Message from the Chairperson.

I take great pleasure in sharing with you the work and accomplishments of Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action and the Association of War Affected Women.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Her Excellency the President, the Honorable Prime Minister, Mr. Bradman Weerakoon the Secretary to the Prime Minister, Former Deputy Minister of National Integration Hon. Dilan Perera, Mr. Pulithevan of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, The International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Pierre Barras Protection Coordinator of the ICRC Colombo Office, His Excellency John Westborg the Ambassador for Norway in Sri Lanka, The Sri Lankan Army, and all individuals and institutions, who have in one way or another helped us, and last but not least we remember with much gratitude our advisors for their useful advice and our members who have been a great encouragement in all difficult situations and who shared, the joy and sorrow throughout this struggle, for the kind cooperation extended to us at all times.

Special thanks goes to Shalini Gunawardena, Taylor Beach and Venura Parua for helping make this publication a reality.

Thank you,

Visaka Dharmadasa

Committee of the AWAW at a press conference

Who we are:
A group of more than two thousand women from across Sri Lanka directly affected by the war; their sons, husbands missing/missing in action, killed, or disabled due to the war. AWAW is deeply committed to seeing an end to this meaningless war and achieving a sustainable peace.
Our main goal:
To achieve peace through socio-economic development enlisting the active participation of war affected women.

Our members:
Sri Lankan women who have been directly or indirectly affected by the war; their husbands, sons, fathers, or brothers killed, missing, or disabled due to the war or they themselves disabled or displaced.

Background

PARENTS OF SERVICEMEN MISSING IN ACTION ASSOCAITION OF WAR AFFECTED WOMEN

In September 1998, when the Kilinochchi Sri Lankan Army complex was attacked and overrun by the Tamil Tigers 609 Sri Lankan Army personnel were reported missing in action. This high figure served as a call to action for the parents and family members of the missing men.

In October 1998, parents of the missing military personnel along with villagers from Walgampaya Danture held a candlelight vigil to bless those missing as well as to draw the general public’s attention to the issue. At this very successful event we proposed that on a specified day the whole country light a lamp to bless the missing and ask for their speedy return home.

In November 1998, a small group of missing personnel’s parents came together to discuss ways and means of addressing the issue. The group agreed that all necessary steps should be taken to know the fate of those reported missing, as well as to secure the release of all detainees. It was further agreed that only by bringing peace to this country can further disappearances be prevented. The Association of Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action (PSMIA) was formed to work towards peace from the heart of the conflict – the battlefront.

Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action proposed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) register all missing individuals and initiate tracing requests for them. The ICRC Colombo delegation, however, informed us that there was no provision to open tracing requests without official recognition of the missing by their commanding force. We learned that the Sri Lankan Army takes more than six months to give such information to the ICRC as it requires a lengthy process involving the Court of Inquiry. An ICRC brochure regarding missing clearly states those disappearances must be reported within six months for effective results. We found this situation disturbing and set forth to ensure the issue was addressed. PSMIA wrote a letter to the head of the Colombo ICRC delegation, visited the Sri Lankan Army Headquarters, and met the Director of Personnel Administration requesting him to take the necessary steps to speed up the process. By the end of December 1998, the Ministry of Defense provided the ICRC with a list of those missing from Kilinochchi.

To announce the formation of our organization we held a flower offering ceremony on the 27th of March in Gatambe, Kandy. All families of those missing from Kilinochchi were invited. An estimated 800 people from across the country attended bringing thousands of flowers. Various
donors provided sounds, food, and refreshment for the occasion. Buddhist and Catholic priests addressed the gathering along with poetry readings by mothers of those missing in action. After the offering the flowers were collected and floated down the Mahaweli River. Thousands of flowers floating on the gentle waters were a deeply moving sight. TNL TV provided coverage of the event. At the end of the meeting ICRC’s mailing address and telephone number was given to all parents for registration at the ICRC Colombo office. A five member committee was then formed to carry on the work of the organization.

One of our primary goals is to reduce the high number of missing servicemen. This number is partly due to Sri Lankan Governmental authorities’ lack of interest in identifying dead bodies. PSMIA hand delivered letters to the ICRC and the Sri Lankan Army explaining the urgency of the situation and suggesting steps to reduce the number of those missing in action. We suggested the ICRC take still and video photographs of all the bodies upon contact, comparing them with photographs on file for verification of the dead. We also asked the ICRC collect all items which could be used for identification and most importantly to advise all combatants to wear and respect identification discs (dog tags).

We requested the Sri Lankan Army wear identification discs at all times, irrespective of their station. We asked that all service personnel have their dental records and personnel details in computerized and securely stored files that all possible means of identification by family members be kept, that the Sri Lankan Army take still and video photos of the bodies, and most importantly, that they promptly accept the bodies before they begin to decompose. Finally, we asked the ICRC, LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army to agree on a mode of transfer for bodies so that a plan of action is in place.

In addition to these suggestions, PSMIA requested that the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE follow the Law of War and International Humanitarian Law regarding the treatment of wounded and captured personnel.

We strongly feel that wearing and respecting identification discs will reduce the number of missing; therefore, one of our major projects is to ensure that the combatants from both sides do so. We have prepared a booklet featuring photographs of soldiers wearing the identification discs with a request in English, Sinhala, and Tamil that they wear and respect the tags for the sake of their families.

The booklet was launched in Anuradhapura on the 22nd of October, 1999. Participants included the Deputy Minister for National Integration, Mr. Dilan Perera, the Brigade Commander of the Anuradhapura Sri Lankan Army, the Sri Lankan Army Director of Additional Directory of Welfare, as well as many senior officers of the Army, Navy, and Air Force and police officials. The audience was a massive crowd of more than 3,000 family members of those reported missing in action. Nine hundred gas balloons were sent by the parents with messages of peace to the Northern areas. This was the first occasion that the parents of servicemen called for peace in public. That same day we sent a copy of the booklet together with a request letter to the LTTE leader, Mr. Prabakaran.

It is certain that most of the soldiers who are reported missing are dead. Eventually, when mothers receive the news that their loved ones are no more they will need a place to share their feelings about the loss. For this purpose as well as to establish a connection with the mothers of Northern and Eastern areas, we decided to create the Association of War Affected
Women (AWAW). The primary objective of the AWA is to achieve peace through socio-economic development with active participation of the affected women.

Above members at a meeting in Anuradhapura and below at a demonstration in Colombo
ASSOCIATION OF WAR AFFECTED WOMEN

We are all aware that Sri Lankan people are undergoing severe hardships due to the ongoing war. Women are the most affected either directly or indirectly due to it. These affected women can be classified into two main groups. The first is women whose next of kin is dead, disabled or missing in action, the other is the next of kin who is a civilian has befallen to one of these unfortunate situations due to the war. The main objective of our Association is to help these women to integrate into the society from their isolated situation by addressing their social, economical and mental problems.

And achieve Peace through Socio-Economic development with the active participation of the War Affected Women

We expect to implement various programs with the cooperation of the civil society to achieve this goal.

We who are war affected do understand well, the pain that all affected women have to undergo... Let’s act collectively to win our rights and privileges. Let’s use the courage we gain through our pain and work towards a Peaceful Tomorrow for all of us!
Organizational Structure of The Association of War Affected Women

Ven. Dr. Kamburugamuwe Vajira  
Rt. Rev. Dr. Rayappu Joseph  
Ven Sivambalagaswewa, Vinalasara

Mr. Somenath Parta  
Mr. Ananda Dhamarathna

Consultants

Visaka Dhamadasa  
Chairperson

Wasanthis Weerasekara  
Secretary

A. Withanage  
Financial Director

Kanthis Kalansuriya  
Mrs. Aladeniya  
R.D.G. Amaralatha

Committee Members
Our work and achievements in brief:

1998 November  * Pahan Pooja at Danture Raja Maha Viharaya
1999 February  * Pahan Pooja and joint religious service around the Kandy Lake
1999 March    * Flowers offerings at Gatambe to invoke blessing for those who are missing in action and Peace
              * Letter to the SL Army with ten proposals to identify the dead Bodies
              * Letter to the ICRC with three requests to identify the dead bodies.
1999 April    * Letter to the ICRC to expedite the procedure of opening Tracing requests
              * Letter to the SL Army to expedite the procedure of Court of inquiry.
1999 July     * Meeting with the Deputy Minister of National Integration
              * Meeting to call for Never a 83 July Ever
1999. August  * Presentation by the chairperson at the Youth Peace camps
1999. October * Launch of the Booklet of Identification Discs
              * Meeting in Anuradhapura. First public call for Peace by Parents of Servicemen by way of Peace messages in gas balloons sent to North.
2000 February * Protest calling the Government to help to secure the release of fasting Pows held by the LTTE
              * Meeting the Norwegian Ambassador
2000 May      * Meeting Her Excellency the President
2000 July     * Joint meeting of Associations of the Missing in action
2000 August   * March for Peace in Colombo
              * Establishment of AAWAW
2000 September* March for Peace in Kandy
2000 November * March for Peace in Matara
              * Attending the Colloquium of Women Waging Peace
              * Meetings with the Ambassadors and High Commissioners of US, UK, Canada, and France
2000 December * Meeting in Colombo and letters to the President, Opposition Leader, LTTE and Norway Ambassador
              * Visit to Mannar and Pesalai speaking to the displaced. 2001 March
2001 May - Dec* Launching of Mobilizing mothers for Peace “signature Campaign” meetings in every district.
2001 June     * Attending Women Waging Peace Meeting in Kthmandu
2001 August   * Presentation at the IIMCR symposium at The Hague,
2002 January  * Signature handing over and peace march
              * Letters to the Prime minister and the President as well to LTTE requesting freedom of movement, freedom to worship for all in any religious place, right to life for all.

              * Kilinochchi meeting with the LTTE upon their invitation on the release of 10 detainees
2000 March
* Track 11 level Dialogue process launched with Berghof foundation for conflict studies and IIMCR

2002 April
* Participated in Lucarno process in Murten CH.

2002 June
* Participated in the running workshop for the conference “The Missing” organized by the ICRC in Geneva
* Members of AWAW meet members of the Mothers Front and jointly demonstrate calling the release of all detainees

* Met Hon. Prime Minister with the members of Jaffna Mothers front
* Met the ICRC delegates with the members of Jaffna Mothers front.

2002 July
* Prime Minister’s office to get the list of detainees with Mothers front of Jaffna

2002 September
* Met LTTE with the members of the Association
* Jaffna visit by the members to meet and a day of reconciliation with mothers of Jaffna

2002 October
* 2nd meeting of Conflict transformation dialogue in Jaffna

2002 November
* Participated the Woman Waging Peace colloquium

2002 December
* Presentation in Kathmandu workshop on Human rights

2003 February
* ICRC Conference of “The Missing” in Geneva

Achievements

1. ICRC change their regulations to register a MIA without the official request by the force they belonged.
2. SL Army has requested their soldiers to wear and respect the Identification discs
3. LTTE handed over dead bodies of soldiers with the identification discs
4. Greater awareness of the necessity of wearing the identification discs at all levels.
5. SL have started taking dental records of all personnel
6. More emphasis on identifying the dead bodies of soldiers
7. ICRC is promoting the wearing and respecting the identification discs
8. The President agreed to bury the unidentified bodies of soldiers instead of cremating them
9. Better welfare facilities for the families of MIA. KIA and disabled soldiers
10. LTTE agrees for the parents of Pows to visit them in Feb.2000
11. Mothers are aware of the cruelty of the war and are ready to work for peace even in the remote villages
12. Women of border villages are very much interested in working for peace.
13. LTTE invites the Association to participate in the release of ten POWS.
14. Closer personnel friendships and understanding with the LTTE
15. Invitation to engage in Children’s health and welfare work in LTTE controlled areas
16. Sri Lankan Army agrees to bury the bodies instead of cremating. Respect and mark the grave sites of all fallen combatants.
17. The list of detainees was handed over by the Prime Minister’s secretary
18. Building closer bonds with mothers across the divide.
19. Joint action to resolve common problems by AWAW and Mothers front of Jaffna
20. Better understanding by the influential individuals across the divide.
21. LTTE meet mothers assure the support for AWAW activities.
What we do:

Promotion of Identification Discs (Dog Tags) among the soldiers and combatants.

It is clear that the high number of servicemen missing in action is due to large numbers of unidentified dead soldiers. We believe that identification discs are the most effective identification procedure available and seek to promote their use by the all soldiers and combatants.

In a meeting with the respective directorate of the Sri Lankan Army we found that soldiers had many reasons for not wearing the discs, such as discomfort and superstition. We do not find these reasons valid, especially when weighed against the pain of missing soldiers’ families. We also found a lack of commitment on the part of the authorities to identify bodies as they do not seem to understand how such situations of not knowing the fate of loved ones can hurt families, and through them society as a whole.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provided materials such as specific articles from the Geneva Conventions concerning identification procedures. Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action then prepared a booklet in Sinhala, Tamil, and English highlighting the importance of identification discs. This booklet was then distributed to the SL Army and the LTTE for dissemination among their cadres. As the ICRC has a mandate for this work and is better equipped to carry it out, they have adopted the project and carried it further. We are very happy to report that now the majority of Sri Lankan Armed Forces and LTTE combatants wear and respect identification discs.
The Association of War Affected Women launched a project where Mothers of Sri Lanka could join together to sign a petition calling the Government and the LTTE to put an end to this meaningless war immediately and protect their children.

This project represented the first mass request for peace in Sri Lanka. Also, the mothers who signed became more engaged in the struggle for peace, thus bringing a very important change of attitude in our society, Peoples concern of the war. This concern through awareness will pave the way for further support for peace. The project targeted grassroots level women, enhancing their awareness of the reality of war and enlisting their help in building a mass antiwar opinion in this country, beginning with their families. We hope this project will help achieve peace through awareness and understanding.

On Mother’s Day, 2001, the Association of War Affected Women launched its Mobilizing Mothers for Peace signature campaign from the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy. This campaign called for the Government and the LTTE to “Stop the war immediately and secure the right to life of our children.” The members of the association held meetings in all major towns of the country’s accessible 20 Districts. The remaining two districts, Mulathiv and Kilinochchi, were completely under LTTE control and as such we were allowed only a small meeting in Madhu. During meetings with these mothers in their respective areas, AWAW
requested them to speak to their family members and impart to them an understanding of the destructive nature of the war.

On the 12th of January, 2002, AAWAW presented to the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Colombo more than 70,000 signatures. The same day we met the Honorable Minister Dr. Jayalath Jayawardena and the Secretary to the Honorable Prime Minister with three requests: 1) Freedom of Movement for all citizens, 2) Freedom of worship in any place of worship they may select to do so, for all citizens and create a conducive atmosphere for peace talks, and 3) Secure the right to life of all children. These requests were made to the LTTE as well.

Mothers marching to the Royal Norwegian Embassy to handover the signatures

LTTE Meeting in Kilinochchi
Funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Colombo
Visaka at the meeting organized by the LTTE on the occasion of the release of 10 detainees.

On the 21st of January, 2002, the LTTE invited six members of the Association of War Affected Women to Kilinochchi to witness the release of 10 detainees from their custody. This was the first time the LTTE issued an invitation to a civil society organization from the south. The meeting was comprised of two segments. The first consisted of speeches by the leader of LTTE’s political wing, Mr. Tamil Selvan, and from heads of NGO’s. The second segment involved the release of the 10 detainees.

**Conflict Transformation Dialogue Series in Sri Lanka**

*Jointly conducted with the United States International Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution (IIMCR) and the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies*

*Funded by the Berghof Foundation*

1st dialogue meeting in Jaffna

A track II level dialogue series where influential individuals are invited from the North, East and the South of Sri Lanka to discuss core issues pertinent to the ethnic conflict. This dialogue process was started in March 2002 together with the United States International Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution. The Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies Colombo office agreed to join and facilitate the process. This was initiated as a parallel process to the official peace process.

**1st dialogue meeting: June 1st to 3rd 2002 at the Pandatharippu Retreat House, Jaffna.**

Five participants from the North East and five from the South attended this inaugural meeting. The topics discussed were:

1. Sustainability and implementation of Cease Fire Agreement (CFA)
2. Public Participation.
3. Human Rights (HR) and Democracy.
4. Rehabilitation and Reconstruction.

Of particular importance was the question of Human Rights and Democracy. How do we enhance the respect for HR and Democracy on the way from the CFA to real peace? This is a timely question because the subject will be part of the official talks in Thailand. Three options are already on the table: 1) Include HR in the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding, 2) A HR Ombudsman with a strong a mandate, and 3) The creation of a separate HR agreement or memorandum. Mr. Vigneshwaran of the Human Development Center (HUDEC) gave a lecture on rehabilitation and reconstruction followed by a ‘sight-seeing’ tour of Jaffna and the surrounding area.

Facilitators: Dr. Norbert Ropers Berghof and Marcel Smits of IIMCR
Participants: Dr. Jehan Perera, Dr. Nawaratna Bandara, Ms. Sunila Abeyasekara, Dr. Selvi Thiruchndran Ms. Dulci De Silva, Rev. Fr. A. I. Bernard, Rev. Fr. C. G. Jeyakumar, Rev. Fr. Jesurajah, Mr. A. Selvendran, and Ms. Saroja Sivachndran
Organizers: Visaka Dharmadasa, and Shalini Gunawardena of AWAW

2nd Dialogue meeting: October 11th and 12th 2002 at the Pandathanippu Retreat, Jaffna.

2nd dialogue meeting in Jaffna

Twelve individuals from the North, East and South participated in the 2nd meeting of the facilitated dialogue. The discussion centered on the peace process and the dangers and difficulties that are likely to be encountered. Public participation, rehabilitation, reconciliation, sustainability and stability of the peace process were also analyzed. The legacy of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), the future welfare of women, the HR issue, the Northern and Eastern Muslim issue, and the High Security Zones (HSZ) issue were discussed.

Facilitators: Dr. Norbert Ropers of Berghof and Liz Phillipson of U.K.
Participants: Rev. Dr. Rayappu, Joseph, Ven. Kalupahana, Ven. Dr. Suthadara, Dr. Nawaratna Bandara, Dr. P. Sarawanamuttu, Mr. Javid Yusuf, Prof. Keerawella, Rev. Fr. A.I. Bernard, Rev. Fr. Jeyakumar, Ms. Saroja Sivachndran, Mr. M. Croos,
3rd dialogue meeting, January 11th and 12th 2003 at Nilaveli Beach Hotel, Trincomalee

Nine individuals from the North East and South of Sri Lanka participated in this facilitated dialogue, among the key issues dialogued were:

1. What are the most important achievements of the track I process after the 4th Thailand talks
2. What are the difficulties and challengers for the future peace process
3. Human security in the Eastern Province/Eastern Muslim issue
4. High Security Zones issue

As well regarding the problems of the civilians and many other relevant issues were discussed.

Facilitators: Norbert Ropers of Berghof foundation and Liz Phillipson of UK
Participants: Rev. Fr. A. I Bernard, Rev. Maulavi Cassim, Dr. Kumar Rupasinghe, Prof. Asanga Thilakarathna, Mr. A. Selvendran, Mr. P. M. Croos, Ms. Kumudini Samuel, Dr. Nawarathna Bandara, Mr. Javid Yusuf,
Organizers: Visaka Dharmadasa and Shalini Gunawardena of AWAW
The fourth meeting was held in Pandatharippu Retreat House, Jaffna on the 26th and 27th of April 2003.

The 4th round was very special as by this time the LTTE announced that they will temporarily pull out of talks and was not ready to meet any government, Norwegian, International or national personnel but did agree to meet the dialogue team for 2 hrs at 3.00 p.m. on the 25th of April. The meeting was very successful and the team was requested to convey LTTE’s message to the government. On the 26th Mr. Bradman Weerakoon Secretary to the Prime Minister joined the dialogue team for one session and was briefed regarding the meeting with the LTTE the previous day.

Top Prime Minister’s secretary Mr. Bradman Weerakoon at the workshop and bottom the participants with Mr. Tamil Selvan of the LTTE at LTTE office Kilinochchi.
Joint demonstration with the mothers of the North
Members of AWAW and Mothers Front of Jaffna

Mothers at a joint demonstration

On June 19th, 2002, thousands of members of the Association of War Affected Women along with nearly 200 members of the Mothers Front of Jaffna gathered in Colombo to demonstrate and request that the government and the LTTE stop the war immediately and secure their children’s right to life as well that the Government and the LTTE will address the issue of the Missing in Action/Missing.

This was the first occasion that the mothers of Jaffna were able to demonstrate in the capital. This demonstration was followed by a meeting between the Honorable Prime Minister, the treasurer of the Mothers Front, the chairperson of AWAW, and members of several women’s organizations calling for a place for women at the negotiating table.
AWAW’s Jaffna trip to initiate a reconciliation process with the mothers of the disappeared youth of Jaffna
Funded by the Urgent Action Fund and Tides Foundation of US

The 20 year old ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has destroyed the country’s economy, its growth, and more importantly, its social bonds and moral values. The loss of life has been extensive and its effect is impossible to measure. As in all armed conflicts the women have been most affected, their husbands, sons and fathers dead, missing or disabled. Women are also directly affected by violence towards them and/or displacement. In many cases these women have had to provide for their family with little or no skills or help from others after their husband’s death or disappearance. Wives and mothers of those reported missing endure severe mental pain because of the uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones. On the Government’s side there are more than 4,000 families of soldiers missing in action. In the North and East there are also hundreds of families who are waiting to know the fate of their loved ones.

During this time of peace talks and a ceasefire agreement between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, the families of those missing are very hopeful that the issue will be addressed and
their family members will come home. The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka has supplied a list of prison detainees, but the Mothers Front of Jaffna claims that none of the names of their children who were arrested and disappeared in 1996-97 appear on the list. In the South, thousands of families are also waiting to hear the news that the LTTE and the Government will exchange Prisoners of War. In reality most of those missing are dead but their bodies were never identified and their families never informed. At this juncture it is important to find a process to inform families of the fate of their loved ones in a manner that will not negatively affect the peace process. The AWAW has proposed such a process designed to bring families towards reconciliation and sustain peace.

The project (26th- 30th September 2002)

On September 26th – 30th, 2002, mothers of missing soldiers in the south visited Jaffna in order to initiate a reconciliation process with the mothers of disappeared youth of Jaffna.

About 100 mothers from the South whose sons are missing or were killed in the war made the journey. This trip was of most significance to the parents who lost their sons in the Kilinochchi attack exactly four years earlier, September 27th, 1998. Taking the A9 road, closed for over a decade, there was a strong sense of being in a war zone as the destruction caused by the war was evident. En route to Jaffna the parents had the opportunity to visit Pampemadhu, the site where the Sri Lankan Army’s unidentified dead were cremated. It was a sorrowful and deeply affecting experience. At the moment there is a law suite in the Vavuniya Courts filed by the Association requesting DNA tests for identification and Ceremonial funeral for all those reported missing but are actually dead by the Sri Lankan State.

Mothers meeting LTTE in Kilinochchi
At the LTTE headquarters in Kilinochchi the deputy head of the political wing of the LTTE, Mr. Pulithevan, Mr. Suda, and an expatriate Tamil journalist, Mr. Sabesh, met the parents and spoke to them. This was a significant event for all involved.

On arrival in Jaffna the parents were met by the members of mothers’ front of Jaffna to spend a day together sharing and learning from one another. They visited various religious sites including the Nagadeepa Buddhist temple, the Nainathiev Hindu temple, the Nallur Hindu temple and a church where all the parents prayed for peace and the speedy return of their sons. The cooperation and contribution from parents on both sides of the conflict was encouraging to the goal of long lasting and sustainable peace through reconciliation.

The Sri Lankan Army of the 23rd Brigade offered to take the parents to visit the ancient Buddhist and Hindu religious places located in the High Security Zones of the peninsula. All the parents were very happy to have met each other and learn more about those on the other side of the divide and their similar situations.

Mothers from both sides of the divide looking at photographs of their missing sons

Needs Assessment of War Affected Women
Funded by the DFID
As it is becoming increasingly evident, the continuing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is resulting in gross violations of human rights, a decline in democratic practices, and enormous loss of human life. The conflict is also destroying society, its economic growth and human development. As a direct impact, thousands of women have been affected. In an ongoing armed conflict it is impossible to protect women from such painful experiences. It is only by
bringing peace to this country that democratic practices can be promoted and human right violations brought to an end.

In this context the Association of War Affected Women intends to bring the women of Sri Lanka across conflict lines together to work towards peace. The project aims to create and promote wide networking amongst these women who are often working in isolation. Together these women are able to support each other’s efforts and learn from each other’s successes and failures. The project also intends to train and provide war affected women with necessary tools to encourage dialogue and understanding between different ethnic communities, creating exchanges between women from different groups and involving more grassroots women in peace building. AWAW proposes to train these women in one or more income generating skills, enabling them to become economically independent. With the goal of creating understanding and awareness through sharing,

Women often bring an entirely different perspective to peace building. As female peace makers around the world have demonstrated, one of their key strengths is relationship and coalition building within and across sectors, communities, and conflict lines. Women have high stakes in the peace process as they are increasingly becoming heads of households after their husbands and/or fathers are killed in the war. Women are often left alone to care for their children and the household without any means with which to do so. In a patriarchal society where women often stay in the home and raise children they suddenly find themselves left with no means to care for their children and the elderly. Without much job training or experience women are often reduced to living in poverty and helplessness. The conflict has upset gender roles, creating a window of opportunity for women to work for peace. 

AWAW will be collecting data from 11 war affected districts in the country

AWAW had already visited the districts of Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Mannar, Jaffna Kilinochchi, Trincomalee, Mulativw Ampara and Anurdhapura. These visits were made to collect information regarding the affected women with the assistant of the District secretaries, Divisional secretaries and Grama Niladharies as well from NGOs and other women’s organizations of the districts. AWAW encourages active participation by these women in creating a strong economical bond among the affected women and seeks to enhance women’s peace building skills and their capacity to assist the peace process at grassroots level.
At the LTTE Peace secretariat

Our future activities:

Healing minds dialogue series
Funded by the GTZ

The Primary objective of the official peacemaking efforts by Norway is to bring the government and the LTTE to a political settlement. But other types of activities and resources are essential to mobilize and prepare a larger constituency for peace and to establish the necessary support for the eventual settlement. In deeply rooted, intractable conflicts such as Sri Lanka, trust and a sense of common goals have been completely destroyed by violence. In such situations, only third party interveners and non-official (local) NGO’s can play a role promoting reconciliation through approaches that address the conflict in a more constructive manner. Rather than looking at conflict as a single entity and asking how it can be completely resolved, intractable conflicts may be best handled by concentrating the efforts on identification and addressing of the various aspects of the conflict – a method which is classified as constructive confrontation. The goal of the discussions at various levels is also to develop a better understanding and increase awareness in order to develop new approaches to deal with critical issues in a more constructive way.

While the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE discuss ways and means of power sharing and governance, a space should be created for the civil society in general to be prepared to accept the decisions taken by the main actors. In a highly polarized society as ours it is very important that the wider segments of the population get to know and be able to understand the other people across the divide in order for a comprehensive conflict transformation to take place.
AWAW has proposed a dialogue series bringing individuals from different groups such as grass root level politicians, journalists and clergy of all faiths from the North, East and South to engage in a facilitated dialogue to initiate a comprehensive reconciliation process.

AWAW successfully completed 9 dialogue workshops of the pilot phase of this series starting on the 23rd of April 2003 in Jaffna and concluding it by having the last successful meeting from the 30th of November 2003 in Batticalo.

Professional’s dialogue series:

The Association of War Affected Women has proposed a series of dialogues between professionals such as members of the bar association, doctors and bank managers from the South and North-East of Sri Lanka. As we feel that such individuals command a lot of respect from the society and they interact with the grassroots level population as well the influential individuals and are able to disseminate and prepare the larger population for an eventual settlement and more importantly to protect the fragile peace process and engage in early warning regarding any threat to the process. As the beginning of a long peace process for a society torn by internal and ethnic strife, this project is timely and very important. The AWAW specifically intend to conduct dialogue workshops in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka with filed tours so that the participants will see to them self and understand the ground situation very well in order to carry out a comprehensive disseminating process as well to engage in joint action so that the bridges can be build at all levels. First two meetings were conducted very successfully in July and August 2003 funds were provided by the USAID OTI grant.

Training Women on Leadership and peace building skills

It is anticipated that this will be a two year project and will contribute to finding peace in Sri Lanka. As the preliminary step AWAW is currently engaged in identifying the affected women through out the country using the data based on governments and independent statistics. Once these affected women are identified AWAW will facilitate these groups to continue and expand the network and awareness through which the project indents to achieve peace. This will be done in three phases, Primarily it will be implemented in two selected areas in the north and south as pilot project and learning from the successes and failures it will be spread through out the Island.

The project will be implemented in three stages and they will be comprised with phase one Networking. phase two Skills training and the third phase Marketing and dialogue

As short term projects we hope:
To conduct 22 meetings taking the ISGA proposals to the people of each district to build a much needed consensus among the general public that the set of proposals tabled by the LTTE is in fact a document to be discuss and not an ultimatum.

Take selected 10 individuals for three study tours to Switzerland, Canada and India to study the existing successful power sharing systems of the world,
Prepare the ground for women to be included at every level of the peace process by advocacy and lobbying as well selecting 10 women and giving extensive training so that they will be professionally qualified with extensive knowledge of the subjects pertinent to the peace process taking into consideration that any one of them may be selected to the team of negotiators.

AWAW Members with the released detainees.

ICRC International Conference for “The Missing” and Red Cross and Red Crescent conference

The Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action was invited by the ICRC to the International conference of “The Missing” in February 2003 and the President of PSMIA was given the honor of making the opening statement as well to address the opening session of the Red Cross and Red crescent conference in December 2003 in Geneva. The PSMIA will be working together with the ICRC in the coming 4 years to raise global awareness regarding the unaccounted for as well to prevent people being unaccounted for due to armed conflict and internal violence.

President of Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action addressing the opening session of the Red cross and Red Crescent conference Geneva, December 2003