Chapter Five

Peace-Building through
Advocacy and Mobilisation

Introduction

Global propaganda by the Sri Lankan government generated awareness about the protracted conflict and the humanitarian issues involved forcing external actors to actively contemplate and involve in the conflict resolution process. Along with an effort to resolve the internal conflict in Sri Lanka through promoting development, the international actors have also pursued since the mid-1990s the strategy of support to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in promoting the peace process. This was due to recognition that the peace process involving only the government and the LTTE had failed to produce any tangible solution to the conflict and a growing realisation that the voices and concerns of different sections could be incorporated into the conflict resolution process by supporting the organisations working amongst them.

The major donors to Sri Lanka, such as the World Bank, Japan and the US, have focused on the main parties to the conflict – the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE – by linking development assistance to the peace process and by applying aid conditionalities. The small bilateral donors, such as Norway, UK, Canada, Sweden, and the Netherlands have supported NGOs working to promote peace awareness at the grassroots level. Since the local NGOs have better access to the conflict-affected areas than the government agencies due to the local networks and contacts, the donors have diverted considerable amount of funds to them even during the war.

This chapter will look into the strategies followed by the peace organisations, such as advocacy and peace mobilisation activities, in support of a political solution. It discusses, in consecutive sections, (i) the growth of the peace movement, (ii) the NGOs’ mobilisation and advocacy in support of peace, (iii) the response to the peace movement, and (iv) constraints to the peace movement, followed by conclusion.
**Growth of the Peace Movement**

The growth of peace activities in Sri Lanka was a gradual and slow process which developed along with the political developments in the country. Before independence, church-based welfare organisations were active in Ceylon. Hindu and Buddhist groups also mobilized the people for providing education and through cultural activities. The ‘Buddhist Theosophical Society (established in 1880) and the Nari Sikshakadana Sanghamaya (established in 1889) set up schools as an alternative to the missionary schools and voluntary organisations developed by the government, the prominent among them being the Young Women’s Christian Association, Young Men’s Christian Association and Red Cross Society’ (Goodhand and Lewer 1999).

The peace movement developed in response to the government’s repressive measures against the Tamil minority. The Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) was formed by Fr Casperez to resist the government’s repressive measures against the Tamils. Although it was started as a movement to protect human rights and civil rights of citizens, “it eventually descended into a formal institutional structure seeking to mobilise all sections of people against the government’s insensitivity towards minorities” (Liyanage 2006: 291). However, this movement collapsed due to personal rivalries. In the 1970s research institutes involved with the peace work were developed, such as the Centre for Society and Religion and the Marga Institute.

To institutionalise the functioning of the NGOs the government in 1980 passed the Voluntary Social Service Organisations (Registration and Supervision) Act (Fernando and Mel 1985). In the 1980s a number of organisations were set up in response to the United National Party (UNP) government’s economic and political actions. The ‘Movement for Defence of Democratic Rights and the Centre for Development Alternatives were formed in response to the government’s suppression of trade union strikes and to observe the general elections’ (Orjeula 2004). The outbreak of ethnic conflict in 1983 against the Tamil minority led to ‘the formation of the Citizens’ Committee in Jaffna by civic and religious leaders and the Mothers’ Front in 1984 to protest the mass arrest of their sons by the government’ (Orjeula 2004). In 1988 the University Teachers for Human Rights was founded and regularly reported about human rights violations by the security forces as well as the LTTE. These
organisations mobilised large numbers of people from the civil society such as trade unions, women, teachers and youth irrespective of their ethnic identity. However, the growth of Tamil militant organisations in the North-East forced some of the NGO activists to leave the peninsula.

The polarisation of the Sri Lankan society along ethnic lines affected the peace movement too, but massive protests and rallies were organised against the UNP government’s suppression of trade union movement, for democratic rights and free elections. The Movement for Free and Fair Elections and the Movement for Peace with Democracy mobilised the NGOs and human rights and peace activists for political resolution of the conflict. Thus, the peace movement in Sri Lanka grew and shaped its principles and policy by responding to government actions against trade unions and minority groups. The 1994 election campaign on the platform of peace encouraged the NGOs to openly support the People’s Alliance campaign for negotiations with the LTTE. The availability of foreign funding for peace work expanded their activities.

Since the 1990s the donors have become sensitive to conflict-related issues and diverted considerable amount of funds to the NGOs involved in the peace work. Particularly, ‘small bilateral donors such as the Scandinavian countries have put in considerable effort to encourage the NGOs to get involved in conflict-related work by funding through agencies such as NORAD, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and Australian Aid (AUSAID)’ (Burke and Mulakala 2005). The NGOs thereafter designed programmes and projects to target conflict-related poverty and underdevelopment along with projects for peace promotion. Their role changed from providers of basic services to advocates of social and political change.

1 Bilateral agencies such as CIDA, SIDA, NORAD, JBIC, DFID and USAID have supported projects and programmes of international and local peace organisations such as CARE International, Save the Children (UK), Oxfam, FORUT, German Agro Action (GAA), and Medicins Sans Frontiers (MSF). In 2003, according to the Ministry of Finance and Planning (2003), Sweden disbursed $4.32 million to projects implemented by SIDA and to NGOs, of which 75 per cent was utilized for supporting the peace process of 2002-3, with the international organisations working at the grassroots level, by implementing projects like small-scale credit programmes, irrigation and basic housing and health.
Since without the LTTE’s support peaceful resolution of the conflict would not be possible and a political solution is the main aim of the donors, small bilateral donors have regularly interacted with the LTTE representatives directly during the peace process of 2002–2003. The NGOs’ peace-building activities took many forms depending on their focus and network at the local and the international level and played an important role in catalysing debate and discussion on various issues such as the peace process, democracy, human rights and peace-building. The local NGOs and research organisations such as the National Peace Council (NPC), Marga Institute, International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) and Sarvodaya have worked consistently to build peace by involving religious leaders, workers, women, youth and children in their programmes. A number of INGOs such as Oxfam, CARE, UNHCR and ICRC are working in the border areas and the conflict zone as a bridge between the civilians and the security forces and the LTTE.

Since 1995 a number of initiatives by the government with the help of the international actors have opened space for NGOs to do peace work. The 1994–1995 Kumaratunga-LTTE negotiations, the unilateral initiative by the government to put forward a proposal for devolution of powers to the regions, and the negotiations between the United National Front (UNF) government and the LTTE in 2002–2003 have opened space for advocacy and peace mobilisation work. At the same time, the willingness shown by the big donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) “to get involved in the peace process well before a permanent solution between the government and the LTTE has encouraged the NGOs’ peace activity in those areas” (Sriskandarajah 2003: 1).

Strategies implemented in support of peace process in Sri Lanka by peace NGOs are based on the premise that, previous attempts at conflict resolution, failed due to main focus on avoiding war and violence rather than addressing interests of grass root people. This approach has only aggravated the conflict rather than solving root causes of the conflict such as question of respect to ethnic identity and equal representation. This aspect of conflict resolution was often ignored by main parties to the conflict. In Sri Lanka’s protracted internal conflict people’s role was quite limited and insignificant due to continuous violence perpetrated by the state as well as militants on the society. Very often the role was limited to voting for a party promising peace. Donors perceived that, this whole approach of leaving people out of conflict resolution process would not help in achieving a sustainable peace. Therefore, donors’ particularly, small bilateral donors have funded peace activities of Non-governmental organisations with a hope that, participation of various sections will build sustainable peace.
The NGOs' peace activity has developed in response to the uncertainty and noncommittal attitude of the LTTE and the government to find a political solution. By participating in the peace talks both parties wanted to achieve certain aims and objectives of their own. According to Narapalasingham (2003), the LTTE was desperate to get rid of its international image as a terrorist organisation and wanted the international community to recognise it as a legitimate political organisation to administer the North-East. The government initiated peace talks with the LTTE to be able to redress the economic and social destruction in the country caused by seven years of intense war. In promoting the NGOs' effort for advancing the peace process, the donors hoped that the awareness generated about the benefits of a political solution to the conflict would help build the people's pressure on the government and the LTTE to opt for negotiations.

Advocacy and Mobilisation in Support of Peace

Mobilisation for Peace: Activities

Mobilising support for peace within Sri Lanka and at the international level during 1995–2003 was an important activity of the NGOs. By organizing workshops, visits to and from the North and the South, seminars, peace education, marches and demonstrations, the NGOs tried to foster communication between various ethnic communities.

The peace activities of the NGOs tried to change the people's perception on important questions such as identity, equal representation of all ethnic groups in the decision-making process and participation in the peace process. Since the resolution of the conflict through peace negotiations depends to a great extent on the support of the majority community, the NGOs worked consistently in the South. In the North-East the local NGOs had very limited space to work, due to the LTTE's opposition to peace work. The SLFP's campaign for political solution through negotiations with the LTTE before the 1994 elections boosted many organisations to organise marches, rallies and discussions throughout the country for peace. In her election campaign Kumaratunga boldly stated through the state media that "a political solution is the only answer to the ethnic problem, and if you kill Prabhakaran today to solve this
problem there will be many more Prabhakarans born tomorrow” (Senanayake 2004: 9).

Encouraged by this approach the NGOs organised, ‘on the eve of the International Human Rights Day in December 1994, thousands of peace activists and representatives of more than forty non-party formations. The NGOs also staged a massive peace rally in Colombo’ (Wickremasinghe 2001). Kumaratunga’s encouragement to the peace organisations also helped to raise funding and for proliferation of new organisations such as the NPC, the CPA and the Centre for Ethnic Studies (CES). The PA government also supported the peace activity through the National Integration Programme Unit (NIPU) of the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional Affairs, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration. According to Wickremasinghe (2001), Kumaratunga’s close links with left-liberal intellectuals in Sri Lanka, who have supported devolution of powers to regions, protection of human rights and a political solution to the conflict, shaped her thinking in this regard.

However, with the breakdown of the peace talks between the LTTE and the government in 1995 the NGO peace activity took a different turn. The PA government’s “War for Peace” strategy was accepted with grave reservations by the NGOs as it contradicted their campaign for political resolution of the conflict. The PA’s strategy of war with the LTTE, the NGOs believed, would isolate the Tamil community from the state. However, the government’s unilateral initiative to solve the problem through devolution of powers to the regions again opened the space for NGO activity. Since the power sharing arrangement between the centre and the provinces had been a contentious issue for many years, the NGOs had set aside their differences with the government by participating during 1997–1999 in “the government-sponsored Sudu Nelum movement and the Caravan programme, which focused on issues such as the unity of Sri Lanka, devolution and ethnic conflict” (Orjuela 2004: 134).

The PA’s effort at constitutional reforms during 1995–2000 encouraged the NGOs to initiate discussion on an alternative form of state system in Sri Lanka, which could accommodate the interests of the minorities. The NGOs also utilized the opportunity to instil certain ideas and principles among the various ethnic communities for
advancing a political resolution of the conflict. For instance, the CPA along with the Forum of Federations organised a series of seminars in 2002 with politicians, policymakers and academics, and discussed issues ranging from power sharing arrangements to mechanisms for the protection of the minorities. Almost all NGOs in Sri Lanka have a consensus on exploring federalism as a solution to the ethnic conflict. The PA's proposal for devolution of power and an agreement between the government and the LTTE during the peace talks in 2002 that the two sides would explore a federal solution to the conflict opened the doors for much debate with regard to the pros and cons of a federal form of government. Since then, according to Uyangoda (2005), the need for state reform for power sharing is recognised as an important component of the peace process.

The intensity of the war after 1995 promoted the thinking in the government as well among the opinion-makers in Sri Lanka that power sharing as an option needed to be explored to resolve the conflict. The NGOs played important role in generating debate on this matter. For instance, the CPA helped the government to draft a power-sharing framework. A major stumbling-block to consensus, however, was that the concept of federalism was approached differently by various parties to the conflict. The LTTE wanted the Northern and Eastern units merged as one administrative unit with greater autonomy to the region - a view later outlined in the ISGA proposals. The government, on the other hand, envisaged a much stronger role for the centre than the regional units. The Muslim community, in its turn, demanded an autonomous Eastern region, apprehensive that the merger of the Northern and the Eastern regions would lead to the domination of the LTTE.

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3 Since the 1980s there were attempts by the government to find a solution through power sharing. The Kumaratunga government's proposals for devolution powers in 1996, 1997 and the 2000 constitutional proposals were serious attempts to accommodate Tamil interests. However, due to pressure from Sinhalese hardliners and differences with the LTTE these proposals were not implemented.

4 In 2002 the UNF government produced two sets of proposals for an interim administration in the North-East, which the LTTE rejected. In 2003 the LTTE came up with its Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) proposals, which if implemented would have given the LTTE control over finance and security as well as on the entire administration of the North-East.

5 Power sharing arrangements imposed on people without a broad political consensus can end up in exacerbating the conflict, which was proved in the implementation of the 1987 agreement as well as during PA's devolution proposals. Since independence, the unitary state structure with tight central control has devolved minimum powers to provincial councils. Though provincial council system has worked in other parts of the country, in the North-East, it was virtually defunct due to war and has become a bone of contention between the government and the LTTE. Since, the issues of ethnicity and
The NGOs maintain that in a multiethnic society where territorial distinction of ethnic groups exists, a clear-cut division of powers between the centre and the provinces, and the abolition of executive presidency will pave the way for peaceful ethnic relations.\(^6\) They cite the federal systems in countries such as the US, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, India and Australia as successful examples of federalism (Pravada 1992). In 2000, to facilitate debate on constitutional reform, the CPA with other local NGOs organised a debate on the development of the constitutional process, involving leading personalities in the sphere of constitutional reforms, politics, governance and conflict resolution (CPA 2002). This initiative provided an opportunity and a platform to some sections of the Sri Lankan society to express their views on peace and constitutional reforms. Along with NGO-sponsored debates, research institutions such as the Social Scientist Association (SSA) have regularly brought out pamphlets on the issue of a federal state. For instance, the SSA pamphlet titled “A Unitary State, A Federal State or Two Separate States?”, released in 2003, has argued critically about the advantages and disadvantages of opting for a federal state.

Earlier in 1998, the National Alliance for Peace (NAP) was formed, as an umbrella organisation for 140 individual organisations to work for resolution of the ethnic conflict. The action plan of the NAP envisaged mass demonstrations throughout the country by all civil society actors to pressurize the government to opt for negotiations. According to Edrisinha (1998), ‘the formation of NAP was a tacit admission on the part of civil society that, it has come alive to its own apathy and has resolved commendably so, to launch on a campaign for peace country wide’. The timely intervention of civil society actors to set up a structure to launch country wide campaign was welcomed by many.

The NGO Sarvodaya has organized peace rallies, meditation and marches in the Sinhalese-dominated South to show the people’s support for peace. Established in 1958, Sarvodaya has been active in 15,000 villages of Sri Lanka. ‘After the 1983 riots

\(^6\) An amendment to the constitution requires two-thirds majority in parliament, followed by referendum. Given the polarization of Sri Lankan society on ethnic grounds, obtaining a two-thirds majority is a difficult exercise.
against the Tamils it launched the 5R programme (Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Reconciliation and Reawakening) in response to the increasing communal violence in the country’ (Ariyaratne 2000). Sarvodaya’s peace programmes used religion for taking forward the peace message. In 2000 March Sarvodaya organised a meditation gathering in Colombo to create, in the words of Sarvodaya leader Dr A.T. Ariyaratne, “a purified psychological sphere or a spiritual and mental environment ... that could provide the basis for peace” (Perera 2000: 4). In August 1999 Sarvodaya organized in Colombo a people’s peace initiative meeting with the participation of 1,00,000 people.

The peace activity during 1995–2000 was, however, limited to Sinhalese-dominated areas. Lack of trust and respect towards other ethnic groups has been one reason for the poor mobilisation of people for peace. To overcome this mistrust, the NGOs conducted workshops focusing on the youth, teachers and women, providing space for expressing opinion about various issues such as development, conflict and the ways to resolve the conflict. The “workshops conducted by local organisations such as Samadeepa Samaja Kendraya in Anuradhapura witnessed 95 per cent of female participation” (Jalmon 2004: 2). In the North-East, after the Army occupation of Jaffna City in 2000, four thousand people from sixty civic and religious organisations participated in a peace march, chanting slogans such as “Stop the war immediately”, “Start peace talks with third party mediation” and “Stop destroying our culture and education” (Perera 2000).

The peace negotiations between the government and the LTTE in 1994–1995 and 2002–2003 also opened the space for the people to express their desire for peace. The “presence of a large number of people to welcome the government delegation in 1995 and in 2001 the Pongu Tamil programmes initiated at the Jaffna University, against the government’s inaction over the disappearances and illegal detention of innocent Tamils were an expression of the people’s desire for peace” (Orjuela 2004: 130–1).

Along with these activities, research organisations such as MARGA, ICES, the SSA, and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) have contributed to the debate through publications and pamphlets. Peace activity in 1995-2000 was limited to Sinhalese
dominated areas. In the North-East, people took the initiative of expressing their desire for political solution through non-violent actions while the NGOs played very little role in people's mobilisation in the North-East.

*Advocacy for Peace: Activities*

The UNF government's willingness to pursue a different path to find a political solution to the conflict encouraged the NGOs' peace work. Immediately after coming to power, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe met British Prime Minister Tony Blair, addressed the European Parliament and met the Norwegian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs to discuss the internal conflict in Sri Lanka. While addressing the European Parliament in 2002 he said that "Sri Lanka's conflict was ignored, because conflict in such a small country had little impact or no impact on the whole world" (Perera 2002: 12). These activities resulted in some action on the part of donors such as the EU and UK. For instance, the EU came forward in a big way to support the rehabilitation activities in the war zone.

The NGOs have used strategies like issuing public statements through the media about the need for peace, lobbying with the politicians and the government, interacting with LTTE representatives, lobbying and reporting about the human rights situation in the country with foreign governments, and publication of reports and documents focusing on conflict resolution, which have become a source for the people as well as the foreign governments to understand conflict-related developments in Sri Lanka. One important aspect of various NGO publications and pamphlets released in this period was recognition of the LTTE as an important player to find a political solution.

In 2002 an independent research organisation, Social Indicator (SI), operating under the CPA board of directors, carried out a survey in Jaffna, funded by the CIDA through the Governance and Institutional Strengthening Project (GISP) of the University of Ottawa. "Three hundred people were interviewed on various issues ranging from conflict to development. It emerged from the survey that the majority of the people interviewed in Jaffna placed resolution of conflict as first priority (33.8 per cent), followed by the cost of living (18.4 per cent) and unemployment (15.4 per
The survey also revealed that around 60 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that international third-party involvement was essential to resolve the conflict. By publishing the survey reports, the CPA tried to give a voice to the people, which are rarely heard by the government. To educate the politicians about conflict resolution exercises in many conflict-ridden countries, peace organisations such as the NPC organised study tours to countries and regions such as Africa, Northern Ireland, Philippines and Bangladesh during the intense war between the government and the LTTE.

The NGOs with the help of international organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have addressed the issue of human rights consistently by issuing press statements, organising seminars, and publishing and preparing reports and documents. NGOs such as CPA have been consistently working to influence policymakers to look into human rights violations and make laws to deal with human rights protection.

In the North-East, only the ICRC and UNHCR work in LTTE-controlled areas, and have become the only source of information from the war zone. Their presence has facilitated the movement of displaced people in the war zone. By facilitating temporary cease-fires between the warring parties and by providing temporary relief to the victims of the war these organisations have been contributing much to normalize the situation on the ground. In reporting human rights violations by the government as well as the LTTE they faced the problem that their reports would be censured by the party whose human rights violations were highlighted. Also, human rights violations continued unabated in spite of the NGOs' efforts. Innocent Tamils continued to be detained on suspicion whenever there was a blast or an assassination.
bid by the LTTE. Human rights activists Kumar Ponnambalam, Neelan Thiruchelvan and the journalist Milvaganam Nimal Rajan became selected targets for killing, highlighting the threat to human rights activists in Sri Lanka. Presence of the SLMM and international agencies in LTTE controlled areas has resulted in assurance by the LTTE not to recruit children into the organisation. In 1998 the LTTE gave a commitment not to recruit children under the age of 18 as soldiers. In 2002 the LTTE reiterated this commitment to the Director General of UNICEF and released 49 children to a transit and rehabilitation centre in Kilinochchi in 2003, but immediately thereafter abducted nearly 25 children in the Eastern town of Valaichenai (Sarvanathan 2002).

Repeated campaigns and pressure by peace organisations and donors on the LTTE to stop the recruitment of children as soldiers, did not deter the organisation from doing so. The ‘LTTE also continued its tactics of controlling the Tamil community through the assassination of Tamil politicians, ethnic cleansing of the Muslims, extortion, and torture and killing of Tamil civilians who opposed its brutality’ (Sarvanathan 2002).

Ceasefire agreement and international presence many believed would lead to lesser violations of human rights. However, continued human rights violations by the LTTE and the government has only established the fact that, only by increasing awareness among the public about their rights, can there possibly be resistance against such violations.

The CFA provided a limited opportunity to the NGOs to do peace work even in the North-East. To mobilise the public in support of the peace process, they took schoolchildren, religious leaders, journalists and politicians to the conflict-prone regions to make them aware of the conditions existing in the war zone. For instance, NPC and CPA took the Sinhalese to Tamil refugee camps to witness the plight of the people living in the camps devoid of basic education and health facilities.

Local NGOs have a much wider network than the INGOs among all sections of society such as religious leaders, teachers, workers and private sector employees. At the same time, international agencies such as the UN have a wider base in conflict-prone regions and are allowed to work even during the war. Collaboration between the local and international NGOs has helped in implementing peace activities even in LTTE-dominated areas. For instance, in 2003, the Uva Community Development
Centre in association with thirteen NGOs launched a peace-building programme sponsored by Facilitating Local Initiatives for Conflict Transformation (FLICT), an agency funded by the German and UK governments. The programmes tried to integrate peace work with development work and produced good results. The people participated in many community development programmes linking different ethnic communities and were also able to discuss many peace-related issues.

Another example is the support given by the German Agro Association (GAA) to Seva Lanka Foundation (SLF) to work in conflict-affected regions. The SLF has used religious leaders to send a message of peace to various ethnic communities as the people can be easily mobilized on religious grounds. However, in the LTTE-controlled areas, the NGOs' work has been limited to relief and rehabilitation rather than mobilizing the people for peace. One organisation which played a constructive role in generating awareness among the people about the actual ground situation with regard to various issues such as education, health and human rights is the University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna (UTHR). Its publications and reports have become an authentic source from the war zone of the country, for the government as well as for international agencies and organisations.

The Role of the Media
Media can play a significant role in changing public opinion on issues of conflict and peace. Some of the positive aspects of the media are it links people, spreads knowledge, promotes awareness among people, it helps in analysing information and it can be used as a means of social control. Media can also be used for negative purposes by the parties involved in conflict by building public opinion against particular ethnic community, fabricating news to divert attention from real issues concerning people or sensationalising issues, unmindful of the social costs. The media in Sri Lanka face many obstacles to freedom of expression. However, the Sri Lankan media have managed to retain their autonomy and promoted peace-building programmes with the help of the NGOs. The radio and the electronic media aired programmes such as Kalai Palam and Kala Palama 2002, which were organized to train youth from all the communities.
Censorship of the private media during the elections has become a phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Both the SLFP and the UNP have used the media for election campaign. For instance, on 17 November 1999 the SLFP made a proposal that private electronic media should not be allowed to air any programme related to the elections, and the proposal was approved by the government. The state television Rupavahini and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation were given the right to broadcast election-related news. Due to pressure from civil society groups, the Commissioner of Election withdrew the ban (CPA 2002b: 9). Government of Sri Lanka has put lot of restrictions on media freedom, to divert the public opinion from the actual situation in the North-East. Censorship on the media in Sri Lanka, has virtually curtailed the freedom of impartial reporting and civil society groups saw right to information as an important tool to overcome this hurdle. In 2003, the Media Monitoring Unit of the CPA in partnership with the British Council, Sri Lanka implemented a project to advocate the Right to Information amongst journalists, plantation workers, IDPs, and NGOs.

However, the media can also play a partisan role, damaging constructive activity. Some newspapers in Sri Lanka have highlighted the activities of forces that stood against any meaningful solution to the conflict rather than the activities of NGOs for peace. For example, in 2000 The Island, a leading newspaper in the South, published a detailed letter addressed to the Prime Minister of Norway by the National Movement against Terrorism (NMT) which was handed over to the Norwegian Ambassador in Colombo. The letter said in part:

What is occurring in Sri Lanka is not an ethnic conflict between two ethnic groups. It is indeed a unilateral ethnic attack by one terrorist organisation against the majority community ... there is a deep suspicion among the people of the country your final objective will be destabilisation of Sri Lanka ... your government has assisted with millions of dollars the so-called “peace movements” including government propaganda movements such as “Sudu Nelum” and NIPU. The 1999 Wanni debacle was totally due to the demoralisation propaganda carried out by the NIPU. (The Island 2000: 9).

By publishing reports and articles against the peace process and by not giving adequate publicity to the peace work, the media have also tried to undermine the efforts of the international actors at peace-building. For instance, the Sarvodaya peace gathering in Colombo in 1999, which was attended by 100,000 people, got very little
coverage in the Sinhalese and English media. One reason for not covering the peace work by the media, according to Orjuela, might be the competition between the media and the NGOs, which share the same space as a critical third force and watchdog of the state. The “NGO sector has been prospering with foreign funding whereas, the media sector suffers from extreme lack of funds and restrictions by the government” (Orjuela 2004:181). At the same time, restrictions on travel to the conflict zone have also affected the reporting on conflict and peace.

Appealing for peace and taking a stand about the way conflict has to be solved, was not an easy step for NGOs. Since the media can play a major role in moulding public opinion with regard to political developments in the country, NGOs have organised workshops and seminars to sensitize journalists about the conflict. Therefore, NPC took journalists to the North-East, funded by European Council in 2001. Since, media can play a constructive role in generating a peace movement in the country, journalists were taken to Jaffna for a five day visit to gain ground experience. The trip served three objectives. “One is it has provided journalists from Sinhalese and English media, firsthand information of the real situation. Secondly, it provided a forum for the participants from South to engage in an open dialogue with representatives from a cross section of the population from North. Thirdly, it has served the main objective to disseminate the reality of the situation in Jaffna to the people of the South via media” (Mendis 2002: 23). Trips also provided the opportunity to interact with local people bearing the burden of the conflict for almost 25 years directly.

8 Journalists met various groups in Jaffna such as teachers and student union members, senior citizens group, Trade Union Leaders, Centre for Women and development, Fishermen’s Association and also government officials.

9 During discussions with local people, many pressing issues of people came to the fore. Discussions ‘at Centre for Women’s Development revealed a fact that, around 10,000 women have been rendered widows as a consequence of war and more than 60% of the houses in Jaffna were seriously damaged’ (Nathan 2002). The delegation’s visit to Jaffna hospital the only functioning health institution in that peninsula revealed that, due to restrictions on medicine and travel to the North-East, drugs sent from Colombo takes about six months to reach Jaffna. Delay in payment of health workers and doctors have also led to migration. Thus, shortage of doctors and teachers has severely damaged the education and health system in the North. Apart from generating awareness, another objective of organising visits, was to generate trust among various ethnic groups.
Response to the Peace Movement
The NGOs' peace work was done during 1995–2003 both during a period of intense war and a relatively peaceful period due to the CFA. Even though the NGOs did not involve themselves in the political affairs directly, their programmes which tried to influence the perspective of the people on various issues such as constitutional reforms, human rights and the peace process faced a mixed response from the society at large.

Government Response
A prevailing notion among the politicians that the majoritarian state has to be protected at any cost has made the State suppress any protest or demand for better opportunities. The brutal suppression of the JVP’s and the Tamil political parties’ demands in the 1980s are an example. The government’s view of NGOs also is coloured by the majoritarian suspicion of protest. Even though the NGOs’ advocacy campaigns and social work for betterment of living conditions have made the State withdraw from welfare work, the government has always tried to keep the NGOs under its control. The donors’ willingness to divert considerable amount of funds to the NGOs citing conflict as a reason has led to the imposition of rules and regulations on NGOs. In 1990 the Premadasa government appointed the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into NGOs to look at the laws and institutional arrangements for monitoring and regulating the activities, including funding by local and foreign sources. The Commission held public hearings against Sarvodaya, World Vision, and the Eye Donation Society. The Commission handed its report to the President on 11 December 1993, and based on its recommendations the government announced that non-registration was subject to punishment. The government accused World Vision of making conversions to Christianity. Many civil society organisations believed that the Commission acted in an arbitrary manner (Pravada 1993). The report defined an NGO as

an organisation of Non-Governmental nature, is dependent on public contributions, grants from the government or local or foreign donations, its main objective should be the upliftment of the poor, relief, training and research ... all NGOs falling within this had to register with the Director of Social Services, and compelled to
give details of every disbursement, together with the name and addresses of every person to whom such disbursements had been made. (Pravada 1993: 6–7).

The government has also from time to time tried to muzzle the NGOs, fearing that their reporting on the conflict would damage the country’s reputation at international forums. For example, Peace Brigade International (PBI) refused the government’s demand to submit its situation reports from Eastern Sri Lanka for editing before publication, leading to the closure of PBI in Sri Lanka (Foster 2003: 155). The imposition of the Public Security Ordinance Act on 4 May 2000, which allows for increased censorship and the banning of public demonstrations have further, constrained the NGOs. The change of governments during this period also affected the work of the NGOs. For instance, the PA government’s “War for Peace” strategy displaced many in the North-East, leading to the breakdown of the economy by 2001. In that scenario, the organisations diverted resources for development work more than peace work, particularly in the conflict-affected areas. In contrast, the UNF government of Ranil Wickremasinghe maintained a cordial relationship with the NGOs and encouraged the local NGOs like NPC and CPA to generate awareness among the people about the peace process. The ‘UNF government’s strategy of non-confrontation with the LTTE to bring peace, has opened more space for peace organisations even to work in conflict-affected areas to mobilise people from below for peace’ (Perera 2002: 195).

**Sinhalese Hardliners’ Response**

Almost all the NGOs in Sri Lanka are foreign funded. The Sinhalese nationalist parties such as the JVP and the JHU have always opposed the activities of foreign-funded NGO. The nationalist political parties have consistently campaigned among the public about the legitimacy of the peace organisations on the premise that the ideas and principles adopted by them are mostly influenced by the funding agencies, which would work against the interests of Sri Lanka. The hardliners’ campaign is mainly based on nationalism and social justice for the majority ethnic community. Hence, they regularly criticize the NGOs’ campaign for change in the unitary state structure and the demand for accommodation of the minority interests. A report of the

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10 The JHU (Jathika Hela Urumaya) was formed in 2004 by monks. It was registered over 250 electoral constituencies and captured 9 seats in Parliament (Devotta 2006: 165).
Sinhalese Commission (2002) accused foreign-funded NGOs such as NPC, Marga Institute, ICES, Social Scientist Association (SSA), Sarvodaya, Inter Religious Peace Foundation and International Alert, as having secret connections with foreign organisations bent on destabilizing the country through reports and pamphlets which are anti-national.

The JVP’s response to the peace work in the South has always been always violent, including attacking peace rallies and marches and NGO personnel. JVP’s strong position against peace talks was expressed by its leader Tilwin Silva in a mass rally in 2002 at Colombo as follows:

We are ready to sacrifice our lives to defeat the so-called peace talks brokered by the imperialistic Yankees and Britishers. ... this mass rally is not to frighten Chandrika and Ranil who are trapped in imperialistic forces. We will walk village to village and house to house canvassing people to stand against the ongoing false peace process ... and Norway is just the cat’s paw used by the USA and UK to divide our country. (Indrajit 2000: 7)

The JVP’s network in every village and its strong ideological base among rural Sinhalese youth has been a strong hurdle for the peace work. Even though the JVP and JHU could not form a government on their own, their substantial influence on the youth and on universities in the South has given them space in parliament. At the same time, the SLFP and the UNP have used the support base of these parties from time to time to form the government at the centre as well as to oppose any meaningful solution to the ethnic conflict. On one hand the UNP opposed the devolution package of Kumaratunga in 2000 with the help of Sinhalese nationalist parties and on the other hand SLFP toed the line of JVP and JHU to oppose the UNP initiative of talks with the LTTE in 2002 and also the CFA.

The peace movement in Sri Lanka as well as international peace organisations premised their efforts to find a political solution to the conflict on negotiations with the LTTE and devolution. This position of the international community and NGOs was criticised by the nationalists who felt that LTTE can never be trusted and for
safeguarding the sovereignty of the country it was necessary to militarily eradicate the organisation (Devotta 2006: 160).

These organisations campaigned against donors such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland including Norway which is a facilitator to the peace process arguing that, agencies supported by these donors will destabilise the country. Presence of large number of Tamils in Norway and its policy of engaging directly with the LTTE to engage the organisation in peace talks was not received well. The hard-line stance of the nationalist parties also gained ground among large sections of people leading to a peculiar situation wherein almost 90% of the NGOs peace work is concentrated in Sinhalese dominated South despite the conflict being primarily restricted to the North-East.

**LTTE’s Response to Peace Work**

Areas under control of LTTE witnessed minimum peace work. Conflict and threat from LTTE to civilians who wished to work with NGOs has made many to migrate for better opportunities. Torture and forced recruitment of youth into the LTTE left little freedom for individuals to work with the NGOs in LTTE-controlled areas. The NGOs’ insistence and campaigns for political resolution of the conflict go against the LTTE’s objective of achieving “Tamil Eelam”, if possible through military means. Even though LTTE occasionally participated in peace negotiations with the government, it was not compelled to pursue a non-violent path to achieve its goal. The LTTE formed the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), so that, international aid could be channelled through its administrative structure prevailing in North-East. According to Orjuela (2004), local organisations in the North-East, which are under LTTE control lack integrity and freedom to implement programmes and projects. Since, NGOs campaigning for peace are not allowed in LTTE dominated areas, only international agencies and organisations could implement projects and programmes related to relief and rehabilitation.
Constraints on the Peace Movement

The main constraint to peace work in the conflict-affected areas in the North-East was displacement and poverty. The people caught between the government security forces and the LTTE do not get a chance to express their desire to live a dignified life. Displacement resulting from High Security Zones (HSZ) and loss of fertile land for military purposes posed challenges to the peace organisations’ work. About 40 per cent of the population in Jaffna peninsula is displaced due to war and 60 per cent of them live in a permanently resettled situation. Income-generating activities in agriculture, fisheries, small industries and trade sectors have also closed, leaving many people dependent on food relief assistance provided by the government, amounting to Rs. 1260 per month (Karthikeyan 2002). The ubiquitous presence of military check-points and military camps has left very little space for civil society activity in the conflict-affected areas. Church-based organisations could mobilise people for peace in the LTTE-controlled areas because the Catholic Church has legitimacy in the area.

In Sri Lanka people have been mostly mobilised on ethnic grounds, particularly since the 1980s. Decline of the trade union movement in the 1970s and the brutal suppression of these protests by the State on security grounds have only resulted in decline of mobilisation on issue-based movements. Even though peace rallies and marches attracted the educated sections in the urban areas, many have argued that the peace movement lacked a mass base in Sri Lanka. The Tamil and the Muslim communities were least represented in these programmes. According to Liyanage (2006), the NGOs failed to attract new groups and persons to their programmes, because most of the projects have targeted only some sections.

Peace organisations tend to work with the people and groups who can be easily targeted. For instance, the NPC programme of educating politicians on conflict resolution process in other conflict-ridden countries did not produce any result. Orjuela’s (2004) study based on many years of fieldwork demonstrates that there was no significant change when it comes to the politicians’ perspective on the ethnic conflict, despite engaging them in peace programmes. This is because politicians in Sri Lanka are conditioned by the party’s ideologies and programmes and tend to be
more loyal to the organisation based on a mass base than to the NGOs that lack legitimacy in society. The politicians who participated in the NGOs’ programmes chose to ignore the basic conflict resolution education obtained in the peace programmes, and publicly participated in programmes against the peace process organized by the Sinhalese hardliners. Thus, the programme design of the NPC failed despite its good intentions. In the view of Liyanage, the only time politicians can be influenced is before the elections, which was evident in the pre-1994 programmes of the PA and pre-2001 programmes of the UNF (Liyanage 2006: 287).

The peace organisations’ reports and statements on political developments in the country have to some extent influenced public opinion. Censorship of the media and on news from the war zone has blocked information about the real political developments in the country. However, the Sri Lankan media have taken different positions with regard to the peace process and the NGOs’ peace work. Some newspapers expressed reservations about the NGOs’ position on the unitary state structure and have regularly questioned the wisdom of embarking on a path which would inevitably end up changing the nature of the unitary state structure (Weerakoon 2006).

The NGOs’ campaign for a federal solution to the conflict during 1996–1999 was mainly encouraged by the government’s willingness to find a solution to a longstanding contentious issue. The government’s cooperation helped in organizing workshops and discussions on this issue along with the research organisations’ publications on federalism. The peace movement during 1995–2003 to some extent depended on the government in place and changed its programmes and implementation to suit the situation. Many NGOs could not criticize openly the government’s “War for Peace” strategy, and immediately participated in government-sponsored programmes. However, in the later part of 1998 the NGOs realized the importance of pursuing their own agenda, and organized programmes accordingly. This was because the PA’s stand on devolution gradually changed due to pressure from the Sinhalese hardliners. The government’s reluctance to change the unitary structure of the State in the 2000 constitutional proposals and the LTTE’s unclear position on a
federal form of government, even though it agreed to explore a federal solution, have become a challenge to NGOs advocating federalism.11

The NGOs’ campaign for promoting the peace process has also suffered due to lack of the leading Sinhalese political parties’ consensus on the way the peace talks should proceed. During 1995–2003 the initiatives taken by one party in power were opposed by the party in opposition. Recurrent misunderstandings between President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe on various issues also demoralized the people. The limitations on their intervention in the political affairs of the country left the NGOs as mere spectators of the political developments.

After the political instability created by Kumaratunga’s takeover of defence and communication portfolios, even the donors who consistently encouraged the NGO peace activity in the country expressed disappointment over the lack of trust between the main political parties. The Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen announced in Colombo on 15 November 2003 that “Norway will go home and wait as there is no clarity about who is holding responsibility for the continuation of the Cease-Fire Agreement” (Longanathan 2003: 9). These developments showed clearly that even the pressure from the international community had minimum impact on the agendas of the Sinhalese political parties. The lack of consensus among the major Sinhalese political parties also made it difficult to convince people in the Sinhalese dominated areas to mobilise for peace. Efforts by NGOs like the NPC to change the mindset of the political leadership by taking them on a trip to other conflict-ridden countries were not very effective. In the highly politicized Sri Lankan society, the politicians, who are responsible for creating cleavages along ethnic and religious lines by wooing voters with innovative strategies and slogans, have much greater legitimacy than NGOs working for peace. The mechanical attitude in implementing programmes is also a reason for the failure to make a lasting impression on people.

One flaw of the peace work in Sri Lanka is that it has repeatedly targeted the same group of people, mostly the educated sections and the urban population. The peace

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11 Terms such as “homeland”, “internal self-determination”, “regional autonomy” are used on various occasions by the LTTE. These are interpreted by the Sinhalese hardliners as the LTTE’s noncommittal attitude to the federal form of government.
organisations' failure to link various issues that come up with peace work has also affected their functioning. At the same time, the people working in NGOs in Sri Lanka are mostly Western educated and have liberal views on many issues which do not match with the ground realities. Even though the organisations have their networks in the rural areas, most of the head offices are concentrated in Colombo and give direction on programme implementation. The gap in understanding complex ethnic realities on the ground has affected the work.

Another constraint to peace work is that the peace movement started as a movement against human rights violations by the government. MIRJE played an important role in initiating this concept but could not really develop itself as a mass movement. This was because the availability of foreign funding has made the organisations develop programmes and projects according to the donors' policies and directions. Timeframes for every project, including peace projects, have developed a bureaucratic structure in many organisations, in the process ignoring the real issues on the ground. The competition between various NGOs also has become a big constraint in peace work.

**Conclusion**

The NGOs' advocacy and mobilisation activities had minimum impact on society, despite having a genuine agenda for resolution of the conflict. One reason for failing to make an impact on society was the way the peace work is conducted. Most of the peace organisations depended on foreign funding for implementing programmes and projects. Since the delivery of funds depended on the organisations' ability to deliver quickly and show quick results, long-term planning in peace work was not possible. At the same time, the State's restrictions on the media and censorship hampered peace work, in the sense that the positions taken by the organisations on the issues of human rights and government policies have been carefully drafted so that they would not invite trouble from the government.

Also, the peace activities were confined to the urban areas, mostly Colombo. The majority of the national and international organisations working for peace have their headquarters in Colombo. This, many argue, is a debacle for the peace movement in
Sri Lanka. Lack of strong networks in the rural areas is another hindrance for effective peace work. Local politicians and activists command more respect from society and are able to mobilize the people in large numbers for political meetings than NGOs having an agenda of conflict resolution and peace. The Sinhalese nationalists’ campaign against the NGOs, which impinged on Sinhalese rural youth, could not be countered effectively by the NGO workers. NGO workers were seen as toeing to Western ideas and principles than for the culture and traditions of Sri Lanka. Where high rates of unemployment and underdevelopment exist, peace education through workshops and seminars had minimum effect on the people.

However, the impact of the peace work on society was not a total washout. Peace marches, demonstrations and peace education sent a message to the government as well as the LTTE that the people wanted peace through political means. Peace gatherings, particularly since 1999, put a lot of pressure on the government to review the “War for Peace” strategy. That was the reason for both the PA and UNF governments’ efforts to involve the international community in the peace process.