

SECURING PEACE

AN ACTION STRATEGY FOR SRI LANKA

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ACRONYMS

CFA	Ceasefire Agreement
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HSZ	High-Security Zone
IDP	Internally displaced person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISGA	Interim Self-Governing Authority
JVP	People's Liberation Front
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PA	People's Alliance
UNF	United National Front
UNP	United National Party
SCOPP	Secretariat for Coordination of the Peace Process
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMM	Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission

A WAR RAVAGED COUNTRY: THE STATISTICS

Population

Total Population	19,742,439	Religion	
Ethnicity		% Buddhist	69.3
% Sinhalese	74	% Hindu	15.5
% Tamil	18	% Muslim	7.5
% Moor	7	% Christian	6.9
% Other (Malay, Burgher)	1	% Other	0.8

Losses and Damage as a Result of Civil War

Number of lives lost in the civil war over past 18 years
65,000+

Number of lives LTTE claims to have lost in the same number of years (as of 2002)
17,637

Years since independence
56

Years in civil war
21

Duration of Ceasefire in months
23

Number of IDPs from North-East as a result of the conflict
800,000+

% Tamil IDPs
78

% Muslim IDPs
13

% Sinhalese IDPs
8

% Administrative buildings destroyed or damaged since 1982
60

Rebuilding & Reconstruction

% Growth in fish catch in North-East between 2000 - 2002
93

% Growth in paddy production in North-East between 2000 - 2002
476

Billions of dollars (US) committed during Tokyo Donors Conference to aid peace process
4.5

Voting

% Margin of UNF victory over PA in 2001 Parliamentary Elections
2

Majority vote of Parliament needed to amend Constitution
2/3

Corruption

% of Sri Lankan citizens who feel that the police is the most corrupt public department
40

% of Sri Lankan citizens who feel bribery is a normal way of doing things
70

% of Sri Lankan citizens who think the public sector is more corrupt than private
8

Military and Defense

Number of government troops
100,000 – 110,000

% Increase in government troops since 1985
560

Estimated number of deserters from the army
28,000

Number of LTTE troops
6,000 – 10,000

Children abducted by the LTTE everyday (reported October 14, 2003)
2

% of Sri Lanka's navy coastal crafts destroyed by LTTE Sea Tigers

30 – 50

Heads of State assassinated by LTTE
2

Number of Tamil politicians killed by LTTE since February 2002 ceasefire
22

Millions of illegal weapons owned by civilians (according to Small Arms Survey)
1.9

Budget and Military Expenditures

GDP (USD) in billions
16.4

GDP per capita (USD)
848

Sri Lankan government military expenditures in 2001 (USD) in millions
786

Military expenditures since 1992 (USD) in billions
6

Military expenditures as % of GDP in 2001
5.1

Number of countries with higher recorded military expenditures as % of GDP
25

Standard of Living

% of Sri Lankans living below poverty line
25

% Unemployment (nationwide)
~10

% Unemployment (North-East)
25

% of Households with access to sanitation (nationwide)
72

% of Households with access to sanitation (North-East)
25

Years without a road to Jaffna

Media

Number of private companies that print newspapers	7
Number of private radio stations	13
Number of private TV channels	6

ABOUT THE REPORT

OBJECTIVE

What will it take to consolidate and sustain peace in Sri Lanka? This report offers a practical and priority-focused action strategy plan that will assist Sri Lankan and international actors to create an enabling environment in which peace in Sri Lanka can be secured and sustained. The action plan, consisting of integrated and innovative strategies coupled with practical recommendations, offers a fresh perspective for those actors – both domestic and international – who are active in the peace process and in the political and economic development of Sri Lanka. It is the hope of the authors that the report would make a unique contribution to this broad community in its ongoing efforts toward establishing peace in the country.

LIMITATIONS

The conflict in Sri Lanka is complex. It involves various combinations of actors at conflict with each other, including Sinhala-Tamil, PA-UNP parties, LTTE-alternative Tamil political groups, and Tamil-Muslim. The causes of conflict are multifaceted, spanning economic, political, cultural, religious, and geographic considerations. In addition, the causes and consequences of the conflict are intertwined.

This report is not intended to address each facet of the conflict in Sri Lanka. Instead, it provides a focused analysis of the current situation in the country by identifying several key factors that inhibit progress towards peace. Recommendations emerging from the analysis aim not at resolving the conflict, but at catalyzing even further action in these most critical areas so that peace may ultimately be attained. The recommendations do not constitute the full range of actions that could or should be pursued.

While a long-term solution to this prolonged conflict requires a transformation of the relationships between key actors and groups, this report addresses the immediate steps that must be taken to ameliorate the current tension and prepare a foundation for the building of a sustainable peace on the island.

ASSUMPTIONS

The GoSL is committed to maintaining a unified country under Colombo's control. The LTTE, until recently, have been committed to the creation of an independent "Eelam," or Tamil state. Positions softened through negotiations and a common desire for peace. Both parties are now willing to concede to a federal solution, wherein the country remains unified but a degree of power and autonomy is devolved to local authorities. The current peace process therefore entails devolving powers from the central government to the North and the East and granting these regions a degree of autonomy. However, these

regions, to be governed by an Interim Authority, are to remain a part of the country of Sri Lanka.

This report assumes that the peace process, as conceived, is working towards an end state that is both workable and desirable for the chief parties to the conflict. A federalist solution – a unified country with devolved powers – is not fundamentally flawed. Rather, it offers an opportunity in which the two main parties to the conflict can realize their goals. Current difficulties over the scope and extent of devolution, sequencing of reforms and demilitarization, and levels of mutual trust are real challenges, but they do not indicate that the peace process itself is misguided or unrealistic.

Furthermore, this report assumes that the two main parties – the GoSL and LTTE – are participating in the peace process with good intent. Federalism is a model that both parties are willing to attempt in order to end the conflict. Although high levels of mistrust and suspicion are evident, the report assumes that both the GoSL and the LTTE are willing, in principle, to make concessions in order to avoid the possibility of relapsing into armed conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This report was prepared by a group of nine graduate student researchers at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University:

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The project was co-sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a policy think tank based in Washington D.C. Rick Barton, Co-Director of the CSIS Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project, led the team of researchers and provided guidance in establishing a theoretical framework for assessing post-conflict situations and reconstruction efforts. This framework is largely based on the four-pillar approach adopted by CSIS in its analysis of post-conflict situations. The four pillars that ground this approach are: Security, Governance, Economic and Social Well-being, and Justice and Reconciliation.

The research project began in September 2003 and concluded in January 2004. Early stages of research focused on examining case studies of post-conflict reconstruction in order to identify common challenges and opportunities, relevant actors, lessons learned, and best practices. During this time the researchers developed a clearer understanding of factors that inhibit or contribute to post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The team also conducted extensive advance work for the field research component of the project,

including monitoring current political developments in the Sri Lankan press as well as contacting various individuals and institutions both in the United States and in Sri Lanka.

Project researchers conducted field research in Sri Lanka from October 21, 2003 to November 2, 2003. Fieldwork began in Colombo, where team members conducted four days of interviews. Deployment teams were then sent to the four regions of the country to understand and represent regional perspectives on the civil conflict and prospects for peace. The deployment teams visited the following towns:

Central	Kandy, Hatton, Anuradhapura, and Puttalam
South	Galle, Matara and Hambantota
East	Trincomalee, Valachchenai, and Batticaloa
North	Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Pt. Pedro, Chavakacheri, Valvettithurai, and Vavuniya

Researchers interviewed approximately 350 individuals representing various sectors, including: government officials and military officers, members of the diplomatic community, and representatives of bilateral aid agencies, multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community based organizations (CBOs). Through interviews and focus groups, researchers also solicited the input of a broad range of Sri Lankan citizens, including business leaders, human rights activists, students, university professors, fishermen, and laborers, and villagers. See the end of the document for a list of official persons consulted through the course of field research.

MAP OF SRI LANKA AND DEPLOYMENT SITES

■ *Orange squares denote team deployment sites



CONTEXT OF THE CIVIL WAR IN SRI LANKA

The peace process in Sri Lanka came to a halt on November 4, 2003, after President Chandrika Kumaratunga dismissed three key cabinet ministers, suspended Parliament, and declared a state of emergency in the capital city of Colombo. Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe was in the United States meeting with President Bush at the time. The move surprised both the country and the international community, who supported the government's efforts to a final peace settlement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The move may also affect the government's ceasefire agreement (CFA) with the LTTE, an agreement that marked the end of the conflict that has lasted two decades, claimed over 65,000 lives and displaced more than 800,000 people. In 1983 the LTTE began fighting against the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). Their conflict is an extension of Tamil protests in response to nationalization policies of the 1956 Sinhalese-dominated government that sought to reverse what was perceived to be a disproportionate Tamil influence in the country. The disputes escalated into a serious armed conflict in the early 1980s. The war drew in outside parties, and from 1987 to 1990 the Indian government made an unsuccessful military intervention that led, among other outcomes, to the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Armed conflict continued in the 1990s, interrupted by a series of failed ceasefires. Each side, unable to win the war, eventually began to soften their positions. The GoSL in 2000 proposed to amend the constitution to allow greater autonomy in Tamil-dominated areas. The LTTE, in turn, gave up their demands for independence and agreed, in principle, to a federalist solution. This paved the way for Norwegian-brokered peace talks, which resulted in the February 2003 ceasefire.

Entering into further peace negotiations with the LTTE, the Prime Minister took responsibility for moving the peace process forward. On October 31, 2003, the LTTE delivered their proposal for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. The proposal allows the LTTE to hold a super-majority in the ISGA, which would be responsible for justice, security, taxation, land administration, and dispersal of the US\$ 4.5 billion reserved for reconstruction of the North-East.

Differing answers to questions regarding the ISGA, and sharply different approaches to dealing with the Tamil Tigers, are a part of the current stand-off between the President and the Prime Minister. Their political impasse puts the peace process at risk since the LTTE expects political stability for the talks to continue. LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran has said he will revive demands for a separate state if peace talks remain stalled.

However, there is little indication that the crisis in Colombo will end. With the President's party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), joining the pro-Sinhalese Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party in an alliance in January 2004, the prospects for political

stability in the near future are poor. The United National Party (UNP), which has dominated Sri Lanka's politics over the past 55 years, may lose their slim majority in Parliament if the opposition alliance holds. Furthermore, President Kumaratunga recently extended her presidential term an additional year until 2006, ensuring that political rivalry is bound to dominate the capital longer than expected.

With both leaders holding key constitutional powers in the country, it is unlikely that peace can be achieved or a settlement ratified without their backing and endorsement. The President and the Prime Minister have publicly committed themselves to end the civil war and have been supporting peace talks with the LTTE, but they have yet to agree on a joint vision for peace.

PROBLEM ANALYSIS: PRIMARY THREATS TO LASTING PEACE IN SRI LANKA

To ensure that the current ceasefire holds and that appropriate steps are taken toward a permanent resolution of Sri Lanka's civil conflict, domestic and international actors must identify the right set of priorities to be addressed in the immediate future. In this section, we analyze the context of the four destabilizing factors that present the most serious threats to the peace negotiations:

- The political power struggle in the Sri Lankan Government
- A pervasive culture of fear amongst the public
- Entrenched ethnic polarization
- A shallow peace constituency

In addition, we include in this section a discussion of the importance of the ISGA because, while it is not yet an existing condition within Sri Lanka, its development and implementation will be a key factor in either exacerbating or deflating the problems noted above. Indeed, if all of these underlying issues are not resolved in the long-term it will be extremely difficult for lasting peace to be achieved in the country. More importantly, if they are not addressed in the short-term, destabilizing forces could easily become spoilers of the current peace process.

POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLE IN THE SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT

For years the SLFP and the UNP have vied for control of the Government. Under the current system of cohabitation, the propensity for political gridlock is even higher than in the past, and the political power struggle at the top levels of government has become a serious threat to the peace process. Indeed, while the violent civil war between the GoSL and the LTTE has dominated headlines for the past two decades, an intense *intra*-ethnic political conflict between the two main Sinhalese parties has undoubtedly prolonged the *inter*-ethnic armed conflict. While both parties see peace as desirable, tendency toward extremism persists in the current political climate. Sri Lanka consequently lacks political leaders who are able to separate peace from political gain.

Although Prime Minister Wickremesinghe is generally viewed as the leader of the peace talks that began nearly two years ago, President Kumaratunga has also consistently identified peace as a key issue on her national agenda. It was the President who initiated a previous round of peace talks during her first term, and she has frequently made public statements in support of a peaceful resolution to the country's violent civil war. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's UNP party has solicited and received the support of many of Sri Lanka's business elites based on its pro-peace policies. Security is clearly the foundation for continued economic growth and increased foreign investment and is therefore highly desirable for the UNP. Both political parties therefore have much to gain from achieving peace.

Until early November 2003, when she took the drastic step of firing three ministers and suspending Parliament, the President had generally left the mechanics of the peace process in the hands of the Prime Minister. Although clearly resentful of being sidelined, she was apparently biding her time, perhaps hoping that the failure to reach a resolution would undermine the UNP's support. Unfortunately, competition for political power in Sri Lanka has resulted in an operational mentality that prioritizes winning political capital over doing what is best for the country. Each political party is so intent on getting credit for advances in the peace process that they are reluctant to cooperate in pursuit of this common goal. Furthermore, they see the peace process as a zero-sum game in which one party's peace achievements translate directly to the other's losses of both prestige and political support.

There are several constituencies that contribute to this protracted power struggle by feeding politicians' fears. The most obvious of these is the nationalist wing of the still influential Buddhist clergy, which insists that a united Sri Lanka is the only way to maintain a true Sinhalese "identity." There are also significant pockets of resistance to peace among Sinhalese populations in the South, where many accuse the government of conceding too much to the LTTE and channeling too many resources to the North. At the same time, the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC), as the "swing vote" in party politics, continues to pressure both sides to appease Muslim concerns or lose their support. As long as President Kumaratunga believes that stalling the peace process will help build her support among skeptical constituencies, there will be little progress toward peace. The recently formalized alliance between the President's party and the JVP is evidence of political maneuvering executed at a cost to the peace process.

With the political commotion instigated by the President in November 2003, the protracted power struggle between the two leaders has degenerated to a political crisis that threatens to stall the current negotiations or, worse yet, undo the progress that has been made. However, this does not need to be the case. The ongoing talks between the President and the Prime Minister could just as easily represent an opportunity for reconciliation and a new commitment to cooperation. The Recommendations section of this report sets forth several possible strategies for mitigating the current crisis and building consensus between the two leaders.

A PERVASIVE CULTURE OF FEAR

Despite drastic improvements in quality of life since the cessation of hostilities, a pervasive culture of fear still exists in Sri Lanka, particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. This culture of fear can best be understood as a collective traumatization resulting from 20 years of civilian atrocities and human rights abuses perpetuated by the Sri Lankan Army, the LTTE and other armed groups. These violent acts, many of which continue today, have restricted basic freedoms and created an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. We have identified three conditions that characterize this culture of fear and threat to impede the achievement of a lasting peace.

- **People lack both physical and emotional security**

First, despite the ceasefire, security is still the preeminent concern. The Sri Lankan Army continues to occupy high-security zones (HSZ), harasses ethnic minorities, restricts their movements, and is seen by many people as an occupying force that has never accounted for its past atrocities. The LTTE openly recruits child soldiers, extorts money and goods from the populace, and intimidates or assassinates those who oppose it.

At the same time, many Sri Lankans are unwilling to report abuses for fear of reprisal, do not trust the police to protect their safety, and will not share their views with others because they are wary of government and/or LTTE informants. As one Sri Lankan citizen whispered nervously over dinner, “we don’t know who is watching us right now.” Thus, while the ceasefire agreement has ended open hostilities, it has done little to address a lack of effective institutional protections for people’s basic security needs. As a result, many citizens have resorted to extremist positions to get the safety assurances they need.

- **Violence is the most effective agent of change**

Second, violence is still the most effective mechanism available to hold the ruling elites, political institutions, and armed forces accountable for their actions. Some analysts have suggested that the people of Sri Lanka are passive and disinterested in mobilizing for change¹. It is more accurate to say, however, that Sri Lankans do not have a secure outlet for promoting reform. In many areas in the North-East, the LTTE does not allow for the free expression of ideas or political opposition and will not permit civic organizations to assemble except under LTTE supervision. Similarly, the central government has a weak record of demonstrating accountability to the needs of its citizens. It has repeatedly undermined reform efforts, such as the Human Rights and Bribery Commissions, and has allowed and even encouraged political extremists to intimidate proponents of positive change.

Many Tamils believe that the only change agent in Sri Lanka that has ever proven effective has been 20 years of armed struggle. With no other alternatives for holding their political leaders accountable, many citizens resort to supporting extremist groups in hopes of having their interests represented. Indeed, many Sri Lankans attribute the growing violence between Tamils and Muslims in part to the Tamil perception that Muslims are exploiting their unique power as the “swing vote” in state politics for material gain. Unless democratic outlets for change can be developed, violence will continue to be a common form of civic participation.

- **Authentic political participation and dialogue isn’t possible**

Third and finally, the culture of fear among the population restricts the exchange of ideas and diversity of participation that will be critical to the credibility and durability of a peace agreement. The current atmosphere of intimidation, fueled in part by the fear of political assassinations by the LTTE, discourages alternative political parties from critiquing either the Colombo government or the LTTE. One of the least recognized divides in Sri Lanka may be between Tamils who do not feel represented by the LTTE—

¹ Orjulea, C. (2003). Building Peace in Sri Lanka: A Role for Civil Society? *Journal of Peace Research*: 195-212.

but are too fearful to speak out against them due to past experiences of LTTE brutality—and Tamils who continue to place genuine faith in the LTTE as an organization.

The reluctance of average citizens to express their political views is allowing those in power to shape new political and social arrangements for the country that few might have chosen if they had an opportunity to participate in an environment of security. As long as moderate groups and individuals are silenced by fear, extremist positions will hijack the peace process, and the negotiating parties will have little incentive to compromise. In a best case scenario, this will likely result in a peace agreement that does not represent the perspective of the majority of the Sri Lankan population. In a worst case scenario, the predominance of extremist views could cause the peace process to collapse.

ENTRENCHED ETHNIC POLARIZATION

The protracted civil war in Sri Lanka has left a legacy of resentment and mistrust between the country's two largest ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. This resentment is generally attributable to decades of state-sponsored institutional discrimination against the Tamil minority, which polarized the two communities and created inequalities that persist to this day. However, in the 20 years since the beginning of armed conflict, many of the initial grievances of the Tamil population have evolved, and bloodshed on both sides has led to increasing polarization and mistrust.

Entrenched ethnic polarization represents both a short- and long-term threat to the peace process, as it prevents the construction of a sense of national unity to help cement the peace. However, most Sri Lankans insist that the Tamil-Sinhalese conflict is primarily political, and that the recent Tamil-Muslim conflict is more economic than ethnic. It is clear that ethnic differences are often exploited for political gain. If increased polarization is the result of misinformation rather than inherent animosity, it is by no means inevitable. With a majority of the population now committed to preserving the peace process, the current period should be characterized by confidence-building and reconciliation measures, not mistrust and blame. We have identified below several key factors that are undermining attempts at reconciliation.

- **Lack of bridging mechanisms and institutions**

In many areas of the country, opportunities for positive interaction between members of different ethnic groups have dwindled. To a certain extent, Sri Lanka's population was geographically distributed along ethnic lines prior to the civil war. However, 20 years of armed conflict has seriously compounded this trend. Colombo and the Eastern Province are the only areas where large numbers of Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese continue to live in close proximity. And while the three populations coexist and interact relatively peacefully in Colombo, this has not been the case in several parts of the East, where recent ethnic tensions, particularly between Muslims and Tamils, have degenerated to violence.

One clear impediment to building mutual understanding among members of different ethnic groups is a lack of community-level “connectors” that would help bring different

groups together. These “connectors” exist to a greater degree in Colombo, where civic and business groups, as well as schools, are more integrated and thus provide regular opportunities for structured interaction between groups. In other areas of the country, such opportunities do not exist, as ethnic communities are highly segregated and insular. In the North, the only contact Tamils have with Sinhalese comes through interactions with feared authority figures representing the government, the police or the armed forces. In the East, where Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese are evenly represented, the result of closer proximity has been sporadic inter-ethnic violence rather than enhanced understanding. This result is not surprising given the lack of positive community-level interaction between the three ethnic groups. Although communities may live side by side, they tend to gravitate toward their “own” neighborhoods, markets, schools, and associations rather than intermingling with other groups.

- **Perception of continued institutional discrimination**

Many citizens in the Eastern Province do not feel represented by their local government or protected by their local law enforcement officials. This is particularly the case for the Tamil and Muslim populations, who perceive a continued political hegemony on the part of the Sinhalese. Furthermore, many Tamils express concern that the persistence of institutional discrimination compromises their rights as equal citizens before the law. While many forms of discrimination may no longer be state-sponsored, the perception of restricted access to agricultural land or fishing waters exacerbates the grievances of minority populations and undermines their faith in government. Any attempt to reduce ethnic tensions and build national unity will be largely ineffective as long as members of certain ethnic groups do not believe they are being treated as equal citizens before the law.

- **Silence and distortions regarding the past**

Many Southerners are not aware of the massive damage inflicted by the war in the North-East, where entire towns were destroyed and neighborhoods abandoned due to intense shelling. In many cases, they do not understand the intensity of the fear and intimidation that characterize LTTE-controlled areas and that left many Tamils with little option but to cooperate with the LTTE. Meanwhile, the Tamil population in the North is largely uninformed about the low levels of economic development experienced by many of their compatriots in the South. In fact, many Northerners are skeptical that the South suffered any negative repercussions at all due to the war, given that most of the fighting took place in the North. The reality is that the huge military expenditures of the war years depleted social and infrastructure spending throughout the country, leaving many areas of the South impoverished and underdeveloped.

If diverse populations had a broader perspective on the trauma and poverty inflicted throughout the country by the civil war, they would likely feel greater empathy toward other groups, have a deeper appreciation of the drastic lifestyle improvements throughout the country since the ceasefire, and give increased support to the peace process.

- **Lack of nationwide, impartial news coverage**

The lack of a bilingual and ethnic-blind print media and the dearth of Tamil newspapers result in serious inconsistencies in the nature and quality of information received by various ethnic groups. With different groups making assumptions and forming their political views based on biased information, it is not surprising that there are strong differences of opinion regarding the political situation and the ongoing peace negotiations. If Sri Lankan citizens had access to impartial media or integrative news coverage that expressed a variety of viewpoints, this would contribute immeasurably to promoting mutual understanding and a clearer sense of national unity.

A SHALLOW PEACE CONSTITUENCY

Popular support for the peace process is broad, but shallow. Economic neglect and misperceptions about devolution undermine a strong public commitment to peace. Since the ceasefire in 2002, the GoSL has failed to widely broadcast the clear dividends of peace. Likewise, the peace negotiations have proceeded with few attempts to inform the public of the details and significance of the decisions being made. Devolution of power has already occurred for much of the Northern Province, yet throughout the South citizens express concern about “giving away the North” in the negotiations. Confusion abounds regarding federalism and its potential forms.

Although the Prime Minister has pursued foreign investments for long-term development, the government has not addressed immediate needs in many marginalized regions of the country. Citizens whose access to economic opportunity was stifled during the conflict have not seen evidence of efforts to re-integrate them into the economic mainstream. These citizens watch Colombo prosper while their own economic situations stagnate or deteriorate.

After interviews with hundreds of Sri Lankans, it is clear that without economic gain and a clear understanding of power devolution, citizens throughout the country will continue to be drawn toward more radical positions that could undermine the peace process. How is underdevelopment directly linked to the peace process, and what are the messages reaching citizens as they grapple with a new vision of their country?

- **Underdevelopment fuels political antagonism**

For the past 20 years, the GoSL has neglected the development of substantial portions of the country, instead expending resources on maintaining and expanding defense. For example, in 2002, about 6 percent of GDP was spent on defense compared to 4.8 percent for health and education combined. In addition, the Government has created large fiscal deficits to support defense spending and has maintained a certain level of social service provision for its citizens. The government’s spending patterns have left economic development largely ignored outside of Colombo and a few other major cities.

The most pressing economic needs are in infrastructure and structural unemployment. Scarcity of water and power and the lack of adequate infrastructure for transportation have left many regions unattractive to private businesses and government service provision. In part due to this lack of infrastructure, joblessness is very high throughout

much of Sri Lanka. Countless people in the Southern Province cited unemployment as their primary concern. Youths face tough prospects for finding employment despite high enrollment rates in secondary education and technical training. Farming is becoming more difficult to sustain as crop prices fall.

Unemployment leaves citizens searching for political alternatives that promise improved social and economic welfare. One of the most active voices focusing on daily needs of citizens is the JVP, a political party opposed to the current peace negotiations. The JVP finds most of its support within the Hambantota and Thissamaharama districts, which are the most economically depressed areas of the Southern Province. The JVP is the leading party in the Thissamaharama Pradeshiya Sabha (local governing council), which is being used as a model to increase the JVP's support base.

- **Absence of clear peace dividends perpetuates frustration**

For almost every Sri Lankan citizen, the protracted conflict has restricted economic opportunities. In many areas, access to land and sea has been limited for security reasons, eliminating the livelihoods of those dependent on natural resources for survival. Throughout the conflict, small businesses have shut down and industry has relocated. The extremely high risk of investment in these areas prevented other enterprises from replacing those that had left. The health industry and public administration have also degenerated to the point of non-existence in many areas, leaving thousands of citizens unemployed.

These distressing economic circumstances have changed little since the ceasefire agreement in 2002. The GoSL has taken only minimal steps to ensure short-term economic gains and has had a weak voice in articulating actual and potential dividends of peace. The LTTE's rhetoric indicates concern for improving the economic welfare of Tamils, thereby securing the backing of those who may not otherwise support them. Without connecting the peace process to tangible benefits for individual citizens, Sri Lankans will continue to feel frustrated by stagnant economic growth and may become disillusioned with the peace process. In places where ethnic violence persists, such as the Eastern Province, the competition for scarce jobs will likely fuel further ethnic tensions.

- **Confusion about devolution undermines acceptability of solution**

The terms of the current peace negotiations and scenarios for possible outcomes are not clear to most citizens. The debate in the South revolves around preserving Sri Lanka as a nation and the Sinhalese as a people, as well as the impending "loss" of the Northern and Eastern parts of the island to the Tamils and the LTTE. This debate overlooks the fact that a large degree of devolution has already been achieved for the North, and that devolution does not imply a complete cessation of GoSL control of that region. At this point, the two parties are negotiating the *degree of LTTE control*, not absolute control by either the LTTE or GoSL. However, the public is generally in denial of this reality due to confusing and inconsistent messages from its political leaders, or in many cases a total lack of information.

Meanwhile, the government's reluctance to publicize the details of LTTE control in a devolved government permits the LTTE and its supporters to strive for maximum devolution—a demand the GoSL will not accept. President Kumaratunga has taken advantage of the void in public communication to gain political support through a non-conciliatory approach toward the LTTE. By doing so, she has also criticized the Prime Minister and his party for views that she herself upheld only a few years prior.

The President draws support from one of the most organized and influential voices in Sri Lankan society – the Buddhist clergy. The clergy remains committed to, and vocally promotes, the idea of a united Sri Lanka, which it believes will be compromised by the creation of a federalist state. The message from the Buddhist clergy to the people of the South is clear: the ruling of Sri Lanka should be done by one central government. With few alternative messages to counteract this perspective, it remains a centerpiece of Sinhalese views on federalism. The failure of political elites to proactively support federalism and acknowledge the current state of *de facto* devolution enables misinformation and nationalistic perspectives to predominate.

INTERIM SELF-GOVERNING AUTHORITY

From the LTTE and GoSL proposals, it can be expected that the ISGA will rule until a final peace agreement is signed or for five years, whichever comes first. Thus, it is highly likely that the ISGA agreement will establish the laws and governing structure of the critical North-East region, including its relationship to the central government and its place in the greater Sri Lankan state, for the short- and medium-term. Furthermore, the powers devolved and institutions established in the ISGA are likely to become the status quo for the region in an eventual peace agreement, thereby defining the body's nature and relationship to the GoSL for the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the arrangement of the ISGA is such that it fosters both short- and long-term peace and stability in Sri Lanka.

From the standpoint of durable peace, why is it so important to establish an ISGA that works from the start?

- Granting maximum devolution for the North-East as requested in the LTTE's ISGA proposal creates a *de facto* separate state, which is certain to fan Sinhalese nationalist resentment and create a political incentive for Sinhalese leaders to crack down on autonomy or even return to use of force.
- Allowing the LTTE unchecked power in the region could alienate resident minorities, who themselves may agitate for greater rights or autonomy. The LTTE would have to crack down on dissenters, giving Sinhalese and/or Muslims in the rest of Sri Lanka the desire to see the central government intervene. This would destabilize the region and the center-periphery relationship.
- A lack of democracy in the region—that is, absolute LTTE political authority—essentially holds residents hostage if the LTTE does not become an accountable,

responsive political party. Residents could either flee to other parts of Sri Lanka or agitate for change within.

- Sri Lankans will expect to have the right to live wherever in their country they choose. If following a peace deal, Sinhalese and Muslims feel they cannot move to the North and East with a reasonable expectation of safety and civil rights, they could charge that the region is indeed a separate state and push the central government to “regain” the lost territory.
- Stability of the entire post-conflict arrangement depends on citizens experiencing the benefits of peace. If the North-East region does not provide increased safety, transparency, mobility, and respect for human rights, the economic peace dividend will be seriously undermined and people may decide that they need to return to armed conflict.

In sum, regarding certain administrative duties, the North and East should function just like any other province and in these ways may serve as a model for devolution for the rest of Sri Lanka. However, as the interim administration will involve a greater level of devolution than has already occurred in other provinces, increased attention needs to be paid to every aspect of devolution to prevent unnecessary and potentially dangerous mistakes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN ACTION STRATEGY

This section provides recommendations for an action strategy to be implemented by key domestic and international actors within the next 24 months in order to catalyze further actions toward a durable peace in Sri Lanka. Broadly, our recommendations are as follows:

- Minimize the capacity of the Colombo power struggle to disrupt the peace process
- Strengthen the constituency for peace
- Improve physical security in volatile areas
- Build an ISGA that promotes future stability
- Remove the most explicit barriers to equality and national reconciliation

RECOMMENDATION 1: MINIMIZE THE CAPACITY OF THE COLOMBO POWER STRUGGLE TO UNDERMINE PEACE

Progress on the peace process has been stalled since President Kumaratunga suspended Parliament and dismissed key government ministers in November 2003. Political gridlock in Colombo is nothing new, yet this episode threatens the most promising prospect for peace since the conflict erupted in 1983.

In the run up to Presidential elections in December 2005 (now likely 2006) and possibly snap Parliamentary elections, this power struggle may result in a permanent derailment of the peace process. The Prime Minister has a clear incentive to get the peace process back on track: he would be delivering on a central campaign promise to end the war, he would be seen as responsible for redeeming a lifestyle-enhancing peace dividend for his people, and he would be widely applauded by the international community for his achievement. Though the President for her part does not see incentives for achieving peace now, she needs to be brought into the process to ensure smooth and sustainable progress. Perhaps the most powerful and organic means of minimizing the President's opposition to the current peace process is weakening the anti-peace political constituency that supports her actions (see Recommendation 2), but there are a variety of means at the government level that could also improve prospects.

International Community

The UN Secretary-General should appoint a three-member team of high-level international diplomats to mediate between the President and Prime Minister, with the Japanese in the lead.

Thus far, foreign ministries and diplomats have sent letters and made public statements encouraging the President and Prime Minister to resolve their differences. The Norwegians have suspended their role in the negotiating process until the Colombo

power struggle has been resolved. We recommend that a troika of high-level special envoys, possibly led by longtime UN envoy and Japanese diplomat Yasushi Akashi and including former Finnish President Maarti Ahtisaari, mediate between the President and Prime Minister. The Japanese should serve a special role because they are the major donor to Sri Lanka and are not seen as favoring a particular political party in the South. Both Akashi and Ahtisaari have played envoy roles to Sri Lanka thus far, but we suggest formalized roles for better coordination and cooperation between these international players.

Personal and staff-level negotiations between the President and Prime Minister have yielded no fruit. The team will therefore work with both sides to help define roles (especially for the President) in the peace process and beyond, address the President's concerns about the current peace process, and determine how the parties and the international community can remove obstacles. The team will serve as an impartial reporter to the international community and make recommendations on how bilateral and multilaterals can best support the removal of Colombo-based obstacles to peace, including recommendations on conditions for future foreign aid.

Negotiate and clarify roles that the President and Prime Minister should play throughout the life of the peace process.

Up to now, only the Prime Minister has played a direct role in this round of peace negotiations. For the peace process to be successful, it is critical that a role for the President is defined as well, and in a way that is both satisfactory to her and promotes smooth progress.

The following roles in the peace process and beyond should be assigned to or shared by the President and the Prime Minister:

- Advise negotiators on the peace process;
- Sign the peace deal;
- Lead the effort to implement various aspects of a peace deal, e.g. dismantling the HSZ, and demobilizing and disarming GoSL soldiers;
- Chair a national dialogue on reconciliation, and;
- Serve as the primary salesperson for Sri Lanka and its peace to investors and foreign governments to deliver concrete peace dividends.

RECOMMENDATION 2: EXPAND AND MOBILIZE THE POLITICAL CONSTITUENCY FOR PEACE

A related recommendation is that pro-peace Sri Lankan and international actors expand and mobilize the political constituency for peace. Measures to deepen and expand the peace constituency will limit the political effectiveness of any anti-conciliatory stances in the peace negotiations. An expanded peace constituency—and consequently a smaller bloc of spoilers—is the strongest incentive for parties to unite surrounding the current negotiations. In fact, as long as a significant constituency exists that opposes the peace

process, some political leader will always seek to retain that voting bloc by obstructing negotiations.

The peace constituency must be broadened and deepened through the realization of tangible peace dividends that encompass infrastructure development, and growth of business and employment. As the Prime Minister told *Time Magazine*, “Only through [development] can we consolidate the peace process. People in both the north and south want a peace dividend. They want reconstruction, schools, employment. I do not think a legal document is going to be enough to satisfy the people.”² As the peace dividend continues to develop and expand in Sri Lanka, an information campaign must be launched to ensure that the people clearly understand the link between economic benefits and peace.

The growth of a broader constituency for peace must also depend on greater understanding of a federalist solution to power-sharing. Information about federalism’s rationale, advantages, and possible forms must be spread throughout the country. This pertains particularly to the South, where citizens tend to equate a federalist settlement with “losing” a part of Sri Lanka.

Recommendation 2, Part 1: Create a lasting peace dividend.

GoSL

Strategically disperse resources beyond Colombo to improve infrastructure including roads, transportation, sanitation, water supply, and seaports. Investment in infrastructure will provide employment to a large segment of the population, facilitate freedom of movement and the increased social cohesion that such freedom brings, accelerate commercial activity, attract greater foreign investment, and reduce the feelings of isolation felt in some parts of the country. Business leaders in the South, for example, hailed the forthcoming interior road from the southern coast to Colombo as a boon for the region. The rehabilitation and re-opening of the A-9 has been critical to improved commerce and social interaction between the North and South. Employment will also give the lower-income population the purchasing power to stabilize food prices and other basic needs, and thus prevent disruptive and violent riots caused by price hikes. Economic inequity and employment issues are particularly important in the Southern District, where there is simmering opposition to the peace process.

Invest in small business development through micro-financing, low-interest loans, assistance with business plans, feasibility studies, and provisions for risk insurance. Local chambers of commerce or other NGOs can help the government provide small start-up grants in the most war-torn and underdeveloped areas. These measures are a necessary supplement to the current practice of attracting large international firms. Locally owned small businesses are not as subject to the swings of the global market and will help stabilize the economy.

² Alex Perry, Interview of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, *Time Magazine*, available at <http://www.time.com/time/asia/features/srilanka/interview.html>.

Accelerate the process of adapting university and other higher education curricula to Sri Lanka's modern needs. The higher education system does not produce a work force with skills that match Sri Lanka's current needs. The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training acknowledges this shortcoming and plans to adapt the system using the US\$40.3 million grant it received from the World Bank in 2003. We urge that this adaptation process be kept free from political wrangling or bureaucratic turf wars. Universities should expand business, finance, marketing, accounting, computer science, and engineering departments. Training courses should directly reflect local industry and labor demands. The dismal employment opportunities faced by the youth must be combated to create optimistic and peaceful future generations. Training should also be directed at farmers who are displaced if traditional farming lifestyles are disrupted by consolidation or land commercialization of farms.

International community

Maintain flexibility in encouraging economic reforms and sensitivity to long-term repercussions. This pertains particularly to international financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF as they implement any development assistance strategies, but applies as well to any GoSL, bilateral, or multilateral intervention in the economic realm. They should keep in mind that increased unemployment resulting from reforms could quickly lead to social instability and conflict. Land law reform should include policies that will address the consequences of increased rural-to-urban migration and ensure adequate housing, infrastructure, and employment. Labor market reform should include provisions for worker protection in times of major disruptions in the labor market. NGOs need to fill in the gaps for employment training, micro-finance, and basic service provision.

Recommendation 2, Part 2: Execute two major bilingual public information campaigns, one promoting the peace dividend and the other explaining federalism in the Sri Lankan context.

GoSL

Make the SCOPP a nonpartisan, technocratic institution with an independent, internationally-funded budget. The Secretariat for Coordination of the Peace Process (SCOPP) is the most appropriate home for these two pro-peace public information campaigns, but is seen as the Prime Minister's agent and thus lacks the credibility to deliver these important messages to all target audiences. The President should appoint a co-director to the SCOPP, and the SCOPP's board should be broadened to show a genuine nonpartisan commitment. Instead of being a department within the prime minister's government, the SCOPP should be an independent, stand-alone agency staffed by civil servants.

Have the SCOPP coordinate both campaigns with heavy involvement of civil society. The SCOPP already works closely with NGOs to produce appropriate pro-peace media products, but the role of NGOs should be expanded to include representatives of all major

regions, ethnic groups, and languages. Civil society actors from outside Colombo will have crucial input in devising campaign tools that reach a broader audience.

Use state media for campaign-related programs and advertisements. The Sri Lanka Government's influence over broadcast media can be seized as a benefit by using it to support the campaign. The Ministry of Mass Communication, Information, and Telecommunications should ask state media directors to devote air-time to the campaigns; however, the Ministry should strictly refrain from generating content. State TV and radio should temporarily assign a handful of production staff to assist the SCOPP in producing high-quality broadcast products.

Convince private media owners to participate. Outdoor advertising (eg. billboards) and private print media outlets are excellent vehicles for delivering these messages but tend to be privately owned. SCOPP should approach major owners, publishers, and editors and ask for a commitment to run campaign messages free of charge. SCOPP can also come up with many innovative campaign strategies involving private firms, such as asking Sri Lanka wireless providers like Mobitel to use free mass text-messaging to communicate campaign themes to mobile phone users.

Domestic NGOs

Work within the SCOPP to create and monitor the content of the advertising campaign. Some thoughts on content:

- Prominent figures should feature heavily in this campaign, and these figures should deliver a clear message to all ethnicities in the appropriate languages. Possible figures for this campaign include the famous cricket player Muttiah Muralitharan, who is Tamil, and his equally admired Sinhalese teammates Sanath Jayasuriya and Aravinda De Silva. They can advertise with appealing mottoes such as “We all play for Sri Lanka.”
- Conduct contests for school children to develop slogans and pictures that will be used in the campaign.
- Seek sponsorships from businesses whose names can appear on advertisements. These businesses should be tagged “Sri Lankan friendly,” and their names published in local or national newspapers. This will attract other businesses to get involved and will encourage natural expansion of the campaign.

International Community

Fund and provide technical support for both public information campaigns. The GoSL has not adequately publicized the economic benefits of peace or fully explained federalism in the Sri Lankan context. Bilateral, multilateral, and NGO actors who care about peace should be willing to make a significant contribution to this important effort.

RECOMMENDATION 3: IMPROVE PHYSICAL SECURITY IN VOLATILE AREAS

Rather than improving security, the Sri Lankan police force in the North-East is often seen as a wing of the Sri Lankan Army. Regions within the North-East in which both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan police have a significant presence are particularly volatile, with events as mundane as traffic accidents often leading to riots. In the Eastern Province, violent clashes between Muslims and Tamils have occurred since the ceasefire. As long as such insecurity persists, authentic political and civilian participation and the ability to peacefully challenge the LTTE and the GoSL will remain minimal.

LTTE

Halt the recruitment of child soldiers and the use of intimidation, extortion, assassination, and other forms of violence.

As a major step toward confidence-building, demonstrate commitment to human rights and the rule of law. Aim to become a mainstream political party that is respected both domestically and internationally so as to gain credibility as a governing authority of the ISGA.

GoSL

Commit to a timeframe for dismantling the HSZs while maintaining a reduced formal military presence in the North and East Provinces.

As a sign of goodwill and confidence-building, the GoSL should commit to withdrawing some of its forces and begin the process for dismantling the current HSZ arrangement. The central government has a right and a responsibility to maintain a military presence in these two provinces, but the current deployment is a source of security concern for many residents. A gradual drawdown of the military presence would be a logical extension of the current ceasefire and would generate mutual confidence in the peace process between the GoSL and the Tamil majority of the region. There is no need for immediate dismantling so much as an agreement on concessions the LTTE could offer in exchange for such a move. Examples might include dismantling LTTE HSZs and eliminating child recruitment.

GoSL and LTTE

Establish a fast-track within the court system for the trial of future human rights cases in order to encourage accountability during the interim period.

It is critical to combating the culture of fear, invigorating democratic participation, and thus solidifying peace that citizens feel a new freedom from repression and intimidation. Police need to be more fair and vigilant. Current human rights abuses need to be investigated. Most important, perpetrators of future human rights abuses need to be prosecuted. Sri Lankans—both potential victims and perpetrators—need to see that such crimes cannot be committed with impunity in a peaceful Sri Lanka. The GoSL and the

LTTE need to establish a fast-track for human rights trials within the existing court system. Eligible crimes will be defined in the context of existing Sri Lankan law, but will focus on intimidation and violence related to political, religious, linguistic, ethnic, or regional association. Appointment of judges will be agreed to by both sides, with strong encouragement from the international community. Seeing even a few of these cases prosecuted will serve as a deterrent for potential perpetrators and a liberating force for those repressed by the GoSL, LTTE, or other parties.

Build an integrated police force that reflects regions' ethnic composition.

The GoSL should intensify Tamil language training for non-Tamil-speaking police, as well as make concerted efforts to employ more Tamil police in order to achieve greater ethnic balance within the police force. The government should immediately convene a task force including Tamil and Muslim representatives to develop a recruitment, training, and deployment plan that addresses the current imbalance and sets target dates for a more diverse police force.

Convene an advisory group to peace talks on demobilization and confidence-building.

Sri Lanka cannot retain two separate militaries, both sides need to draw down troop levels, and some officers and enlisted men from both sides will eventually have to work together. The issue of responsibility for security in the North and East is highly contentious, but both sides should be able to agree that it is mutually beneficial to reduce troop levels across the board. Therefore, as part of the peace talks, the parties should convene an advisory group to generate a concrete proposal for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of soldiers. The GoSL has an estimated 100,000-110,000 active duty soldiers and the LTTE 6,000-10,000. Both figures, but especially the government's force, can be drastically reduced as part of a peace dividend.

International community

Establish a UN-sponsored police training and monitoring mission in the North and East based on the UN International Police Task Force in Bosnia.

There is a rule of law problem in Sri Lanka that has especially repressive manifestations in the North and East. We propose a deployment of UN trainers and monitors assigned to local police stations in those regions. The trainers will be tasked with improving the professionalism and capabilities of the local police force. Monitors will review complaints, accompany police on patrols and investigations, and report to their own headquarters on police performance. These reports should be made publicly available to make police and elected officials more accountable to the public and to international donors. The presence of international police monitors will serve as a deterrent to unfair law enforcement; boost assurance of the freedom of movement, assembly, and expression; and create a more stable atmosphere for commerce, study, and social activity.

Sponsor and expand the mandate of the Human Rights Commission for Sri Lanka.

This new Human Rights Commission would include several respected international commissioners, international funding, and an overall composition that reflects Sri Lanka's diverse ethnic, linguistic, regional, and religious make-up. The Commission will, within a set timeframe, document future human rights complaints, investigate cases, and provide legal representation for victims of human rights abuses. Such investigations will enhance accountability, improve respect for the rule of law, and deter political violence in the transitional period starting with agreement on an ISGA. Resources will certainly limit the caseload the Commission can take on; Commissioners and staff should therefore prioritize complaints in a clear mandate.

RECOMMENDATION 4: BUILD AN ISGA THAT PROMOTES FUTURE STABILITY

International Community

Engage the LTTE

The LTTE, at least partially and in the short term, is going to govern the North-East region. Constructive engagement—as opposed to isolation—will give the international community a more productive role in promoting peace, development, fair representation and human rights, which will be key to keeping residents satisfied and the central government from interfering. This means more openness and transparency in providing aid to LTTE-controlled areas, more formal bilateral and multilateral contacts and partnerships between the LTTE leadership and key international players, and open recognition that the LTTE is the political leadership of the ISGA.

LTTE engagement is critical to facilitating the flow of aid and commerce that people need to see as peace dividends in the areas they control. In addition, the LTTE leadership is more likely to become moderate if its members are exposed to the rest of the world. The United States should use removal of the LTTE from its list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations—a condition that makes fundraising, diplomatic relations, and official travel difficult for them—as a carrot for getting the group to comply with various requests.

Invest in the development of non-LTTE political parties and media and insist that the ISGA's ruling charter provide for fair representation of non-Tamils in political institutions.

The LTTE currently represses all opposition political parties in their area of operation. If the government of the ISGA remains undemocratic beyond the interim period, there will be pressure from minorities, dissatisfied or fearful Tamils, the international community, and the central government for further change, which will have a destabilizing effect on the region. The international community—led by U.S. AID's Office of Transition Initiatives and NGOs like the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the International Republican Institute, and the Open Society Institute—needs to make a significant investment in the cultivation and training of political parties other than the LTTE and in independent media. Furthermore, the LTTE's current ISGA proposal

allows for representation, but would have a LTTE-majority with no special rights (eg. veto) for minorities, even for issues that affect the places they exclusively populate. The international community—through diplomatic pressure and aid conditionality—should insist that this provision be changed. The international community should remain non-partisan as it promotes political pluralism.

GoSL

Provide a guarantee of meaningful LTTE/Tamil representation in the central government via seats in Parliament and possibly a position in the Government.

The LTTE need to be brought into the mainstream of democratic decision-making in order that they become more integrated with Sri Lankan politics and society and over time take more interest in the functioning of the Sri Lankan state.

LTTE

Implement a mechanism that ensures that key government functions are effective and transparent.

The LTTE already governs the North and parts of the East, even though the central government maintains control over these regions' finances. If residents, the central government, businesses, and the international community are to trust the ISGA, its leadership needs to demonstrate openness and competence. The ISGA should therefore establish measurement criteria for transparency and effective governance—especially in financial management, contracts, and licensing—that ensure competence and transparency in public management. An audit committee composed of LTTE/Tamils, the GoSL, and the international community can publish a “report card” against which the Sri Lankan public, potential donors, and investors can judge performance.

Recognize the right of non-LTTE actors to have a formal role in the region's political sphere.

The LTTE must prevent intimidation of peaceful non-LTTE political movements and in no way discourage opposition parties from participating in the political process. This means people should have freedom of expression and peaceful assembly that is protected by the regional police and courts. The ISGA should include direct political representation of Tamils not affiliated with the LTTE and of non-Tamil groups.

Clarify the role of LTTE and other Tamil groups in the central government.

The LTTE's ISGA proposal enumerates the jurisdiction of the proposed province, but does not explicitly delineate the GoSL and ISGA duties and roles in the central government. The LTTE must offer a vision for its political participation as an important political constituency of the unified Sri Lanka.

RECOMMENDATION 5: REMOVE THE MOST EXPLICIT BARRIERS TO EQUALITY AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Institutional equality and national reconciliation should be addressed in the ISGA negotiations.

GoSL and ISGA

Ensure equal access to employment and public services, particularly access to higher education.

The GoSL, led by the Minister of Public Administration, Management, and Reforms, and the LTTE should immediately convene a task force on ethnic balance in public sector employment. Tamils complain of systematic exclusion from government work, as do Muslims in the East. The two sides should work together to assess the problem and develop a plan for mitigating the imbalance.

The GoSL's Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training should further its efforts to address serious weaknesses in the University system. In particular, institutions should pursue an ethnically mixed student population through equal opportunity policies and merit-based admission processes. They should avoid the use of quotas or unfair affirmative action, but rather proactively recruit to encourage minorities without giving unfair advantage to any group. These recommendations apply equally to the ISGA.

Inequitable distribution of educational resources between schools and across regions, and inadequate teacher deployment, especially to poor areas and those most affected by the conflict, must be addressed and resolved. Efforts to teach English as a bridging language should be continued and expanded.

Key government functions such as policing should be available in both Sinhalese and Tamil regardless of the population distribution in a region, not only in law but in practice as well.

Remove ethnicity labeling on National Identity Cards.

Every Sri Lankan over the age of 18 must carry an identity card, which is presented at checkpoints and elsewhere. The presence of ethnicity on the card serves no positive purpose and symbolizes an institutional segregation based on ethnicity that inhibits desirable steps toward social cohesion.

GoSL and LTTE

Establish national working group on reconciliation

It is too early to prescribe a transitional justice and reconciliation mechanism for Sri Lanka. At this point, the GoSL and the LTTE should agree to establish through international facilitation a national working group on reconciliation comprised of one each of their own representatives, three from Sri Lankan civil society, one from the business community, and one international member. The working group should study transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms in other post-conflict countries and make a recommendation to the parties to the negotiation 12 months after commencing operations. In the process, it should consult with organizations such as the International Center for Transitional Justice that has already begun exploring the post-conflict justice issue in Sri Lanka.

International community

Insist that there be explicit protection and vigorous enforcement of ethnic, linguistic, religious and political minority rights in the ISGA as well as the rest of Sri Lanka.

This can be achieved through monitoring of public services and conditionality of donor aid.

Emphasize development projects that ‘connect’ ethnic groups.

Some aid organizations, including Oxfam and USAID, have been investing in much-needed community development projects that bring together at a local level the major ethnic and religious groups. The explicit purpose of such projects is to build a school or install an irrigation system, but an additional outcome is trust-building among groups that have developed a serious mistrust and misunderstanding of each other over the last two decades. As aid organizations set their priorities, they should seek to facilitate community-level reconciliation through such “connector” models.

CONCLUSION

The prospects for peace in Sri Lanka are promising, but the hard-won gains of the last year could be lost without increased engagement by the international community and courageous choices by the Sri Lankan political leadership. The bloody 20-year conflict has traumatized the island’s citizenry, inhibited their access to the last decade’s burst of global economic growth, and kept the political situation chronically unstable. There have been massive strides toward peace and stability in the last 12-18 months and all parties should push hard to cross this marathon’s finish line: to fail would be irresponsible of Sri Lankan leaders and catastrophic for the Sri Lankan people.

In our view, resolution of the current political struggle between the prime minister and the president is the top priority. This conflict—whatever the merits of both sides’ arguments—is selfish in the short-term and self-defeating in the long-term. The country is ready for peace. The LTTE is ready to continue negotiations. The world is watching.

The prime minister and the president need to seize this moment, honor their constituents' faith in them, and settle their dispute immediately. The critical next steps we explore in this report will go unaddressed if this issue is not resolved immediately.

In this report, we have offered recommendations to all stakeholders in Sri Lanka peace, with the hope that our ideas may help overcome the obstacles to immediate progress, address the most pernicious root causes of conflict, and create conditions for a durable peace. We have tried to offer recommendations that are bold but realistic. If we have erred to one side, it is to more dramatic fixes; the stakes in Sri Lanka are too high to deal in timid half-measures.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Colonialism and Independence³

- 1815** British become first European power to win control over Ceylon. Start bringing in Tamil laborers from southern India to work on plantations.
- 1833** English made official language.
- 1931** British grant the right to vote and introduce power sharing.
- 1948** Ceylon gains full independence.

Rise of Sinhala Nationalism

- 1949** Indian Tamil plantation workers disenfranchised.
- 1956** Solomon Bandaranaike elected on wave of Sinhalese nationalism. Sinhala made sole official language.
- 1959** Bandaranaike assassinated by Buddhist monk. Succeeded by widow, Srimavo, who continues nationalization program.
- 1965** Opposition United National Party wins elections and attempts to reverse nationalization measures.
- 1970** Srimavo returns to power; extends nationalization program.

Building Ethnic Tensions

- 1971** Sinhalese Marxist uprising led by students and activists.
- 1972** Ceylon changes its name to Sri Lanka and Buddhism given primary place as country's religion, further antagonizing Tamil minority.
- 1976** Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) formed as tensions increase in Tamil-dominated areas of North and East.
- 1977** Separatist Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) party wins all seats in Tamil areas.
- 1983** 13 soldiers killed in LTTE ambush, sparking anti-Tamil riots leading to the deaths of an estimated several hundred Tamils. Conflict develops in north of island between army and LTTE.

Civil War Intensifies

- 1985** First attempt at peace talks between Government and LTTE fails.
- 1987** Government forces push LTTE back into northern city of Jaffna. Government signs accords creating new councils for Tamil areas in North and East and reaches agreement with India on deployment of Indian peace-keeping force.
- 1988** Left-wing and nationalist Sinhalese JVP begins campaign against Indo-Sri Lankan agreement.

³ Adapted from the BBC On-line Timeline: Sri Lanka.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/country_profiles/1166237.stm

1990 Indian troops leave after getting bogged down in fighting in north. Violence between Sri Lankan army and separatists escalates.

War and Attempts for Peace

1993 President Premadasa killed in LTTE bomb attack.
1994 President Kumaratunga comes to power pledging to end war. Peace talks opened with LTTE.
1995 Peace talks collapse and LTTE resumes bombing campaign. Government launches major offensive, driving separatists out of Jaffna.
1996 State of emergency extended across the country after LTTE bombs Colombo.
1997 Another major government offensive against LTTE.
1998 Tigers bomb Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist site. Tigers capture key northern town after intensive fighting.
1999 Kumaratunga is wounded in a bomb attack at an election rally. She is re-elected president.
2000 April. LTTE captures strategic Elephant Pass in north of island.
2000 October. Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) wins general elections.
2001 July. Kumaratunga suspends parliament for two months to save her minority government from defeat in a no-confidence vote.
2001 October. Kumaratunga dissolves Parliament hours before a no-confidence vote which her minority government seemed likely to lose.
2001 December. New cabinet, led by Prime Minister Wickramasinghe, is sworn in after the opposition United National Party narrowly won the parliamentary election.

Peace Begins

2002 February. Government and Tamil Tiger rebels sign a permanent ceasefire agreement, paving the way for talks to end the long-running conflict. The peace initiative is sponsored by Norway.
2002 March-May. De-commissioning of weapons begins; the road linking the Jaffna peninsula with the rest of Sri Lanka reopens after 12 years.
2002 September. Government lifts ban on LTTE - a rebel demand. First round of talks begins. Both sides exchange prisoners of war for first time. Rebels drop demand for separate state.
2002 December. The government and rebels agree to share power. Under the deal, minority Tamils would have autonomy in the north and east.
2003 February. Peace process talks get under way.
2003 April. Tamil Tigers suspend their participation in peace talks, saying they are being marginalized.
2003 November. LTTE offers the government its proposal for the Interim Self-Governing Authority.

Political Crisis

2003

November. Kumaratunga dismisses three ministers, suspends Parliament. Parliament reopens after two weeks; negotiations with Tamil Tigers put on hold.

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