What caused the repeated outbreak of violent social eruptions in Sri Lanka during past five decades and what can be done to prevent such upheavals in future?

Report on reflections by civil society actors

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December 2020

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Background

The Association of War-Affected Women in Kandy Sri Lanka conducted a series of People to People dialogues from July 24 to November 20, 2020 among civil society actors concerning violent social and political eruptions in Sri Lanka from 1970s onwards with a view to achieve the following objectives.

1. To identify triggers and underlying causes of selected episodes of violence
2. To assess the social and political consequences of selected episodes of violence for democratic processes, civil society activities and economic and social development in the country.
3. To identify policy options and strategies for prevention of possible violent eruptions in Sri Lanka in future.

People to People dialogues involved members and partners of AWAW, religious leaders, academics and civil society representatives and male and female activists from different ethnoreligious communities from different parts of Sri Lanka, including South, Centre, North and Eastern Sri Lanka. The consultations were conducted in three phases. In Phase 1 invited resource persons described conflict dynamics drawing from conflict studies and helped the participants to identify three important conflicts in Sri Lanka that required further analysis from the angle of understanding triggers and root causes. This resulted in identification of JVP uprising in 1987 to 1989, LTTE insurrection from 1983 to 2009 and Easter Sunday attacks in April 2019 for further discussion and analysis bearing in mind the overall objectives of the exercise. In Phase 11 the identified participants undertook a detailed conflict analysis in respect of the specific conflict they agreed to explore further, prepared a conflict tree and conducted a conflict mapping exercise with inputs from invited consultants. In Phase III field visits were made to selected sites to assess the current situation and identify lessons learnt from the angle of promoting peace and reconciliation. The dates, venues and the number of participants in each consultation are given in Annexes 1 and 2, some pictures from the dialogue sessions are given in Annex 3 and selected outputs are presented in Annex 4. It has to be noted here that these civil society consultations were made in the backdrop of COVID-19 pandemic. The meetings and field visits were conducted in keeping with health and safety guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health. This restricted the number of possible participants in each meeting and range of information gathering from affected people through interviews and group discussions.

Selection of the Three Conflicts

JVP and LTTE uprisings and Easter Sunday attacks were chosen for further exploration in this Civil Society Dialogue for a number of reasons.

First, they were high profile national events that resulted in loss of many human lives, many episodes of physical injuries, life-long disabilities and lasting trauma, multiple property damage, serious challenges for law-and-order situation and a long-term process of economic and social retardation in the country.

Second, they emanated from structural inequalities and widespread grievances affecting different communities in the country with JVP actors drawn from disaffected layers of population in the majority Sinhala community in southern and central Sri Lanka, LTTE drawing most of its members from a similar layer of people from the Tamil community in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka and Easter Sunday attacks led by a core group of Muslim extremists from Eastern and elsewhere in Sri Lanka. These three events indicated that anti-establishment tendencies are not confined to one community or one region in Sri Lanka but widespread throughout Sri Lankan society though manifested and articulated in diverse ethno-religious configurations.

Third, there have been state initiated investigations of each of these violent episodes after the event and academic research covering many aspects of these violent eruptions but no efforts have been made to understand them within a single analytical framework or identify common lessons to be drawn from them for the purpose developing policies and preventive strategies.

Fourth, even though there have been many investigations by civil society organizations on specific violent eruptions and their impact and assessment of specific interventions such as relief and rehabilitation activities for victims of particular episodes of violence, so far, no efforts have been made to identify underlying causes specific to each event as well as common drivers of these different mobilizations with a view to guide evidence-based policy and action at different levels. While case by case response is certainly understandable due to specific needs during each event and donor-driven project dynamics, we need a more grounded understanding of diverse events and cross-cutting parameters in order to mobilize civil society for prevention activities and promotion of social harmony across ethnoreligious divides.

Key Findings

Key findings of the consultations with selected civil society actors are discussed here under following headings:

1. Findings relating to JVP insurrection from 1987 to 1989
2. Findings relating to LTTE uprising from 1983 to 2009
3. Findings relating to Easter Sunday attacks by Islamic extremist in April 2019
4. Cascade analysis of interconnections among the three episodes
5. Common and divergent drivers of violent extremism
6. State reactions

JVP Insurrection from 1987 to 1989

Following an unsuccessful youth uprising targeting police stations and army camps in 1971 that was brutally suppressed by the state, the JVP regrouped under the leadership of Wijeweera from 1987 onwards on a campaign of national liberation opposed to the presence of Indian peace keeping forces in Sri Lanka, formation of Provincial Councils under the pressure of Indian government and lack of opportunities for Sinhala educated youth vis-à-vis youth from affluent urban background and politically connected youth served by the patronage networks connected

with the ruling regime. With a cocktail of widespread grievances derived from perceived underprivilege connected with low caste social origin, education in Swabasha and lack of access to English education, graduate unemployment particularly among arts graduates with inadequate English language skills, the leaders of the movement had successfully mobilized a large number of school children in higher grades, university undergraduates, unemployed youth and lower paid workers in government and informal sector through a campaign of resistance against the ruling regime at the time.

The campaigns involved organizing hartals, coerced closure of government offices, shops and industries, mandatory non-use of electric lighting and non-compliance with government orders in a deliberate effort to undermine the government. A hand written poster campaign was deployed by JVP to criticize the state and its representatives and enforce its orders. The local representatives of the government, including Grama Niladhari, development workers and political representatives at the village level representing the government, were targeted in the JVP attacks along with police and military personnel from local areas who were asked to resign in protest against the government. This led to a violent confrontation in rural areas with government officials often turning against JVP and divulging information to the security forces about local JVP suspects and the JVP actors in the villages unleashing a brutal campaign of violence engaging one section of the population against the other. Indiscriminate violence by both parties escalated as the agitations progressed with lamp post killings, public burning of bodies of suspected JVP actors using 'pyres of tires', extrajudicial killing of JVP suspects by newly formed militia groups and the public display of tortured bodies for the purpose of intimidating the opposite camp. The estimated number of killings attributed to this uprising varies but the civil society actors who participated in this consultation estimated that as many as 60,000 people were killed during these confrontations.

The decline of JVP started with the arrest of Wijeweera from a hideout in upcountry and his subsequent assassination and the arrest of many of the leaders and their networks at the ground level. The Sri Lankan security forces developed their intelligence services and counter insurgency operations through their participation in the violent suppression of the two brutal uprisings in the South.

The outcomes of JVP insurrections identified during civil society consultation as fruits of the conflict tree included unresolved tensions between violent actors on both sides of the conflict and their victims, widows and single parent families, a degree of de-sensitization about violence in the security forces and the public in general and the formation of an alliance between the underworld and certain politicians for their mutual survival in a background of election and post-election violence and intense competition for preferential votes.

In response to the youth insurrection in the South, the state and some civil society organizations established several new initiatives for addressing youth problems in the country. A National Youth Service Council was established in 1987 in order to provide services to youth in terms of vocational training, art and culture. A National Youth Commission was formed in 1990 under the

leadership of Prof. G.L. Pieris in order to investigate the drivers of JVP and find remedies for identified youth problems. In its report, this commission recommended several policy changes and action, including the importance of introducing educational reforms, promotion of social justice, vocational training for youth left out from higher education, a policy of recruitment of persons to government employment on the basis of competitive examinations, prevention of political interference in selection for government jobs and enhanced youth participation in decision making. The proposed changes and policy shifts, however, were only partially implemented by the rulers. Civil society initiatives by organizations such as the Sarvodaya Movement targeted youth in disadvantaged communities, promotion of self- employment and enterprise development and voluntary self-help activities. The entry of remaining rebel leaders into the parliamentary electoral process through the JVP political party, originally formed under the leadership of Wijeweera following his initial release from the prison, facilitated the process of reintegration of the former insurgents.

LTTE Uprising from 1983 to 2009

As in the case of JVP most of the fulltime members of LTTE were youth from underprivileged backgrounds, including lumpen elements from low caste backgrounds. LTTE, however, approached their problems primarily from an ethnic angle seeing the Sri Lankan state as a Sinhala dominated state relying on Sinhala security forces for containing their struggle. Apart from mobilizing the minority Tamil community in Sri Lanka who were often favored by the British colonial rulers over and above the majority community in selecting public servants, identifying them for hard work and efficiency, the ethnic identification also enabled the LTTE to establish international linkages with Tamils in India, Malaysia and Singapore and the expanding Tamil diaspora in western countries who considered Jaffna or Northeastern Sri Lanka as their original home. The ill-informed policies of the Sri Lankan state such as state-aided establishment of Sinhala colonies in Tamil areas, adoption of Sinhala-only official language policy, reported Sinhala-bias in university admission and increased militarization of war-affected regions served to reinforce the perception of systematic ethnic discrimination and social exclusion based on ethnicity also informed by Sinhala nationalist aspirations increasingly adopted by ruling political parties in the South. Initially the LTTE had some support from Tamil speaking Muslim youth in Eastern Sri Lanka as well, but it soon gave way to an antagonistic confrontation between the two minority communities due to mass expulsion of Muslims from the North by the LTTE in 1990 and LTTE attacks on Muslim communities in the East from 1989 onwards. The mobilization of Muslims by the Sri Lankan security forces for intelligence work in particular further contributed to the increased polarization between the two minority communities in the war-affected regions.

The problem analysis by civil society actors recognized a range of other factors that contributed to the perpetuation of war in North East Sri Lanka. This included support by diaspora members, multiple and repeated displacement of civilians due to the war, chronic poverty and economic hardships caused by disruption of farming, fishing and other economic activities in the war-affected areas, disruption of school education and repeated attacks by the military resulting in

deaths and injuries and the efforts by the LTTE to attract members of depressed castes in Tamil society by providing a degree of dignity and access to land and livelihood support. The LTTE cultivated a strong sense of injustice along ethnic lines among its members using video technology to inform its youth constituency. In a sense in preparing the underprivileged Tamil youth for the armed struggle, ethnic discrimination perpetrated by the state and security forces at the time of war was singled out to the relative neglect of class, caste and gender discrimination within Tamil society in explaining their existential problems and insecurities of diverse origin. Forced recruitment in Eastern Sri Lanka in particular, formation of black tigers readily mobilized for suicide attacks, increased recruitment of child soldiers and women cadres, formation of sea tigers and the mastery of weapons trade consolidated their power vis-à-vis the Sri Lankan security forces. The decline of LTTE started with the breakaway of the Karuna faction in 2004. President Mahinda Rajapakse mobilized Sinhala Buddhist nationalism to consolidate Sri Lankan security forces, which crushed the LTTE in a brutal final phase of the war that ended in May 2009.

The entrenched fallout of the war accumulated over two and half decades included a displaced civilian population, chronic poverty, a high rate of disability, widowhood and female-headed households, outcry about missing persons, outmigration of the creamy layer of the population in war-affected regions and the problem of rehabilitation of former LTTE fighters who survived the war. Release of land owned by civilians taken over for establishment of high security zones in strategic locations throughout the war zone also remained a point of contention between the security forces and war-ravaged civilians. Desensitization about violence that began in the JVP era became further entrenched during the last phase of the war in particular with ethnic polarization adding to the lack of sensitivity about victims of violence on the other side of the ethnic divide. The international donors and civil society organizations were compelled to leave the area during the last phase of the war, adding to the challenges of rebuilding of civilian physical and social infrastructure in the war-affected areas.

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) set up in May 2010 identified many of these problems and provided recommendations for proposed interventions by the government, civil society and donors. Of the various recommendations made by LLRC, the resettlement of displaced persons and physical infrastructure development in the affected areas have been successfully implemented in collaboration with donors and bilateral partners and the restoration of democratic institutions has been accomplished to some extent. The establishment of an Office for Missing Persons (OMP) on September 15, 2017 has also been an important milestone in the recovery process. On the other hand, the state has been reluctant to embark on a comprehensive program of national reconciliation and transitional justice along the lines suggested by LLRC due to a combination of factors such as possible resistance from the Sinhala nationalist block in the South in the light of possible international sanctions against human right violations by the security forces during the last phase of the war. On the whole no serious effort was made by the state to identify, discuss and address the root causes of the youth uprising in the north.

Easter Sunday Attacks in April 2019

The Easter Sunday attacks by a small group of Islamic extremists in April 2019 differed from the two previous uprisings by virtue of the scale, intensity and duration of violence. Further, the Easter Sunday attackers appear to have been primarily motivated by a certain religious vision and a jihadist reinterpretation of Islamic faith as against ethnic, caste and class drivers of the previous uprisings, it being a high-intensity short-term terrorist attack as against the long drawn-out LTTE and JVP struggles. The social background of the Easter attackers was diverse, with some from relatively impoverished backgrounds in Eastern Sri Lanka and others from affluent and professional backgrounds drawn from well-connected families in Colombo. Unlike in the case of JVP and LTTE primarily involving youth from underprivileged backgrounds, the small group of Easter attackers came from a range of diverse backgrounds, with some connected to each other through close kinship ties. The possible inspiration from an external actor, namely ISIS, is another distinctive feature of the Easter attacks. The attackers targeted three tourist hotels in Colombo and three churches with congregations gathered for Easter Sunday morning prayers in an effort to attack Western tourists and Christian devotees as targets of the attack as declared by ISIS in a subsequent statement. These attacks led to loss of lives for over 250 people, serious physical injuries for over 500 people and a serious damage to the tourist industry heavily promoted by the government as part of its development policy at the time.

Apart from ISIS propaganda, to which the attackers involved were heavily exposed, the other key driver of Easter Sunday attacks was a wave of anti-Muslim violence unleased by Buddhist extremists from 2012 onwards targeting Muslim businesses and mosques in selected locations such as Beruwala, Galle, Dambulla, Ampara and Kandy. There was, however, a certain disconnect between previous local events where Muslims were targeted by militant Sinhala Buddhist groups and Easter Sunday attacks by Islamic extremists targeting local Christians and Western tourists rather than the protagonists in the preceding wave of anti-Muslim violence. Muslims had also been subjected to ethnic cleansing and mosque attacks by the LTTE in war-affected areas, but Easter Sunday attacks was the first ever violent attack by an organized Islamic group in Sri Lanka. Any possible ISIS involvement in the attack points to a further dimension of the internationalization of conflict dynamics in Sri Lanka.

Muslim religious leaders who participated in the current consultation reiterated the point that Zahran's group had already being identified by mainstream Muslim leadership in the country as a potentially violent group who increasingly moved away from the key religious precepts of Islam by invoking an extremist position vis-à-vis mainstream Islam in Sri Lanka as well as other religions in the country. In this context Zahran's extremist group sought to establish contacts with smaller clusters of Muslims outside mainstream Islamic centres in key Muslim concentrations such as Kaththankudi, Akkaraipattu, Sammanthurai, Kalmunai, Akurana and Beruwala where they were not welcome and already identified as a potential threat to conventional Islam committed to a path of peaceful coexistence with other religious groups in the country. Also, they speculated that the Easter Attack may have been used by a third party within or outside Sri Lanka to create

a split between the local Muslim community and the Christian community, between whom there was no history of antagonism of any kind. They did not specify who that other party would be. However, in the conflict mapping they included CIA, RAW and ISIS besides the government of Sri Lanka. Their inclination was to consider this terror attack not so much as a natural growth from within the Islamic community, but rather as an externally driven development where certain local Islamic actors were instrumentalized ideologically and perhaps financially as part of a plot to create religious tension in Sri Lanka.

One of the immediate outcomes of Easter Sunday attack was a backlash against it in the form of another episode of anti-Muslim violence by Sinhala Buddhist extremists in places like Minuwangoda, Kuliyapitiya and Paduwasnuwara three weeks after the Easter attacks (Silva, Mahees, Hapuarachchi and Nuhman 2020). There were several official investigations about the Easter Sunday terror attack in the subsequent attacks with a Parliamentary Select Committee investigation and two presidential commissions one of which was ongoing at the time of compiling this report. Many of the civil society participants were of the opinion that these official investigations sought to blame their political opponents for security failures or for instigating violence instead of genuinely trying to find the real causes of the attack or means of preventing such violence in future. One Muslim participant in the dialogue commented "When Muslim politicians tie up with you to form a government, they are good. When they turn to the other side, they immediately become terrorists. The official investigations merely serve to identify terrorist among Muslim politicians in the opposite camp."

Cascade Analysis

Civil society participants in this consultation also found connections, mutual influences and antagonistic relations among participants in these different conflicts. There were also possible influences from one conflict to the other. For instance, in its early phase the LTTE and other rebel groups learnt from the experience of JVP about poster campaigns and the need to use secret codes rather than actual names in formation of a rebel group opposed to the state. The brutal violence of the security forces against JVP uprisings in 1971 and 1987 to 1989 also convinced the LTTE about the possible repercussions from the antagonistic security forces and confronted them only when necessary for the purpose of making strategic diversions and required incursions.

The Easter attacks used suicide bombing as the primary mode of attack, following a strategy effectively used by the LTTE as a potent weapon against the state. The high degree of personal commitment to the cause was established through the jihadist ideology of divine commitment rather than through a secular attachment to the goal of eelam inscribed by the LTTE. The easter attackers had modified the suicide bombing technology to suit their mission also borrowing elements and highly explosive new substances included in the suicidal arsenal from Islamic terrorists elsewhere in the world so as to achieve maximum impact during suicidal attacks in public gatherings. Also, it appears from the evidence given in the ongoing presidential commission that Zahran group had some secret connections with intelligence services of the Sri

Lankan security forces as an extension of their mobilization of Muslim informants during the war against the LTTE and it is likely that this gave them some protection against possible arrests by the police even after obtaining authorization for such action from the judiciary.

The important point to note here is that while these rebel groups fought different struggles against different enemies or sometimes the same enemy, there were some cross-cutting ties and informal communication channels that contributed to learning from each other and upgrading of violent technologies to suit their individual campaigns. This is an insight that would be completely missed in a separate and disparate treatment of these anti-establishment rebel movements.

Common and Divergent Drivers

There are also some important similarities and differences in the key drivers of these successive social eruptions in different communities in Sri Lanka. JVP presented itself as a movement for liberation of motherland captured by its emotive slogan "Maubima Natnam Maranaya" (Motherland or Death) with government collaborations with Indian Peace Keeping Force and the LTTE identified as imminent threats to motherland. In addition to this perceived threat, parallel caste and class obstacles hampering lower segments of Sinhala communities triggered JVP uprising by militant Sinhala youth. A large segment of JVP actors came from Vahumpura and Bathgama castes in Sinhala society as pointed out by researchers such as Janice Jiggins (1979). This is because many of them were landless and had become parts of a rootless wage-earning class in many areas by the 1970s. Education was perhaps the only possible means of upwards social mobility open for youth in these communities as of 1970s and they encountered class and caste-based discrimination in access to good schools that in turn greatly debilitated their life chances. This may have been an important driver of their support for JVP. Apart from inhibited social mobility, dignity issues appear to have been an important driver of political radicalism. On the other hand, JVP leaders from middle level castes may have deliberately looked for recruits from these and other depressed castes knowing their inclination for violent radicalization. As all other political groups in Sri Lanka, JVP did not address caste issues explicitly in their political propaganda or agenda for social reform but apparently used it as a mobilization strategy in its recruitment drives. In 1971 members collectively referred to each other as 'mahattaya' (gentleman) in order to avoid the hackneyed leftist term 'sahodaraya' or 'sahodari' (brother or sister), but also to afford a level of dignity to its members within the organization itself. JVP presented itself as an educational process to its members using panthi paha (five classes) as an entry point to the movement.

The LTTE followed a similar strategy in recruitment with possible over recruitment of members from Pallar, Parayar and other depressed caste communities. LTTE more explicitly presented itself as a liberation movement for minority ethnic Tamils identifying themselves as victims of an oppressive Sinhala state. Like in JVP, caste or class was not explicitly addressed as an issue requiring reform also fearing that any explicit reference to caste would split their support base defined in ethnic terms. Parallel to JVP, the LTTE leadership came from middle level castes such

as karaiyar but many of the foot soldiers came from the so-called depressed castes as was indeed the case in JVP as well. LTTE, however, gave greater attention to rigorous military training geared to guerilla warfare. LTTE made a deliberate attempt to treat all members equally irrespective of their caste, class and gender. Ethnic identity was used as a common denominator among all members. LTTE titles such as 'mahaveerar' (war hero) was awarded to all qualified families in spite of their caste or class and the award of such honours may have been particularly dignifying for those from depressed caste backgrounds who also experienced caste barriers in the entry to certain Hindu temples controlled by the dominant Vellalar caste. While the LTTE action may have led to a certain relaxation of rigidities in the Hindu caste system and a degree of empowerment of subordinate castes in Hindu society during the LTTE regime, the elimination of LTTE has gradually served to reawaken caste in Jaffna society making the Panchamars (a local collective term for depressed castes) vulnerable again.

The easter attackers were driven by an Islamic extremism apparently acquired through repeated exposure ISIS online propaganda. As already noted, there was no organic unity of any kind among the different members of this group with the possible exception of their exposure to ISIS propaganda also disseminated by Zahran through his powerful sermons in Tamil distributed through You Tube videos. Even though Islam did not recognize caste, Zahran and his small group of immediate followers in Kaththankudi may have experienced a degree of social stigma in their communities due to their impoverished and criminal like social background, but how far this triggered their attraction for violent extremism could not be established through the current consultation. Their exposure to online propaganda and the resulting perception of victimhood also backed by a wave of anti-Muslim violence may have contributed to the emergence of a nucleus of Islamic extremism in Sri Lanka.

State Reaction

The state reacted to the first two uprisings in the form of violent repression and is currently investigating all parties with any links to easter attacks. The state has been reactive rather than proactive in responding to these violent eruptions. Each event was investigated in its own right without considering any cross-cutting themes and factors contributing to overall trends in violent extremism. Also, possible strategies for preventing such violent eruptions in future from within the respective communities or through a mass mobilization cutting across ethno- religious divides have not been explored. Lacking any political commitment for reconciliation processes in general, the current ruling regime does not appear to appreciate the need for state policies and programs for prevention of violent extremism as part of its responsibility to the public. The Sinhala nationalist ideology advocated by the ruling regime does not provide any space for concessions to minorities and recognition of caste, class and gender divisions within the Sinhala majority and in minority communities as well. Lack of information gathering relating to ethno-religious mobilizations and their outcomes beyond intelligence work by security forces has prevented a realistic risk assessment and development of evidence-based policies and programs assessed by neutral social research and critical objective investigations.

Reflections on the Current Situation

Against this background the current civil society consultations and people-to-people dialogues assessed the current situation in Sri Lanka in regard to future potential for violence in the country. This assessment found a certain public mindset about social injustice that is deeply problematic as well as a possible emerging hotspot for violent confrontations along ethno-religious lines in Eastern Sri Lanka. These problematic developments are briefly analyzed in the sections that follow.

Problematic public mindset in Sri Lanka

Analysis of mass media and social media reveals several problematic attitudes that have implications for social harmony and potential for violence in future.

First, there is a marked tendency within each community to be oversensitive to social injustices against themselves and totally insensitive to or completely desensitized about social injustices experienced by other communities. This is reflected in social media posts by youth in particular. For instance, while the damage caused by Easter Sunday attacks are heavily criticized implicating the entire Muslim community in these attacks, the subsequent violent attacks on Muslim owned businesses and mosques totally unconnected with Easter Sunday attacks are ignored or even justified on the grounds of exploitation of Sinhala consumers or perceived unfair economic domination by the Muslims. The problem lies in use of common stereotypes in approaching ethnic others while not being self-critical at all about one's own community. This is a mindset that can easily be mobilized for triggering violence against the ethnic other with no moral concern or feeling of guilt involved. This is, however, not merely reiterated in the public mindset but also reflected in state action. For instance, while there was no single high-level official investigation of any of the anti-Muslim violence that recurred from 2012 onwards, there was already three high level official investigations of Easter Sunday attacks (One parliament select committee enquiry and two presidential commissions of investigations) in regard to Easter Sunday attacks.

Second, the ethnic or religious other is always held responsible for one's problems to the relative neglect of any assessment of one's own contribution to the problems one encounters. For instance, the blame game in connection with COVID-19 clearly illustrated this tendency. Following Easter attacks, in some face book posts in Sinhala, Muslims were blamed for spreading the disease in Sri Lanka also attributing it to their irresponsible behaviour (See Annex 5). This also has the effect of neglecting or denying one's own responsibility in risk taking and minimizing one's exposure to the disease. This is tantamount to attributing one's disease risk to an external agent based on fears and untested assumptions guided by ethnic stereotypes and without having any evidence to support the claims. This is not limited to social media posts only. At least two national TV channels demonstrated the same tendency, violating media ethics.

Third, there is no critical engagement seeking to change the status quo characterized by mutual mistrust among communities and hatreds formed with or without any factual basis. Against a background of peaceful coexistence among different communities established over a long period

of time, the strained relationships evolved lately are seen as a natural state of affairs that cannot be altered for the better through human intervention.

Finally, these common mind sets are shaped by ethnonationalist thinking or religious sentiments also affirmed by mass media, popular culture and political developments that influence each other in ways that confirm the widespread biases making it difficult to break away from them (Tambiah 1986, Silva, Mahees, Hapuarachchi and Muhman 2020). This is where the state and civil society must develop a common program for addressing this distorted mindset and work towards trust building among different communities and help overcome the distorted mindsets increasingly gaining ground particularly among younger generations.

Emerging View of Development as a Panacea for all Problems in Sri Lanka

There is an emerging view in certain sections of the political elite in the country that the leaders must work towards achieving rapid economic development in whatever way possible and once development is achieved everything else including peace and reconciliation will fall into place automatically. This is indeed a problematic view for a number of reasons.

First, unresolved social tensions giving rise to violent eruptions such as the one's investigated in the current assessment are likely to reverse any gains in development and indeed retard the development process more or less permanently. Each episode of violence results in heavy damage to businesses and property, compensation payments and relief for affected persons, loss of investor confidence and disincentives for future investments in the country on the part of local and foreign investors.

Second, in spite of a well-developed master plan for tourism development in the country, tourist industry is most sensitive to violent eruptions in a country as tourists are unlikely to visit a violent prone country, however appealing that country would be from the angle of natural beauty, cultural heritage and friendliness towards visitors from overseas.

Third, development itself can contribute to increased tension among different communities and different stakeholders if not based on a sound understanding of the relationship between development and conflict dynamics. The abandoning of some development projects before their completion due to public protests and escalation of tension among different stakeholders in a case in point. One such project is the construction of a large foreign funded housing project for the benefit of tsunami-victims in the vicinity of Deegavapi temple (Silva and Hasbullah 2019). Some 500 newly built houses, established with Saudi aid spending over US dollars 5 million, remains abandoned since 2015 or so in spite of severe housing shortage in the area due to an ongoing legal dispute and unresolved intercommunity tension (See Annex 6). It has to be noted here that Sri Lanka is replete with such monumental waste of development aid caused by increased social tension, misappropriation or misuse of funds and many other factors.

Eastern Province as a Potential Hotbed of Ethnoreligious Tension

During this assessment Eastern Province was identified as a potential driver of ethnoreligious tension due to a number of considerations also supported during a field visit to the area and consultation with a number of different stakeholders.

First, ethnoreligious diversity is a key feature of the demographic profile of the province. There has been considerable tension among different ethnoreligious communities over access to land, political control of Eastern Provincial Council and local Pradeshiya Sabas and administrative demarcation of Divisional Secretary areas and Pradeshiys Sabas in ways that advantage one local community or another (Spencer 2015).

Second, with the development of several coastal regions as current or potential tourist sites including the popular Arugam Bay area, competition for setting up tourist establishments has attracted some investors from outside with political backing in some instances, resulting in loss of land for some long-term inhabitants in the area.

Third, declaration of several forest and wild life reserves by the state in the aftermath of the end of civil war has also resulted in loss of land and loss of access to forest resources for some traditional users giving rise to tensions between the relevant government officials and civilians and different land users such as cattle glaziers and farmers.

Fourth, contestations over encroachments of archeological sites by members of minority communities have become a politically sensitive issue involving Buddhist monks, representatives of the relevant government agencies, military, local land users from minority communities and politicians representing the different groups. This can pose a serious threat to peace and harmony in the area unless addressed satisfactorily by the authorities through negotiations and consultative decision making.

Finally, connections with diaspora and overseas Islamic donors and religious institutions have introduced an international dimension to emerging developments in Eastern Province with corresponding complications in addressing governance issues and reaching decisions acceptable to different stakeholders.

Gendered Reflections

Overall the study of the three conflicts in Sri Lanka identifies the lack of gender concerns, though women are the ones who were impacted and are undergoing sever mental hardships up to date their concerns are the least addressed. Sri Lanka which has taken not only in Sri Lanka but world over the leadership of having women as their head of state and also having examples of Hon. Madam Sirimavo Bandaranaike mediating Peace between Asian giants India and China way back in 1960s stopping an eminent war between the two nations, Sri Lankan processes hardly used this great resource productively, though the Sri Lankan Peace process was the first to have a gender subcommittee in their official negotiations. This first attempt also has lessons for us to learn, when the peace process stalled, Liberation Tigers refused to meet the Gender

subcommittee stating that it is a part of the Sri Lankan government but was ready to meet Association of War Affected Women, and this teaches us that in peace processes Civil society engagement is vital and absolutely necessary. Another common element was that though women took active participation in all there conflicts they were never given leadership roles and nor their service was adequately reorganized.

The TJ process or the peace processes of Sri Lanka didn't have a specific gender dimensions apart from the gender subcommittee in the peace process, but the consultation task force on reconciliation mechanisms were able to carry out an Island wide consultation taking gender concerns and also design the consultations in a manner to gain input of all sectors of the society. Its report contains recommendations for the Office of the missing Persons and Office of Reparations specific actions to be taken to accommodate the special needs of men and women.

Recommendations for Action

Based on deliberations of these civil society consultations sponsored by AWAW, the following recommendations cane be made for the purpose of ending the cycle of violence in Sri Lanka.

1. In collaboration with civil society mainly women Peace Builders and the private sector, the state should strive towards establishing and fostering an inclusive Sri Lankan identity among all citizens that respects the constitution, human rights, unity and diversity, historical and cultural heritages and territorial integrity of the country. The parameters of this inclusive Sri Lankan identity must be established through consensus building and consultations among different stakeholders. Such an identity should not be perceived as a replacement or a substitute for ethnic, religious or linguistic identities but rather as a higher-level identity that binds all citizens in a common bond of humanity and a sense of belonging to a common nation without undermining their distinctive cultures, heritages and identities.

2. Educational programs in the country must be restructured in a way that promotes mutual respect, mutual understanding and social harmony among children from different communities. The current patterns of ethnic, religious and class segregation of the school system must be gradually eliminated and the content of the curriculum at different levels must be restructured in a way that enables students to interact with a broader spectrum of peers from different communities and cultivate mutual respect and value unity as well as diversity in Sri Lankan society.

3. The religious education must receive special attention in curriculum revision so as to enable the students to understand and appreciate the core values of one's own religion as well as those of other religions practiced in Sri Lanka. Most participants were of the opinion that comparative religion should be introduced to all students at an appropriate level so as to help them understand and appreciate the core values of each religion within a comparative perspective.

4. The constitution reform must contribute to the process of nation building, promotion of social justice, equality and social harmony. This assessment found that unresolved grievances connected with structural inequalities associated with ethnicity, class, caste, gender and regional disparities are at the heart of many of social eruptions in the country over the past several decades. The constitutional reform must address the key issues at hand and provide for home-grown strategies for dealing with the problems at hand.

5. There has to be a national policy on peace and reconciliation supported by all political parties, civil society organizations and private sector agencies. The draft national policy prepared in 2017 must be revised and updated with a view to bring all parties and stakeholders to a common platform and reverse the ongoing processes of polarization and building of mistrust. All efforts must be made to remove existing barriers for upward social mobility and create a level playing field in education, social welfare and politics in general. State policies relating to archeological sites must be reviewed with a view to establish a sense of common ownership and mutual cultural enrichment through diverse historical processes and exchanges in Sri Lanka.

6. The rule of law must be asserted and the tendency among certain sections of the population and law enforcement agencies to take the law into their own hands in dealing with law breakers, criminals, underworld figures in custody and prisoners must be avoided at all costs in order to restore the rule of law, social justice and good governance at all levels. Any unfair practices in law enforcement can only contribute to escalation of violence and strengthening of the underworld. The epidemic of substance abuse currently prevailing in the country must be contained through a change of approach that emphasizes prevention, rehabilitation and community-based treatment rather than criminalization and punishment as the primary tool for addressing the problem at hand.

7. This assessment identified food as a possible means of promoting interaction and exchanges across the ethnoreligious divide in Sri Lanka. Food can be used as a means of promoting and admiring cultural diversity as well as promoting exchange among different communities in Sri Lanka. While effort must be made to help understand the cultural foundation of food taboos and food prescriptions in each culture, food exchanges across cultural divides must be promoted as part of an overall effort at promoting interethnic and interreligious exchanges as a means of promoting social harmony and trust building.

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Annex 1: Basic Information about People-to-People Dialogues

People to people dialogue towards Social Cohesion		Date	Venue	Number of Participants		
				Male	Female	Total
Phase1: Meeting and Trust Building	Workshop 1	24 to 26 July 2020	Girithale Hotel, Girithale	9	3	12
	Workshop 2	13 to 15 August 2020	Girithale Hotel, Girithale	6	6	12
	Workshop 3	20 to 22 August 2020	Girithale Hotel, Girithale	9	3	12
Phase 2: Dialogue	Workshop 1	3 to 5 September 2020	Habarana Village, Habarana	9	3	12
	Workshop 2	17 to 19 Sept 2020	Habarana Lodge, Habarana	6	6	12
	Workshop 3	24 to 26 Sept 2020	Habarana Village, Habarana	7	5	12
Phase 3: Joint Action Reconciliation	Field visit & dialogue Jaffna	7 to 10 October 2020	Dambakola patuna, Milady harbor, Mandapakadu, Nallur Kovil Dialogue at Northgate Jetwing, Jaffna	7	6	13
	Field Visit & dialogue Kandy	20 to 22 November 2020	Peradeniya University, Lankathilake, Gadaladeniya, Embekka Dialogue at Cinnamon Citadel Kandy	5	7	12
	Field Visit & dialogue Batticaloa	26 to 29 November 2020	Ariyamtahai, Ulaganachchi, Kokkadicholai, Sivan Kovil, Thanthamalai, Mawadi Munamali, Kachchakodi, Pulukunawa temple Unnichchai Dialogue at East Lagoon, Batticaloa	11	4	15

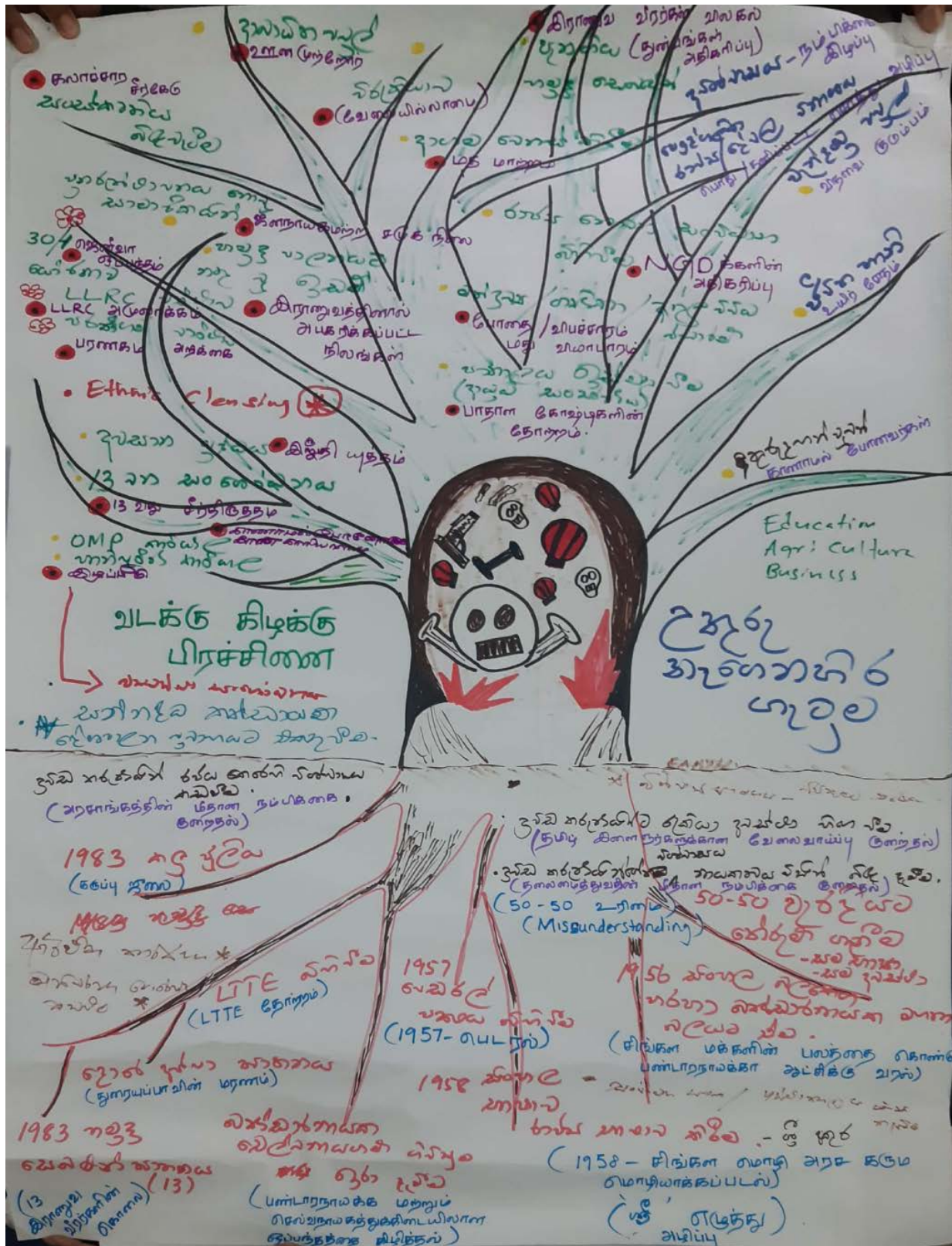## Annex 2: Information about Follow Up Events to People-to-People Dialogues

Event	Dates	Venue	No. of Participants		
			Male	Female	Total

Dialogue with Civil Society Leaders on Future of Sri Lanka Peace Process	18 to 19 November 2020	Cinnamon Citadel Hotel Kandy	10	3	13
People to People Dialogue - Concluding Meeting	14 to 15 December 2020	Habarana Village, Habarana	16	12	28

Annex 3: Pictures from Dialogue Sessions, Group Work and Field Visits

Annex 4: Selected Outputs of Civil Society Consultations

JVP Problem Tree

Problem Tree of North East Conflict

Easter Sunday Attack Problem Tree

Annex 5:   Sinhala Face Book Posts Blaming Muslims for Easter Attacks
and the Pandemic

Annex 6: Photographs of Abandoned Tsunami Housing Project in Norochcholai, Ampara District