but as rights-bearing stakeholders with a legitimate claim to share in the benefits of development. Housing ownership, secure land tenure, quality education, vocational and entrepreneurship training need to be built into the reform process from the outset. We especially call on the government to establish an independent national land commission, inclusive of representatives from all ethnic and religious communities, to develop transparent principles for land allocation and provide a credible mechanism for dispute resolution.

Sri Lanka is approaching eight decades of independence. In that time, the Malaiyaha Tamil community has contributed more than any other to the plantation economy but received the least in return. Therefore, we see the second phase of plantation reform as not simply being a commercial opportunity but rather as a test of whether Sri Lanka will be correcting a structural injustice that has persisted across generations. The government has both the opportunity and the obligation to ensure that this reform delivers genuine dignity and economic security to those who have earned it most. The correction of the historic injustice to the Malaiyaha Tamil people must not be seen as a concession to them but as an investment in the national unity and social cohesion that Sri Lanka urgently needs.

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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.

National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, 12/14 Balapokuna Vihara Road, Colombo 6, Sri Lanka
Website: www.peace-srilanka.org
Email: info@peace-srilanka.org
Tel: 011 2818344, 011 2854127
Fax: 0112819064