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Message from H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder, International Association for Human Values

The light of peace has come from South Asia. It is unfortunate that South Asia has today become the hub of disturbances. It is high time that the thinkers and the movers and shakers of South Asia sit together and think of ways and strategies to resolve the conflict. It is quite natural that conflicts arise in today’s complex society. It has happened in the past in Europe and USA, and it has happened in South Asia also. However, the scale and duration of this conflict today has taken the toll of many lives and hampered the development of the region.

So it is time that we come together for reconciliation, with the understanding and accommodation of each others’ point of view, and with arbitration and annihilation of animosity, adhering to the ancient principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence), which has been the gift of South Asia.
Globalization has brought people across the world nearer to one another. It has also brought civilizations and cultures closer together, providing novel arenas for more intense dialogue and more communication platforms for mutual and sustained understanding. The notion that ours is a global neighborhood has become a reality.

Along with the awareness that the global neighborhood is now upon us, there is the realization that any war, conflict, serious disturbance or oppression in any one part of the world affects every other part of the world. Globalization means the interconnectedness and fellow-feeling of people in situations of suffering and want. Misery in any corner of the global neighborhood affects the peace and well-being of everyone else. We can justifiably quote the American peacemaker Martin Luther King who famously said that “injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere”. However, there are still forces that focus on a fragmented world and emphasize old positions, historical events, divisive concepts and views that fuel conflicts around the globe. Is it possible to counteract these forces and build a new, cohesive civilization in which deadly conflicts will not survive and more harmony in diversity prevails, which will lead to a greater understanding and acceptance between cultures? This Conference on Peace and Reconciliation in South Asia will aim to find answers to these questions, and to establish a new avenue to overcome these well-known intranational problems and issues confronting South Asia.

South Asia is a turbulent, complex region with a prominent place in the global map of ethnic conflict. It is characterized by multi-ethnic societies with striking internal divisions along linguistic, regional, communal and sectarian lines, externally linked to one another across national boundaries. Even though it has a common cultural background and shared political experience, many groups have been fiercely fighting with each other, challenging the national governments and frustrating their nation-building efforts, such as in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Burma (South East Asia).

India, the largest democracy in the world, is plagued with violence from Naxalites, variously referred to as extremist Maoist revolutionaries. One third of the districts in India are currently under their influence and many observers consider Naxalite violence as the greatest threat to the Indian nation. Why such an extremist movement thrives in an open and democratic society is a puzzle to many. There seems to be no question that everyone in the country wants democracy. The issue is how to achieve stable democracy in the face of unrest, and to establish a new avenue to overcome these well-known intranational problems and issues confronting South Asia.

The military regime in Burma / Myanmar is considered a totalitarian dictatorship because of its absolute denial of fundamental rights and freedoms to the people of Burma. The prolonged absence of democracy and human rights in this Buddhist country has long been on the high political and diplomatic agenda of the international community.

Such problems in these countries have certainly received their fair share of international attention and mediation efforts to realize immediate as well as long-term solutions. Although the underlying issues involved are many (conflict along ethnic and religious lines, extremism, violence, and oppression), Asia certainly has the cultural and civilizational resources at its disposal to help resolve these problems.

All these conflicts and violence are occurring in South Asia despite the fact that the Gandhian principles of non-violence originate from this region, and the world’s largest democracy, India, has a central place in South Asia. Then, what is the missing link to achieve peace in this most volatile region, despite interest from all sides and the long-term engagement of the international community? How can we integrate economic, social and environmental development with peace and security issues in this region?

The Conference on Peace and Reconciliation aims to establish a new avenue to peace. This new avenue to peace and reconciliation draws from the ancient well of human values and spirituality in the region. As South Asia re-discovers the power of its rich heritage, more and more faith-based resources are being developed and deployed to address the political issues and international problems that globalization has brought out into the open. Faith-based tools and resources such as non-violence, compassion, eco-friendliness, acceptance of differences, sincerity, integrity, prayer and meditation are values that can serve the mission of healing and reconciliation between conflicting groups anywhere in the world today.

The goals of this conference are:
- To recognize the crisis in South Asia and the urgent need for more stability, security and good governance in the region,
- To bring together representatives from South Asia, as well as Western experts, and those who have been involved in mediation efforts in the region, to facilitate the dialogue that is necessary and explore novel approaches to bring lasting security, stability, development and peace.
- To discuss the need to focus on each individual in society, as peaceful individuals do not contribute to conflicts. How could this be achieved?
- To articulate and explore the faith-based resources and values offered by the two ancient religions of Buddhism and Hinduism in the setting of contemporary social and political problem-solving for peace and development in South Asia.
- To explore long-term possibilities for the creation of a new security mechanism in South Asia, such as a union of South Asian countries and to examine models and principles that may facilitate this effort.

The Conference will focus primarily on the following countries:
- India: The largest democracy in the world, which is plagued with Naxal violence
- Sri Lanka: The conflict between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE
- Nepal: National reconciliation with Maoist rebellion
- Burma / Myanmar (South East Asia): Good governance and the military junta
Thursday, 10th April 2008

17.30: Inaugural Session: Welcome Address and Lighting of the Peace Lamps

Welcome Address
Mrs. Aud Kvalbein, Deputy Mayor of Oslo, Norway
H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder, International Association for Human Values

17.45: Panel Session 1: History and current situation of conflicts in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Burma (South East Asia); An overview, challenges and opportunities

South Asia is a turbulent, complex region with a prominent place in the global map of ethnic conflict. It is characterized by multi-ethnic societies with striking internal divisions along linguistic, regional, communal and sectarian lines, externally linked to one another across national boundaries. Even though it has a common cultural background and shared political experience, many groups have been fiercely fighting with each other. This session aims to highlight the current situation and the recent history of conflicts in the region focusing on Sri Lanka, Burma, and Naxalism in India and Nepal.

Moderator
Ms. Erika Mann, Member of European Parliament

Speakers
Mr. Ramvichar Netam, Home Minister of Chhattisgarh, India
Rt. Rev. Dr. Brahmanawatte Seevati Nayaka Thero, Deputy Secretary General, Sri Lanka Amarapura Mahanikaya
Mr. Arumugam Thondaman, Minister for Youth Empowerment & Socio-Economic Development, Sri Lanka
Mr. Vaiko, General Secretary, The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Tamil Nadu, India
Mr. Khin Maung Win, Deputy Executive Director, Democratic Voice of Burma, Norway
19.00: Panel Session 2: A roadmap to peace: Novel approaches to peace building in South Asia

What is the missing link to achieve peace in this most volatile region, despite interest from all sides and the long-term engagement from the international community? How can we integrate economic, social and environmental development with peace and security issues in this region? This Panel Session aims to stimulate discussion on new dimensions in peace building, which take into account the unique ethnic considerations in South Asia, incorporating human values that are unique to this region. Could faith-based tools and resources, such as non-violence, compassion, eco-friendliness, acceptance of differences, sincerity, integrity, prayer and meditation be values that can serve the mission of healing and reconciliation between conflicting groups in South Asia, and elsewhere in the world today?

Moderator
Ms. Erika Mann, Member of European Parliament

Speakers
Mr. Colin Archer, Secretary General, International Peace Bureau, Switzerland
Dr. Jayalath Jayawardene, Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka
Swami Sadyojatathah, Director, The Art of Living, India
Rt. Rev. Dr. Maduluwave Sobitha Nayaka Thero, Chief Incumbent of Nagavihara Kotte, Sri Lanka

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09.00: Panel Session 3: The role of the civil society and governments in conflict resolution

Does the complexity of the conflict in South Asia and other parts of the world indicate that to find sustainable solutions and peace, the civil society, governments and business community need to coordinate their efforts? And if so, what is their role and possible contributions?

Moderator
Mr. Wolfgang Riehn, Executive Chair, Club of Budapest Worldshift Network, Germany

Speakers
Ambassador Jon Hanssen-Bauer, Special Representative, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder, International Association for Human Values
Ms. Dagmar Sorbøe, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Norway
Prof. Sturla Stålsett, General Secretary, Kirkens Bymisjon Oslo, Norway
Dr. Wasim Zaman, Director, CST for South & West Asia, United Nations Population Fund, Nepal

10.00: Panel Session 4: The role of the media in conflict resolution

This Session aims to examine the role and responsibility of the media in influencing public opinion as well as the parties involved in a conflict, thereby directly influencing conflict resolution and peace building efforts. How could the media support the peace process in the 21st century?

Moderator
Mr. Francois Gautier, Editor in Chief, La Revue de l'Inde, India

Speakers
Ms. Kathrine Aspaas, Journalist, Aftenposten, Norway
Prof. Brahma Chellaney, Centre for Policy Research, India
Mr. Sigurd Falkenberg Mikkelsen, NRK, Norway
Prof. Rune Ottosen, Journalism Education, Oslo University College, Norway
Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary General, Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process in Sri Lanka
11.15: Workshops

The Workshops will provide opportunities for more in-depth information and intimate dialogue towards identifying possible obstacles as well as novel solutions and common threads in peace building.

**Workshop on Sri Lanka**

**Moderator**

*Ms. Erika Mann, Member of European Parliament*

**Discussion with**

*Dr. Jayalath Jayawardene, Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka*

*Rt. Rev. Dr. Bruthmanawatte Seevala Nayaka Thero, Deputy Secretary General, Sri Lanka Amarapura Mahanikaya*

*Rt. Rev. Dr. Maduluvave Sobitha Nayaka Thero, Chief Incumbent of Nagavihara Kotte, Sri Lanka*

*Prof. Indra de Sasya, NTNU / International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), Norway*

*Mr. Arumugam Thondaman, Minister for Youth Empowerment & Socio-Economic Development, Sri Lanka*

*Mr. Vaiko, General Secretary, The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Tamil Nadu, India*

**Workshop on Naxalism in India and Nepal**

**Moderator**

*Mr. Nirj Deva, Member of European Parliament*

**Discussion with**

*Mr. Kalpataru Das, Member of the Orissa State Legislative Assembly, India*

*Mr. Francois Gautier, Editor in Chief, La Revue de l’Inde, India*

*Mr. Giridhari Nayak, Inspector General of Police, Chhattisgarh, India*

*Mr. Ramvichar Netam, Home Minister of Chhattisgarh, India*

*Mr. Sashi Raj Pandey, President, Art of Living Nepal*

**Workshop on Burma**

**Moderators**

*Mr. Johannes Heimrath, Executive Director, Club of Budapest Worldshift Network, Germany*

*Ms. Hilde Salvesen, Special Advisor, The Oslo Center for Peace & Human Rights, Norway*

**Discussion with**

*Mr. Colin Archer, Secretary General, International Peace Bureau, Switzerland*

*Mr. Charles Mendas, India/Nepal*

*Mr. Harn Yawnghwe, Director, Euro-Burma Office, Belgium*

14.00: Workshops

Same Moderators and Speakers as in the morning

Workshop on Sri Lanka

Workshop on Naxalism in India and Nepal

Workshop on Burma

16.00: Final Panel Discussion

Summary statements: In this session, the leaders of the workshops will share with the audience the outcome of the discussions in their respective workshops and have an open floor conversation in identifying common themes for future discussion and implementation.

17.00: Conclusion

Concluding remarks. What are the next steps?
Mr. Colin Archer

Colin Archer has been the Secretary-General of the International Peace Bureau in Geneva since 1990. He holds degrees in European languages and Development Studies, and has been a peace and human rights activist since the early 1970s, organizing a wide variety of projects, publications and events in the international peace movement. He has travelled and worked in Latin America, then directed a Third World Centre, and taught in adult education for ten years. He is heavily involved in global coalitions against nuclear and other weapons, as well as the Hague Appeal for Peace, Global Campaign for Peace Education and Barcelona Forum. He recently wrote two books on Disarmament for Development.

Ms. Kathrine Aspaas

Kathrine Aspaas works as commentator and editorial writer in the Norwegian newspaper, Aftenposten. She is an economist, with a recent Masters in International Affairs from The New School University in New York. She is also an active jazz singer and musician, with a strong interest in human psychology and the way we treat one another.

Ambassador Jon Hanssen-Bauer

Ambassador Jon Hanssen-Bauer is Ambassador and Special Envoy of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Sri Lanka. A former managing director of the Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, he participated in the multilateral peace process on Palestinian refugees and worked with the countries affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in developing data and policies on refugees. He has extensive experience with international cooperation and institution building and has worked in the Middle East, the Americas, Africa, Russia and Eastern Europe, as well as in China and Tibet.

Prof. Brahma Chellaney

Brahma Chellaney is professor of strategic studies at the New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research, an independent, privately funded think-tank. A specialist on international security and arms control issues, Professor Chellaney has held appointments at Harvard University, Brookings Institution, Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies, and Australian National University. He is the author of five books. His latest books are Asian Juggernaut: The Rise of China, India and Japan (HarperCollins, 2007); and On the Frontline of Climate Change: International Security Implications (KAF, 2007).

Mr. Kalpataru Das

Kalpataru Das is Member of the Orissa State Legislative Assembly, India, with degrees in law and arts. He has been General Secretary of Biju Janata Dal since 1998. He is also chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on agriculture, and member of numerous parliamentary committees including environment, tourism and energy. He has a special interest in programmes to empower youth for self-employment. He is also actively involved in Naxal issues in Orissa.

Mr. Nirj Deva

Nirj Deva was born in Sri Lanka and holds Sri Lankan and British citizenship. He became chairman of the Bow Group (leading British political think-tank) in 1981. He was chairman of the Department of Transport/National Consumer Council Committee on De-regulation of Air Transport, which resulted in low-fare airlines in Europe. In 1992, Deva was elected as Member of the House of Commons, and in 1999 as Conservative Member of the European Parliament, where he is a member of the Committee on Overseas Development and Cooperation and the Foreign Affairs Committee. He is a Fellow of Britain’s Royal Society of Arts, Chairman of the EU-India Chamber of Commerce and patron of the International Monarchist League. In April 2005, he was chairman of the European Parliament’s delegation to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in New York.
Mr. François Gautier


Mr. Johannes Heimrath

Johannes Heimrath is Executive Director of the Club of Budapest Worldshift Network. He studied composition, music ethnology and historic instruments at the Conservatory Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria. He is the Founder President of the European Academy of Healing Arts, which under his leadership, has received awards from the German Government and Humboldt University for innovative social engagement and work towards a sustainable civic society. He has written a number of recognized books dealing with frontier sciences, nature philosophy and history of culture.

Dr. Jayalath Jayawardene

Currently a Member of Parliament in Sri Lanka and former Minister for Rehabilitation of Refugees there, Dr. Jayawardene is an eminent surgeon with qualifications from Sri Lanka, USA and Moscow. He is also an Emeritus Professor in politics and human rights at the Irish International University. His work has brought him many awards within Sri Lanka, particularly for his services to health, children’s rights and peace. He was awarded the Samadutha Lanka Puthra award from the Ramanya Maha Chapter for work towards peace in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Sigurd Falkenberg Mikkelsen

Sigurd Falkenberg Mikkelsen is a foreign news reporter for the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) since graduation from Institut d’Etudes de Politiques de Paris (political science) in 2000. He has been working mostly in the Middle East, notably in Iraq, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine. He has made two documentary films (Lebanon: Victims of War, Iraq: The Making of an Army). This autumn, he will be publishing his account of the war in Iraq.

Mr. Giridhari Nayak

Giridhari Nayak is a serving Inspector General of Police in the Naxal-influenced Bastar Range, Chhattisgarh, India. He is Deputy Director of the Indian National Police Academy. He specialised in communalism, left wing extremism and disaster management. With his considerable experience in the Naxalite issue, he has been in charge of the anti-Naxalite operations since 2005, with an active role in the formulation and implementation of the anti-Naxalite action-plan of Chhattisgarh. His has published many articles, including “Intensity and Impact of Insurgency” and “Model Action Plan to Fight LWE”. He received the Indian Police Medal for Meritorious Service and the President’s Police Medal for Distinguished Services.

Ms. Erika Mann

Erika Mann is serving her third term in the European Parliament, and is a Member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. She is chairwoman of the Delegation to the EU-Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee, as well as a Member of the Committee on International Trade. Erika Mann is Senator of the Max Planck Society and Board Vice-Chair of Frauen für Technik neue Impulse. She is the Chair and Co-Founder of the European Internet Foundation, and European Chairwoman of the Transatlantic Policy Network. In 2006, she received an award for Outstanding Transatlantic Commitment from the European American Business Council. She is a qualified teacher, and was a researcher at the University of Hannover before becoming an IT business consultant. She is an academician of the International Informatization Academy of the United Nations.
Mr. Ramvichar Netam

Ramvichar Netam is from a rural background with a Masters Degree in History. From his student days he has fought for the interests of the poor and underprivileged. He started his political career in 1990 as a BJP Member of the Legislative Assembly, Madhya Pradesh. In 2003, he was elected as MLA in the Chhattisgarh Assembly, and he was appointed as Cabinet Minister of Tribal Welfare. In view of his success, he was entrusted with the portfolio of Home, Jail and Cooperative. When Naxal violence was at its peak, he was the leader of the Home Department and made a significant contribution in dealing with the Naxal problem.

Prof. Rune Ottosen

Rune Ottosen (1950) is professor in journalism at Oslo University College. He has published several books and articles within the field of war and peace journalism. Together with Stig A. Nohrstedt, he has edited the book “Global War - Local Views: Media Images of the Iraq War”. He is also a member of TRANSCEND – a Peace and Development Network, and is also a member of a working-group on peace journalism initiated by Toda Institute for Global Policy and Peace Research.

Mr. Sashi Raj Pandey

Sashi Pandey is a prominent businessman from Kathmandu, Nepal. Educated in the Soviet Union and the USA, he has a background in engineering and management. He is currently the CEO of Shree Investment and Finance Co and a Director of the Kathmandu Medical College. His positions have included those of Honorary Secretary General of the Nepal - India Chamber of Commerce for 12 years, President of the Nepal Finance Companies’ Association, and Founding Member of Rotary Club of Pashupati. He is also Chairman of the Art of Living Nepal.

Mr. Wolfgang Riehn

Wolfgang Riehn is the Executive Chair of the Club of Budapest Worldshift Network, which is committed to the unity of humanity and the development of a global wisdom and culture. The Club of Budapest Worldshift Network connects organizations and individuals throughout the world who are working for a values-based civilization so as to strengthen their concerted political effectiveness in society. In an illustrious career, Wolfgang Riehn has made a significant contribution across a range of areas. He is Executive Coordinator of the World Wisdom Council, and Vice Chair of the Advisory Board of the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation Germany.

Swami Sadyojathah

Swami Sadyojathah was born in 1969 into the Royal Family of Kerala, India. He holds a degree in Mech. Engineering, and as a student, was an active supporter of the student wing of the Communist Party in Kerala. After meeting H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in 1993, his life changed, and since then he has been coordinating the international activities of the Art of Living Foundation (AOL). He is a Senior Faculty of the AOL Programs, and Founder Director of the Sri Sri College of Ayurvedic Science and Research. He led the core team of AOL volunteers that provided trauma relief and counselling to thousands affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. He is also actively involved in the ongoing conflict resolution process initiated by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in Sri Lanka.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Brahmanawatte Seevali Nayaka Thero

Rt. Rev. Dr. Brahmanawatte Seevali Nayaka Thero holds a Doctorate in Tamil Language and Tamil Literature from Jaffna University, Sri Lanka. He is currently the Deputy Secretary General of the Sri Lanka Amarapura Mahanikaya. He is active in the Sri Lankan peace process.
Ms. Hilde Salvesen

Hilde Salvesen is Special Advisor at the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights. Prior to joining the Oslo Center, she served as Secretary of the Norwegian Embassy in Guatemala, in addition to further positions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NORAD, the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), Norwegian Church Aid, and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. She is a Political Scientist from the University of Oslo.

Dr. Dagmar Karin Sorbøe

The Norwegian physician Dagmar Sorbøe has been a lifelong participator in feminist activities and the anti war movement. Today, she is President of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Norway. In 1976 she was one of the Norwegian delegates at the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women which led to the establishment of the first emergency centre for women victims of family violence and rape. This became a model for many similar establishments within the Norwegian Social System. She works with the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), where her efforts contributed to the Nobel Committee becoming aware of the activities of the organization and they were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985.

Prof. Indra de Soysa

Indra de Soysa is Professor of Political Science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway. He also holds a ‘Senior Associate’ position at the Center for the Study of Civil War at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). He has authored the recent book entitled ‘Foreign Direct Investment, Democracy, and Development’ (Routledge) and co-edited two books entitled ‘Energy Wealth and Governance in the Caucasus and Central Asia’ (Routledge) and ‘How Social Norms Help or Hinder Development’ (OECD). His recent articles appear in the top journals in Political Science, such as International Studies Quarterly, International Organization, Journal of Conflict Resolution and Journal of Peace Research, among several others.

Ms. Hilde Salvesen

Hilde Salvesen is Special Advisor at the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights. Prior to joining the Oslo Center, she served as Secretary of the Norwegian Embassy in Guatemala, in addition to further positions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NORAD, the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), Norwegian Church Aid, and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. She is a Political Scientist from the University of Oslo.

Dr. Dagmar Karin Sorbøe

The Norwegian physician Dagmar Sorbøe has been a lifelong participator in feminist activities and the anti war movement. Today, she is President of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Norway. In 1976 she was one of the Norwegian delegates at the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women which led to the establishment of the first emergency centre for women victims of family violence and rape. This became a model for many similar establishments within the Norwegian Social System. She works with the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), where her efforts contributed to the Nobel Committee becoming aware of the activities of the organization and they were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985.

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Prof. Sturla J. Stålsett

Sturla J. Stålsett is since 2006 the General Secretary of the Church City Mission in Oslo, Norway. He was formerly Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, and holds a doctoral degree in Latin American theology. He is the author and editor of several books on ethics, politics, religion and theology. As the Head of Commission on International Affairs in the Church of Norway, he co-authored and published the study “Vulnerability and Security” (2001). His most recent publication is the edited volume, “Religion in a Globalised Age. Transfers & Transformations, Integration & Resistance” (Novus Press, Oslo: 2008).

Mr. Arumugam Thondaman

Currently the Minister for Youth Empowerment and Socio Economic Development in Sri Lanka, Mr. Thondaman comes from a family with a strong tradition of effective work for the underprivileged and minority communities. Having been educated in Sri Lanka, India and USA, he returned to Sri Lanka to campaign as a trade unionist for the Ceylon Workers Congress. He became well recognized for his support of workers’ rights leading a successful and notably peaceful campaign in 2003. As the leader of the CWC, he successfully contested the 2004 election winning enough seats to make a decisive and influential difference to the outcomes of the Government.
Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha

Rajiva Wijesinha is an Oxford educated, Senior Professor of Languages at Sabaragamuwa University, and Secretary General of the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process in Sri Lanka (SCOPP). He is a former leader of the Liberal Party, and continues as Vice-President of Liberal International and a member of the LI Human Rights Group. He has conducted workshops on liberalism in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan and Indonesia. He has also been active in projects for social health, including work with the handicapped, medical camps and successfully campaigning on issues of water rights and other major issues affecting the rights and lives of people.

Mr. Khin Maung Win

Khin Maung Win has for the last ten years been involved in communicating to the world the issues and challenges facing Burma. He currently works as the Deputy Executive Director of the Democratic Voice of Burma to produce television programmes. In the last decade, he has been involved in issues relating to the Burmese people, participating in the Burmese Students Council and the Burma Lawyers Association. Khin Maung Win has an MA in Human Rights and is trained in journalism, broadcast media and management.

Mr. Harn Yawnghwe

Harn Yawnghwe is the son of Sao Shwe Thaik, the last hereditary ruler of the Shan principality of Yawnghwe and first president of the Republic of the Union of Burma. He studied in Burma, Thailand and Canada, obtaining an MBA from McGill University. He has served Burma’s pro-democracy movement in a variety of capacities. These include editorship of the monthly news digest, Burma Alert, and advisor to the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma. He holds several directorships, including with the Euro-Burma Office in Brussels, the National Reconciliation Programme for the Union of Burma, and the Democratic Voice of Burma, Norway.

Dr. Wasim Zaman

Dr. Wasim Zaman is a development professional with over 35 years of programme and academic experience. He is currently Director of the Regional Technical Office for South and West Asia of the United Nations Population Fund based in Kathmandu. He was UNFPA’s Representative in India and the Chairperson of UNAIDS Theme group for India and then, South Asia. He was a member of the Civil Service of Pakistan and Bangladesh. He earned his Doctorate degree in population sciences from Harvard University and was involved in research and teaching at the Kennedy School of Government and the Harvard Center for Population and Development. He has authored a book and several articles. He is a member of the Editorial Board of the Asia-Pacific Population Journal of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
WELCOME ADDRESS

Mrs. Aud Kvalbein, Deputy Mayor of Oslo, Norway
H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder, International Association for Human Values
Mrs. Aud Kvalbein, Deputy Mayor of Oslo, Norway

It gives me great pleasure to welcome such a distinguished group of people to Oslo, and it is an honour for our city to host the International Conference on Peace and Reconciliation in South Asia.

We who live here like to think of Oslo as a city of peace. As you know, this is where the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded, and the Nobel Peace Center is a popular attraction. We also have the renowned International Peace Research Institute, and a population which is genuinely concerned about the prospects for peace around the world. The images of celebrations on the streets of Oslo after the end of World War II are etched into our collective memory, and nothing would please us more than similar celebrations elsewhere.

Sadly, collective memories seem to be among the obstacles for peace and reconciliation in some countries and regions of the world. It can be difficult to put past and present differences behind, even if this is necessary in order to move forward. This is especially so when political movements make use of collective memories and cultural differences in order to achieve narrower goals.

Hence the necessity for conferences such as yours, which asks: How do we reconcile our differences? This is an important question which goes to the core of ethnic or national conflicts, where differences in culture are laden with political relevance and interest. I am happy to see that you will be looking at the possibilities of solutions, both at an individual level and a macro-political level.

In Europe, such conflicts abound throughout history, but many of them seem to have been solved by the European Union. The Union has succeeded in channelling cultural and other differences through the apparatus of a supranational political system. Thereby it has diminished the political relevance of those same differences. I believe this is a model which can be emulated elsewhere.

But the fundamental key to peace and reconciliation obviously lies within each of us. The Norwegian writer Nordahl Grieg, who was killed in an airplane over Berlin during World War II, wrote in his poem 'To Youth': "Man's dignity only can give us true peace." I think this is absolutely correct, and it is also in the spirit of this conference. "Peaceful individuals do not contribute to conflicts," your conference summary states.

I believe all people can be peaceful. Helping people express their peacefulness requires fostering constructive values within the individual and a social environment where peacefulness is possible. These are all issues that you will be discussing.

I thank you for choosing Oslo as the venue for this conference, and hope it will be a successful one. On behalf of all the people of Oslo, I welcome you to our city, and hope that you will enjoy your stay.

H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder, International Association for Human Values

I am happy to be here with all of you this evening. It is a very important occasion that we all come together to find a common solution. Often with meetings, we discuss the problems – then the problems appear so big. When the problems appear insurmountable, and conflicts remain as conflicts to continue for centuries, then one loses heart. However here, we have people from various fields and from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, social and economic strata, all coming together, sincerely looking for a solution – because we want peace. Enough is enough – we have had so much violence.

As the Hon. Deputy Mayor very correctly said, Europe has resolved its conflicts and come together. Oslo is considered the city of peace, the peace capital of the world perhaps. And here the atmosphere is good, it’s very cool – everyone can think from a cool mind!

Today, we have two types of extremism. One is the religious extremists; another is the communist extremists. And then there are the ethnic conflicts. These are the three major types of conflicts we need to look into – this is what is clogging South Asia.

Then there is the problem of poverty – there are certain forces which, for political reasons, personal gains or other reasons, are using the poverty of people for their own ends by not giving them the right picture, the right direction to move ahead.

Here, we all have to bring sense and come up with solutions to the conflicts. The world, life, is full of contradictions and conflicts, and it is the wisdom that helps us to sail through these. In Norway, I would say ski through these – ski through these ups and downs of life, these conflicts and contradictions of life, and come together for an understanding.

We need to look at life with the "Three Cs". One is with a Cosmic vision (or broader vision) of a problem. The second is Commitment. Without commitment, you will not be able to move a step forward – we need to have commitment for peace. The third is having Compassion – without compassion, you cannot understand another person’s point of view.

Often, when you listen to the conflicting points of view, you will find that everyone is correct from their own viewpoint. If you listen to the Tamils, you would side by them. If you listen to the Sinhalese, you would side by them. If you listen to the Maoists, you would side by them. If you listen to the government, you would side by them. Everybody has their own logic, their own viewpoint. We have to find a way where we can meet and come together in peace.

India has been the country of non-violence for centuries. In thousands of years of history, India has never waged a war against any country, it has not conquered any country. Of course, it has been fighting war in
self-defence – but the land where Buddha and Mahavir preached, where Mahatma Gandhi spoke on non-violence, today, that entire region is affected by different types of violence. And it pains us to see the suffering of people, of men, women and children.

A couple of years ago, when I was in Chhattisgarh, the Inspector General of Police came to me with tears in his eyes. He said, “This year I lost 281 of my men. I do not know how to face the families of men who were working under me. How can I recruit young men for the police? I feel I am recruiting them for a job and putting them to death. I am so traumatised.” It was so moving to hear this – it would shake anybody. The same is the suffering when you look into the eyes of women – millions of women and children are bereaved of their families.

These are man-made calamities, they could be avoided, unlike the tsunami. This is what we need to do – all of us here, sincerely pray and take responsibility to bring peace, to turn every tear into a smile and dream for a stress-free, violence-free world.

PANEL SESSION 1:
HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION OF CONFLICTS IN INDIA, SRI LANKA, NEPAL AND BURMA (SOUTH EAST ASIA):
AN OVERVIEW, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Moderator
Ms. Erika Mann, Member of European Parliament

Speakers
Mr. Ramvichar Netam, Home Minister of Chhattisgarh, India

Rt. Rev. Dr. Brahmanawatte Seewali Nayaka Thero, Deputy Secretary General, Sri Lanka Amarapura Mahanikaya

Mr. Arumugam Thondaman, Minister for Youth Empowerment & Socio-Economic Development, Sri Lanka

Mr. Vaiko, General Secretary, The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Tamil Nadu, India

Mr. Khin Maung Win, Deputy Executive Director, Democratic Voice of Burma, Norway
Mr. Ramvichar Netam, Home Minister of Chhattisgarh, India

Participating in this international seminar, I get the feeling that the globe is one family, and the world is full of great people. ‘This is mine and that is theirs’ – Indian philosophy says these are thoughts of narrow-minded people. Broad minded people never have the concept of ‘mine’ and ‘theirs’. They believe in the philosophy that the globe is one family.

Before explaining the role of governments in conflict resolution, I will highlight briefly about Chhattisgarh, and the Naxal problem in the state. Chhattisgarh is an eastern central province of India, with a population of 20 million and an area of 1,300 square kilometers, out of which 44% is forested.

The problem of Naxalism has continued here since 1968. In the last two decades, Naxals have killed approximately 2,000 civilians as well as continuously raided police stations, killing over 600 police men. They have destroyed roads, damaged railway lines and destroyed hospital buildings and school buildings. In the last ten years, the violence has been very serious. They have not only resorted to massacres but the brutality has surpassed all limits.

The inhuman public killings definitely warrant strong government intervention. The Chhattisgarh government’s counter-measures can be divided into two categories – establishing peace and promoting development. We noticed there is a need to enhance presence of administration in remote areas, so we started moving into the interior areas. There we started addressing the problems of the underprivileged. The Chhattisgarh government has established two developmental authorities – one in Bastar, and the other in Surguja. This administrative innovation has solved ground problems to a greater extent. The government has arranged hundreds of health camps in remote areas. Fed up with the Naxalite violence, the villagers have started raising their voice against Naxalites.

The government has started a rehabilitation policy for victims of Naxal violence. Due to Naxal violence, poor innocent people have suffered a lot. In order to address the grievances of people in the areas of conflict, the Chhattisgarh government set up relief camps, and provided food to the poor. UNICEF inspected relief camps set up by the Chhattisgarh government for internally displaced people, and has highly commended them as being of international standard. Now there is a conflict and debate going on about closing these relief camps and asking the villagers to go back to the jungles. The villagers have freedom to move but most of them are not willing to go back because they are afraid of being killed.

Besides establishing these camps, the government has set up different development projects in these areas. More than 20,000 people have benefited from national rural employment generation schemes. The Chhattisgarh government has a surrender and rehabilitation policy due to which 2,500 militia men and hardcore Naxalites have surrendered.

Here I will highlight that the prime responsibility of any government is to protect its own people. Chhattisgarh has taken many steps to fulfil its responsibility of safeguarding people – one has been to increase the police to people ratio.

We are building peace by taking developmental measures and security measures which will further strengthen democracy. It is the need of the day that we must save democracy because democracy can bring happiness to the largest number of people, and establish peace.

(Reproduced from the transcript of Mr. Ramvichar Netam’s presentation, with translation from Hindi into English)
Greetings and Blessings.

I would like to speak a few words about the war and disturbances happening in South Asia. Why does war happen? It happens mainly due to poverty. If you have wealth, you can take care of the basic necessities such as food and shelter, and then war and conflicts can be avoided.

When you reflect on what Gautama Buddha gave to the world, his message was first and foremost to change the minds of people. If you feel that ‘I am the same, like the other person’, then there will be no war.

In India, during Buddha’s time, there was a river called Rohini River. There were two brothers, Sakya and Koliya, who were fighting over this river. Each one said, ‘This river belongs to me’. Lord Buddha went there and asked one question, ‘If the war happens because of this water, what is more important; the water flowing in this river, or the blood that will flow from the death of the people?’ When Buddha asked such a question, only then they understood the value of human life, and the conflict was resolved. Then they came to the conclusion that both sides would take the water.

Today, there is so much conflict happening. This is the time for both the Government and the LTTE to think how many lives are being lost because of this war. In any place, in any country, only by war you cannot solve the problems. Only through peace talks, can reconciliation happen. This is exactly the message Lord Buddha conveyed 2,500 years ago.

It is very important that we stop the war. We have no liberty to take another life. It is our request to stop all these conflicts. In order to show the world that we are all united, whether we are Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or Catholic, we all have to come together and resolve these conflicts. I want to conclude my few words by quoting the words of Lord Buddha – let the whole world, the people of the world, be happy.

Greetings to everyone.

(Reproduced from the transcript of Rt. Rev. Dr. Brahmanawatte Seevali Nayaka Thero’s presentation, with translation from ancient Tamil into English)

Mr. Arumugam Thondaman, Minister for Youth Empowerment & Socio-Economic Development, Sri Lanka

We are here to talk about peace. Looking at peace on an individual basis; it is the harmony of the mind, body and soul, a feeling of contentment, happiness and satisfaction within one’s self, a feeling which is so encompassing that it banishes all other negative emotions. His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has been preaching the attainment of this inner-peace for years through yoga, meditation and stress-relief. An individual at peace within himself will obviously influence the inner-peace of other individuals around him. Their inner-being would benefit from such a positive influence. This in turn would lead to the eventual augmentation of personal harmony among all human beings on Earth. And doesn’t each person being at peace imply that the whole world is at peace?

To come to our particular situation today, Sri Lanka at the time of independence in 1948 was the envy of other colonies in Asia, particularly South East Asia, having a robust economy, a literate workforce and high social indicators. Many of these countries that obtained independence after Sri Lanka have today overtaken us in all these aspects. This has been largely caused, in spite of the leaders of the nation endeavouring to develop the country, by the ethnic differences that have hindered progress.

The first act of a government on an ethnically discriminatory basis was the disenfranchisement of the people of Indian origin through the Citizenship Act of 1948. A million people lost their citizenship and, as a result, the right to vote, right to state employment, right to own property, right to travel and right to proper education.

Following this, several steps were taken with the perception that the Sri Lankan Tamils had been given excessive privileges during the British time and affirmative action had to be taken to reverse this situation in favour of the Sinhalese majority. These actions were: making Sinhala only as the official language, standardization for admission to universities, and politicizing of recruitment to the state sector. These measures alienated the minorities from the state and sowed the seeds of ethnic strife. The ethnic riots of 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983 have exacerbated the mutual suspicion amongst different communities and polarized their thinking along ethnic lines.

Starting on a positive note, the citizenship issue of people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka was solved completely through two acts of Parliament in 1988 and 2003. This was achieved through continuous lobbying, political engagement and peaceful agitation under the leadership of my late grandfather, Saumyamoorthy Thondaman, for over forty years.

The first attempt at sorting out other issues was the district council system proposed in 1981. It was doomed to failure from the beginning, since the then government that proposed it was not sincere in its
implementation in the north and east. The second attempt was on the intervention of India in 1987 by the 13th amendment to the constitution, through the provincial council system.

The provincial council system had many features that could have met some of the aspirations of the Tamil people of the north east. However, although devolution through the provincial council system was implemented, it was not implemented in the true spirit of the Indo Sri Lanka agreement or the 13th amendment. The frustrated Chief Minister of the north east, an elected head of the provincial council, unable to face the hostility of the Central Government and the LTTE, abandoned the government and fled to India stating that the devolution granted failed to meet the expectations of the people.

With the Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga government assuming office in 1994, a further effort was made with a cease-fire to resume negotiations, but it was short-lived. The war escalated from 1995 to almost a conventional war, though the LTTE used guerrilla techniques now and then.

There was a new look at bringing a political solution in 2002 under the Hon. Ranil Wickremsinghe government with the cease-fire agreement signed between the parties to the conflict. This was facilitated by the government of Norway who had been invited by Her Excellency the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga. Though the agreement had all aspects to move towards fruitful negotiations, the discussions did not proceed beyond six sessions.

The LTTE, citing slow progress in the field, withdrew from the talks. However, certain basic principles were agreed upon, enunciated through the Oslo and Tokyo declarations. Both parties officially agreed to explore the possibility of achieving a solution based on a federal structure.

After the talks were stalled, the LTTE proposed an interim self governing authority for discussions to resume. However, the premature dissolution of Parliament and the election of a new government brought this process to an end.

After His Excellency Mahinda Rajapakse assumed office, though talks briefly resumed, the LTTE withdrew from the discussion within a year, citing protocol. The war escalated again and the government, with the support of a faction of the LTTE, liberated the eastern province.

While the war was in progress, His Excellency the President invited all political parties represented in parliament, except the TNA, so that a consensus among all groups, other than the LTTE and TNA, could be achieved to form a basis for future negotiations.

The All Party Conference was attended even by the opposition group UNP and seemed a forum where a southern consensus could be reached. The All Party Conference appointed an All Party Representative Committee to discuss the technical aspects of a political solution that may be offered to the people of the north and east. The All Party Representative Committee has had over 75 meetings where a reasonable consensus on most issues that should form a new constitution has been agreed upon. There remain only five issues for discussion and agreement, but they are issues of great importance and have been deferred due to the nature of the issues. The issues to be agreed are:

1. The nature of state, whether federal united or unitary
2. A structure for addressing the aspirations of Tamils of Indian origin and the Muslims
3. Vesting of residual land for development in the centre/province
4. Fiscal devolution and centre-province fiscal relations
5. Electoral system

There was also a consensus on the issue of sharing subjects in the lists reserved for the centre and the provinces, by abolishing the concurrent list. This was a contentious issue in the 13th amendment which made the provincial council system ineffective with the centre usurping powers of the provinces unilaterally.

With the liberation of the east, there was a desire among some Tamil political parties for political leadership to be given to the provincial councils presently functioning under the direction of officials. There was a proposal to implement the 13th amendment to the constitution and create provincial councils for the north and east which had been demerged by a court order. This was endorsed by the All Party Representative Committee and His Excellency has agreed to implement the 13th amendment in full until the final report of the APRC is received and made law.

Elections to the local authorities in the Batticaloa district were held. The conduct and results of the election have prompted two opposition parties that did not participate in the previous election to contest in the newly announced Provincial Council elections in the eastern province. Elections in the eastern province are to be held on 10th May 2008. Free and fair elections being held in the east are essential since it is an area liberated recently.

I am strongly of the opinion that there is no military solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. It is essential to evolve a political solution, and I have been briefed by my representative at the APRC that the consensus reached at the APRC is reasonable and fair, and should be acceptable to all communities in our country. All parties of the APRC, I understand, have used the process of discussion as a negotiating exercise and achieved a balanced and fair solution. Since His Excellency the President is committed to the APRC process, it is essential for the international community including civil society organizations, like yours, to assist in the process by bringing both parties to the conflict to the negotiating table. A cease-fire should also be in place so that the proposal can be discussed freely, amended or improved, and then agreed upon to achieve a political solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka.
Peace is about pluralism. People have to realize that peace already exists in the world, albeit in questionable amounts, and all that has to be done is to improvise, expand and spread it effectively so that the whole world will eventually flourish in it. This more realistic view of peace will conceive a conviction that peace is not right, but changeable and therefore imperfect, contrary to what is popularly believed. A more optimistic approach by all individuals of the world to achieving global peace will then be catalyzed. This, combined with concepts of non-violence and pacifism preached by various religions, would significantly propel our quest for world peace.

I appreciate the interest shown by your organization in inviting attention to the issue of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, and providing us a forum to air our views with different parties sitting together today. Finally, I wish the deliberations all success.

Mr. Vaiko, General Secretary, The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Tamil Nadu, India

At the very outset, I would like to extend my deep thanks from the core of my heart for having invited me to participate in this international conference on peace and reconciliation. I deem it the proudest privilege to take part in the purposeful deliberations today.

Today, this conference has spread a larger canvas to deliberate the burning issues of South Asia – the emerging problem of Naxalism in India, the denial of democratic rights in the totalitarian regime of Myanmar, the struggle for democracy in Nepal, and the confrontation between the Government of Sri Lanka and the ethnic Tamils represented by the LTTE.

Due to constraint of time, I would confine myself to the grave situation in the island of Sri Lanka, endangering the very existence of the Tamil race. Conflicts have occurred – confrontation and battles have been occurring in the history of mankind. All the great faiths, religions, have emanated from the great continent Asia – Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Shintoism. All these religions have preached love, affection, humanism and compassion – but the painful paradox is that more blood has been shed. The conflicts happen between the religions, in the name of religion.

As rightly articulated by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the cardinal principle to be highlighted by the international community is compassion. The great poet Thiruvallavar, 2,000 years ago, articulated about compassion – ‘Compassion, the noblest of all virtues, which moves the world’. That compassion nurtures fraternity and brotherhood, which was articulated by a great Tamil poet. In a Tamil classic 3,000 years ago – ‘The whole world is one. Every citizen of the world is my kinsman’.

The spirit of humanism is vibrant in the people of Norway. When I stepped into this land, grief and sorrow penetrated my mind because I thought of Anton Balasingham, the political advisor of LTTE, who was rescued by the Norwegian Government when he was on his deathbed. He was brought here, given medical care – he was able to breathe for another eight years.

The history of the Tamils of Sri Lanka has been written by tears of blood – that is why that landscape also looks like a tear of blood on the world map. To put it in a nutshell, I crave your indulgence – it is two nations. Before the Europeans came, the Tamils had their own kingdom in that island for thousands of years – before the Dutch, the Portuguese, the British came. When the British left, the Tamils expected a fair deal, but discrimination started. They suffered persecution, harassment, killings, plunder. Through peaceful means, they fought to get justice – through demonstrations, speeches in the parliament, through non-violent means, they did not take up guns – but that was rewarded with bullets and repression. Every vestige of that civilization was about to be erased.
As an example, in 1981, the great Jaffna library was burnt to ashes – 100,000 books, a treasure, was burnt to ashes. Places of worship were attacked. The Tamil women cherished their honour dearer than their lives – but what happened? I shudder to describe what happened to those women. For these reasons, things took a different turn.

In 1976, the great leader Selvanayakam had a solution in the Tamil’s conference that we should have a separate sovereign independent Tamil nation, and he called for the youth to take up the cause and fight. Until then, they did not take up the arms. Yes, it is history, they resorted to armed struggle. When the children were killed, when their mothers and sisters were raped, they took to arms – so armed struggle had started. It is a phenomenon throughout the world in history.

Then what happened? Today, one million Tamils of that island have been uprooted and scattered throughout the world, like refugees. In that island itself, 500,000 Tamils have become refugees, and 130,000 Tamils have reached Indian shores as refugees. 60,000 children have lost their education – at least, from the North-East secretariat on human rights, that is the report. No food, no electricity, no medicines, they are dying – this is the scenario today.

Our friends spoke about the cease-fire – the cease-fire was unilaterally declared by the LTTE on the eve of Christmas in the year 2001, for 30 days. It was extended for another 30 days, which was responded by the Government of Sri Lanka. The Norwegian Government took all effective measures to bring a negotiated settlement.

In 1995, 168 women and children were killed in a bombing when they were taking shelter in Saint Peter’s Church, and Pope John Paul II gave an appeal to the international community to extend all solace and succor to the suffering Tamils. The then Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali made an appeal to the international community to render all assistance and help to the suffering Tamils. And abductions, disappearances, of innocent men and women. What happened in Kosovo? The innocent people were killed and buried, and it was unearthed. Likewise, 400 innocent women and children were buried in the graves of SEMMANI area near Jaffna.

I made a representation to Dr. Host, the Deputy Chairman of the Human Rights Commission, 1998. Regarding that, he sent a delegation of physicians of research to SEMMANI – the same team that went to Kosovo. Today, after all these things, tsunami, the devastating effect it had. And the French voluntary organization employed 17 Tamil youths. They were not LTTE boys, but they were shot at point blank.

And the gruesome killing was the bombing of Chencholai orphanage where 61 girl children were killed in cold blood. All these things have happened. The cease-fire was declared by them in 2006. Again, they came to the negotiating table. The commitment that was given by the government was not honoured and the peace talks were sabotaged.

The situation today is very sad. That is why I would make a mercy appeal to the nations of the European Union to put all pressure on the Sinhala Government to stop the military offensive and come to the negotiating table. And erase the tears of the ancient Tamil race.

It is their traditional homeland, but the President of Sri Lanka, Rajapaksa, says that the Tamils do not have any traditional homeland. If he sticks to this stand there cannot be any scope for negotiation. This factor has to be considered. Today, the situation is really saddening our minds. People are dying of hunger, of disease, without medicines. So I would make an appeal through you to render all assistance through the International Red Cross Society, to provide food and medicine to the suffering Tamils in the areas.

And if they conduct elections in the east, that is against the spirit of the accord in 1987, because north and east are the traditional Tamil homeland. So this is a major problem.

Finally, I would crave your indulgence. Through you, I appeal to all the nations of the European Union to turn your eyes to the suffering Tamils and lend your ears to the anguished cry of the Tamils. Peace, peace to be restored. What do we mean by peace? Not peace of graveyard, not the security of slave, but peace to be restored, to make them live in dignity and honour. That is their longing.
Mr. Khin Maung Win, Deputy Executive Director, Democratic Voice of Burma, Norway

Conflict in Burma

Burma has been isolated since 1962 when the military came into power by a bloody coup. Since then, the richest country in the region has become the poorest.

Demonstrations in 1988 resulted in 3,000 deaths, but not much is known about this worldwide. The world was alerted by the September demonstrations last year.

Currently, there are two major conflicts occurring in Burma. The first conflict is the ethnic conflict in the jungle – the conflict between the Burman dominated central government, and the Non-Burman ethnic groups. The Burmans are a majority group encompassing over 50% of the country’s population. The rest of the population is comprised of several dozens of ethnic minority groups (non-Burman ethnic groups). We can compare the Burmans with the Serbs of the Former Yugoslavia, where Serbs are the major group controlling politics, causing other non-Serb ethnic groups to be unequal.

The civil war in Burma started when Burma attained independence in 1948. 2008 is the 60th anniversary of the civil war. The ethnic conflict, or conflict in the jungle, has caused the suffering of millions of innocent Non-Burman ethnic civilians, mainly by the troops of the military regime, now known as the State Peace and Development Council.

The second conflict is the struggle for democracy happening in the urban areas. The conflict is between the military junta and the urban Burmans. It has been happening since 1962, the year the military came into power. The intensive democracy movement happened on 8th August 1988 – so we call it the 8-8-88 nationwide demonstration. Now it is the 20th anniversary of this demonstration.

You will see innocent civilians – women, children, elderly people – are victims of the ethnic conflicts happening in the jungle. The international community does not know much about it – there is no media coverage, none of the stations are reporting about this conflict. The Democratic Voice of Burma is now trying its best to report to both the domestic and the international audience.

The students and the Buddhist monks are in the forefront of the struggle – you will remember the images of the demonstration last year. Because of that, thousands of activists, including Buddhist monks, are jailed in urban prisons – prisons with walls. Aung San Suu Kyi used to say there are two types of prisons in Burma – one type is the prisons with walls, for political activists and the critics, and another is a large single prison, without walls, for 55 million Burmese.

What is the major source of conflict in Burma? Put simply, it is the military rule.

People are crying for peace.

So what should be the solution to the Burmese conflicts? For most Burmese, it is very simple. Democratic forces – students, Buddhist monks and other intellectuals – led by Aung San Suu Kyi, Non-Burman ethnic groups, who are suffering in the jungle in the remote areas, and the military regime, all coming together in a tripartite dialogue to find the solution. That is the recommendation already made by the United Nations, supported by the international players, all the ethnic groups and the democratic forces. Only the military regime is still refusing.
PANEL SESSION 2:
A ROADMAP TO PEACE: NOVEL APPROACHES TO PEACE BUILDING IN SOUTH ASIA

Moderator
Ms. Erika Mann, Member of European Parliament

Speakers
Mr. Colin Archer, Secretary General, International Peace Bureau, Switzerland
Dr. Jayalath Jayawardene, Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka
Swami Sadyajathah, Director, The Art of Living, India
Rt. Rev. Dr. Maduluvave Sobitha Nayaka Thero, Chief Incumbent of Nagavihara Kotte, Sri Lanka
Swami Sadyojathah, Director, The Art of Living, India

Terrorism in the world claims maximum lives in India, after war-torn Iraq (Source: Times of India, 27th August 2007). One in six Indians is living under insurgency, their lives shaped by militancy, violence and fear (Source: The Hindustan Times, 2nd July 2007). From January 2004 to March 2007, Europe, Eurasia (except India), North America, Central America and South America had a combined loss of 3280 lives due to terrorism. During the same period, India alone lost 3674 lives to terrorism, of which 88% was due to Naxal violence.

Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, said, “It would not be an exaggeration to say that the problem of Naxalism is the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by the country. No single day passes without their attack… The Maoist problem has assumed proportions bigger than militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, and insurgency in North East India, due to its sheer spread and organized linkages.”

Naxalism refers to the Left Wing extremist movement that traces its roots to the failed May 1967 peasant uprising in Naxalbari village, West Bengal. Its prominent ideologues and leaders in the first phase included Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal. The movement was launched under the banner of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), but in April 1969, a split occurred in the party and the radical platform was adopted by the new formation, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML) whose programmes and activities are ‘based on the thought of Mao-Tse-Tung’. Today, though no historical links exist between the original parties and the contemporary Left Wing extremist movements, each of these continue to be referred to as ‘Naxalite’ movements.

The Naxal groups today are seen as extreme left formations constituting a lawless, predatory force. About 90% of the people killed by Naxalites are from the poorest sections of society; the sense of insecurity is therefore more in the poorer sections of the population: “Until yesterday, the Naxalites spoke against imperialists, capitalists, industrialists and monopolists - but now they have gone against their own cause. They have deviated from their principles, and they are killing the people.”

(Mahendra Karma, senior tribal leader, Chhattisgarh)

From 1998 to the end of 2007, over 7,794 people have been killed due to Naxalite violence. In 2007 alone, there were 1,385 incidents of Naxalite violence. The number of incidents of violence in Naxal-affected states in India has reached 14,046 incidents (1998 - 2007). More than 50,000 people are living in temporary shelters due to destruction of their homes in the state of Chhattisgarh alone.
The Art of Living Foundation also helps people to cope with the trauma of violence through:

- Trauma Relief workshops and counseling in affected areas, including the remotest jungles;
- Building of schools and developmental infrastructure;
- Giving young minds a new, non-violent approach to development through the Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP); and
- Uplifting rural and tribal communities through the 5H program.

Thousands of people have benefited from the Art of Living initiatives: in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, over 11,000 people have received training, including 150 people (many who were Naxal rebels) who graduated as youth leaders under the YLTP; in Andhra Pradesh, 230 Naxals have completed the Art of Living program; in Jharkhand, over 100 Naxals, including 30 extreme rebels, have undergone the Art of Living training. In total, nearly 20,000 rural folk have benefited from the trauma relief programs.

Concerned with the growing violence in Bihar, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar met with the chief of the South Asia Maoist Coordination Committee at The Art of Living International Centre in Bangalore, India. After extensive dialogue, the chief agreed to give up violence and work towards restoring peace. To honor this commitment to peace, a 300-km belt on the border of Nepal-Bihar (Champaran district) was declared a peace area.

In private and public meetings, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has appealed for moral and spiritual instruction in the school curriculum to ennable the young, impressionable minds. The violent tendencies in the youth can be attributed to the disappearance of spiritual content from instruction at home and school. He has personally visited many Naxal affected areas and persuaded the youth to give up violence. The Art of Living’s interventions in the Naxal affected areas have been appreciated and supported by the government, local administration and the police force.

As Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says, “Never try to change a terrorist; we need young people with that kind of commitment. Just change their goal.”
Mr. Colin Archer, Secretary-General, International Peace Bureau, Switzerland / UK

Working for democracy in Burma

In this morning’s International Herald Tribune, there was a cartoon that struck my eye. Of course, the great subject in the press over these last few days has been Tibet and the Olympics – so the cartoon was of the passing of the flame, the relay – but it wasn’t the Olympic torch, it was the protest stick. It is a rather easy joke to make, but I thought there was a kind of message underneath which in fact is very important: peace, first of all, is an effort, it doesn’t just come by wishing good thoughts. It comes by struggle, by making an effort, and it’s a collective effort, a relay. No one person can do it all, we have to work on it as a team. That might seem obvious, but somehow that image has stayed in my mind.

The news has been very full of Buddhist monks, hasn’t it? When we saw the monks protesting in Lhasa, I am sure many of us thought of the monks in Rangoon and other cities just six months ago in Burma, and the extraordinary courage they showed in standing up to a brutal regime. In both cases we are talking about essentially military regimes.

There has been another Buddhist story in the last few months that we should not overlook – Bhutan. There we have had a different kind of transformation, where the King has suddenly said, ‘Well, it’s time for democracy. Let’s have elections’. Extraordinary! What other country in the world can we think of where that has happened? Well, Burma doesn’t have a King, it has General Than Shwe – and he is not going to organise democratic elections any time soon. Well, actually, he says he is, because there is a process under way, a constitutional process that is due to lead to a referendum. On May 10th, we will hear the result of this referendum that will (presumably) approve the new constitution, and there will be elections in 2010. It all sounds wonderful. But when you realize that the military’s own process has taken some 14 years to even write the constitution, and that all the key democratic groupings (including all the monks!) have been excluded, we can rapidly conclude that this is not a serious democratic process – it is designed to keep the regime in power. So there are going to be many more chapters in this drama, and there could be more monks on the streets before it’s over.

I want to talk about pressure and struggle. What is non-violence? It means many things to many people. I don’t think I need to explain the name Gandhi in this gathering. Gandhi showed very clearly that non-violence is about struggle – not about sitting and hoping, or just talking, or even dialogueuing. It’s about putting your point of view firmly and making change happen, but that has to be done in a non-violent and disciplined way that respects one’s opponent – that was the essential message of satyagraha. So, if we are going to make change in Burma, or rather, if Burmese people, people living in the State of Burma, are going to be assisted by the international community, how will that process take place? What kind of struggle can it be, and what kind of contribution can we make from outside?

Well, Governments have a range of policies; and the United Nations has passed many resolutions – unfortunately, at the Security Council, there was not agreement on a binding resolution on Burma. For the first time, there was a historic resolution in January 2007, but Russia and China in particular (and South Africa also, it must be said) voted against it. So we do not have a strong enough position at the United Nations level, or even at the European Union level, as we should have. The EU has made some positive statements, and has made some contributions – we should recognise that. It introduced some limited forms of sanctions, which are after all the main non-violent method for the international community to put pressure on a regime. We have had non-humanitarian aid sanctions, a visa ban, assets freeze, an investment ban of a limited kind, and more recently a specific import ban on timber, gems and metal – and that is now beginning to get closer to the real interests of the regime. We do need additional sanctions, particularly in the financial and banking sectors. But the regime is kept afloat by revenues from its reserves of gas, timber, gems etc, and as long as it is able to sell its natural resources abroad, both to its local neighbors, to ASEAN members, India and China, partly through the French company TOTAL (the famous campaign to get TOTAL to divest goes on...), it will not feel the full force of international pressure.

So part of our struggle has to be at the political level, through international institutions, through bilateral positions of particular Governments, and through support from the civil society. We must continue to insist that Aung San Suu Kyi should be released from house arrest, and allowed to take part in a genuine tripartite dialogue between government, opposition and the ethnic groups. But we also need to work at an economic level – after all ‘money is the sinews of war’ as the French say, it’s what keeps it all going. We need to recognise that is a major factor in the situation.

Now some of this may seem remote from our everyday lives, and for some of us it might seem too high-level. But consider this: in the UK, where I come from, we have a strong Burma democracy campaign, and that campaign has been working day-in and day-out to put pressure on companies that are selling clothes made in Burma. In the latest report I saw, they noted that 138 brands have now refused to take garments sourced in Burma. The campaign has been working day-in and day-out to put pressure on companies that are selling clothes made in Burma. In the latest report I saw, they noted that 138 brands have now refused to take garments sourced in Burma, because they agree it is important to take a stand. This is a remarkable thing – these are not activists, or party-political people. These are not churches. These are businesses that see it in their interests to be on the right side. Surely, through these kinds of actions, the message will come through to the Burmese capital before too long.

Yet it is undoubtedly a long campaign, and it will require all of us, and many other people who are not here today, to join our efforts, working in different ways. We have people here from many walks of life, and each of us in some way can do something to assist the non-violent struggle for the democratic liberation of Burma. And what applies to Burma can apply to the rest of the planet, because very few countries are truly free of all of the scourges – poverty, discrimination, homelessness, AIDS... the list goes on. So, we have our loyalties to our friends around the planet, and each of us makes our choices. I have chosen to spend some of my time on Burma, but since I am the General Secretary of an international...
peace network, with 300 organizations in 70 countries, we have a big job to tackle, so we can’t only spend time on one country. However what we see through the case study, through the example of the Burmese struggle – which generally speaking is a heroic one, worthy of the term ‘Gandhian’ in so many ways – can inspire us to participate in a worldwide struggle for those fundamental shared values that are so important.

So I look forward to continuing this conversation through the weekend, and to talking with you about your own work for peace around the world.

Dr. Jayalath Jayawardene, Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka

Vanakkam.

First of all, I would like to thank H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar for inviting me to attend this very important international seminar, which is very close to my heart, and which is so important for my country, my people.

I very carefully listened to the representations made by Mr. Vaiko about Sri Lankan Tamils. Today, Sri Lanka is suffering. The entire population of Sri Lanka is trying to find a negotiated peaceful settlement. I come from the main opposition and belong to the majority Sri Lankan Sinhala community. We do understand the suffering of the Tamil people. I was the first minister in charge of the north, since independence, who came from the Sinhala community.

Mr. Vaiko spoke of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu. I was the first man who went to Tamil Nadu to look for the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu. I fought for them, and we continue to fight for them, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or politics. We really thank the Government of Norway and the people of Norway for trying to facilitate a negotiated peaceful settlement to our ethnic problem.

We do not believe in a military solution. We would like to see that there will be a negotiated political settlement that will be accepted by all communities of Sri Lanka, and where all communities will be able to live with respect and dignity. There cannot be second class citizens in our country. The Tamils cannot be considered as second class citizens. They should have equal rights like the Sinhala citizens, or the Muslims, or any other ethnic groups of our country. This is my firm belief, and this should be put into practice in reality.

I personally believe that to achieve ethnic harmony in Sri Lanka, there should be religious harmony. You may be aware, Sri Lanka has the gift of having all four major religions in the world – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Each and every citizen of our country belongs to one of these religions. All of them are great believers in non-violence.

It is true that the Tamil group LTTE has taken up arms. They are still trying to struggle to find justice for them, which they believe to be correct by means of arms. My dear friends, it is our responsibility to make sure those people who have taken up arms are not dealt with by military means, but by peaceful means. This is my cry.

We are aware that every day in Sri Lanka, whether it is happening in the north, the south, or the east, the violation of human rights is the violation of human rights. The basic needs of each and every citizen of our country have to be provided, whether they are Sinhalese, or Tamils, or the Muslims. We cannot compromise the human needs and the human rights for anything. That is why we initiated the peace process in 2002, to
find a negotiated peaceful settlement in the country, with the help of the Norwegians, the European Union, and other countries such as USA, Japan, and especially India.

We still continue to try and find a negotiated settlement. Even though I belong to the main opposition party of Sri Lanka, we hope and pray that the present ruling party that is in power, under the leadership of President Mahinda Rajapakse, will have some ways and means to find a negotiated settlement. Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, the Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat of Sri Lanka is here with us. Hon. Arumugam Thondaman, who is my very dear friend, is speaking on behalf of the Tamils of Indian origin. His grandfather had been a local Gandhi; he had voiced the rights of the innocent Tamil people of Indian origin who have been helping to develop Sri Lanka’s economy.

We are here even to disagree, and we are here to agree, that peace can be achieved only by peaceful means. We seek your advice and assistance to find a negotiated peaceful solution to Sri Lanka’s ethnic problem. We really appreciate the efforts taken by H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and his attention to find a negotiated settlement to Sri Lanka’s ethnic problem.

Vanakkam.

(Reproduced from the transcript of Dr. Jayalath Jayawardene’s presentation)
The LTTE cannot be considered as the only voice of the Tamil people – there are other Tamil organizations and leaders such as Mr. Ananda Sangari and Mr. Douglas Devananda; so you have to get the views of all the Tamil political parties and leaders to find a solution. Mr. Arumugam Thondaman is a leader who represents thousands and thousands of Tamils of Indian origin. He is not an LTTE leader. Therefore, it is always important to consider the views and opinions of all the Tamil leaders to find a negotiated settlement.

My last wish is to see that within this one country, all the communities will have an opportunity to live together like brothers and sisters.

(Reproduced from the transcript of Rt. Rev. Dr. Maduluvave Sobitha Nayaka Thero’s presentation, with translation from Sinhala into English)
Ambassador Jon Hanssen-Bauer, Special Representative, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Norway’s Commitment for Peace and Reconciliation in Asia

I would first of all like to thank the International Association for Human Values for inviting me to address this conference. I would like to commend the organization, and in particular His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, for this initiative to gather experts and professionals to discuss the challenging task of promoting peace in Asia.

Norway has a long history of engaging with countries in Asia with an aim of supporting peace initiatives, negotiation processes and peace building. This engagement ranges from quiet and low key support, to processes like the ones in Nepal, Aceh and East Timor, to more profiled work as the facilitator of negotiations as we have been invited to in Sri Lanka and the Philippines. In Afghanistan, Norway contributes to the Nato-led stabilization forces under United Nations mandate, and it contributes dollar for dollar, the same amount of financial support to civil peace building efforts as to the military component.

The objective of my address is not, however, to make a list of Norwegian engagements. I would rather focus on a few principles guiding our work and the roles that we engage in this particular area of the world. If I should sum up our approach in two sentences, I would say that Norway believes in the strength of a soft-powered, or weak if you prefer, facilitator. Also, Norway believes more in building coalitions of complementary good offices that can together nurture and facilitate a process of building peace, than to engage on the basis of one single, all-purpose, mediator. A mediator, in our terminology, will often relate to the conflict on the basis of a mandate external to the parties to help forge an agreement between them. A facilitator can be more effective if they are unbiased, impartial and have no preferences of their own as to how the disputed issue should be solved.

Over seven years now, Norway has organized retreats for mediators together with the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva. The purpose is to discuss lessons learned between active mediators with a view to professionalize the business of peace making. This year, just four weeks ago, Beijing, China hosted one of our retreats for mediators who are active in Asia. Here, the participants representing governments in the region told the participants that prospective mediators must understand the regional context. Most conflicts in Asia are intrastate or internal conflicts. They are between governments on the one hand, and armed insurgencies on the other. And, as it was formulated at the Beijing retreat, there is in Asia ‘a regional aversion against getting involved in somebody else’s internal affairs’ based on a sense of national pride and on historical experience. It was quite useful for me, as a Norwegian, to be reminded of the fact that the western countries tend to forget the history of foreign interference in the region – a pattern that nobody wants to see repeated.

The second principle of Norwegian peace diplomacy is that we only engage in facilitating negotiations or peace processes when the parties to a given conflict invite us to do so. By working on invitation only, we feel that we respect the sovereignty of the states, and we respect the sensitivities of the rebel groups. The implication of this fact is also that we remain impartial.

In Sri Lanka, Norway was invited by the parties to facilitate talks between the Government and the Tamil Tigers. On behalf of the Government, President Kumaratunga extended this invitation to us in the year 2000, and on behalf of the LTTE, its leader Prabhakaran did the same. Norway is still committed to the task that we at that time accepted to do. We accepted, because Norway has enjoyed a very long history of presence in and solidarity with Sri Lanka. The history of development cooperation between our two countries goes back to the 1960s, and is of substantial size for Norway.

The third principle is that the ownership of processes must remain with the principals and the parties to the conflicts. This is the reason why we call ourselves facilitators. We are not advocating any particular solution or imposing anything. In our view, mediation works best when the mediators opt for a low profile and avoid visibility on their own behalf. They should aim for a limited and modest role, be more obsessed with process than results, and stay involved throughout the complex ups and downs of a typical peace process. Being a
partner with limited leverage on its own can have advantages, as there is less interest in making us pawns to the conflict.

To use Sri Lanka as an example again, we respect the fact that the parties must define when and how to talk. During 2006, when the parties invited Norway to resume talks, Norway spared no efforts to make them happen even within a context of increasing violence. In December the same year, when there had already been several military confrontations, it became evident that Norway could do very little. We conveyed this to the Government and to the LTTE, and told them we would take no further initiative before they conveyed to us that they wanted our services. Meanwhile, our main task is to preserve the logistics and infrastructure for talks, to provide an open and discrete channel of communication, and be ready when the timing is correct.

Nepal may give another example of a much more indirect and even more invisible role played by Norway. We were not invited by the parties to take a role as a facilitator, but we offered our premises as a venue for informal discussions and meetings. We also hosted seminars on experiences from other peace processes on topics of relevance for all, they being Government, Maoists or the seven party alliance. We have tried to be of help when called upon, and nudged all players in the same direction whenever nudging seemed necessary. The ownership of the process remained all the time with the parties, never with us.

The fourth principle is that while being impartial, Norway is not neutral in the sense of not defending values. Conflict solution must be based on fundamental and internationally shared values. Norway is consistent in promoting respect for human rights. We uphold and defend the primacy of international humanitarian law. We engage on the basis of solidarity with the people, respect for sovereignty, and in the belief in the rights of people to democratically define their own future. Our work is firmly based on the principles and resolutions vested in the UN.

We are often asked whether we are completely uninterested in the negotiated outcomes. No, we are an interested partner. For example, I can imagine conflicts where it may be difficult for Norway to take a role. On the other hand, we are often invited because we have the reputation of not imposing our views and, probably because we were not part of the colonialism in the region, we are perceived as not to engage out of self-interest. In Sri Lanka, there are speculations from time to time whether we are there to search for oil or for harbours or other things. The answer is that we are not motivated by such interests. Of course, we welcome business cooperation and matchmaking between Sri Lankan and Norwegian companies. Such exploration of mutual commercial interest is wonderful, but does not motivate our engagement for peace.

We also feel that it is favorable when we can agree on what the broad parameters for talks are. To use Sri Lanka as an example again, the common understanding with the government and with the LTTE has been that talks are aimed at finding a political solution that are acceptable to all communities in Sri Lanka. For Norway, any solution endorsed by the Sri Lankan people as stated above, is of course acceptable to us.
Dr. Dagmar Sorbøe, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Norway

We cannot talk about peace and reconciliation anywhere in the world without a gender perspective. If we want sustainable peace we have to take a stand on violence against women in conflict and war, one of history’s great silences. We had been completely unprepared for the searing magnitude that we have seen and heard of in conflict and post-conflict areas.

We know the data and we have read reports of sexual assaults including rape, torture and sexual slavery. We have learned of the dramatic increase in domestic violence in war zones, and of the growing number of women and girls trafficked out of war zones to become forced laborers and forced sex workers. We have now seen and heard about scars or brutality in modern war so extreme that survival seems for some a worse fate than death. And yet, we have seen and heard about something else as well – time and time again, we have encountered women who survived trauma and found the courage and the will to commit to life. They are struggling to rebuild communities, keep their families together and remake their lost lives.

Clearly, the nature of modern war has changed. It has been fought in homes and communities and on women’s bodies, in a battle for resources and in the name of religion and ethnicity. Violence against women is used to break and humiliate women, families and communities, no matter which side they are on. Women have become the greatest victims of war and the biggest stakeholders of peace. We see how militarization of societies breeds new levels of violence and how violence against women during conflict has reached epidemic proportions. Their bodies become a battle ground over which opposing forces are struggling.

The extreme violence that women suffer during conflict and war does not arise solely out of conditions of war – it is directly related to the violence that exists in women’s lives during peace times. Throughout the world, women experience violence, just because they are women and often because they do not have the same rights and autonomy as men do. Without political rights and authority, they often have little resources.

Because so much of the persecution against women goes largely unpunished, violence against women comes to be an accepted norm, one which escalates during conflict as violence in general increases – and militarization and the presence of weapons has legitimized new levels.

Often this escalating violence becomes a new norm which continues into the post conflict period, where chaos adds to the many frustrations that were never solved by the war itself. There are many examples of recent mass rapes such as it took place in East Timor, during the Balkan war, not to mention what happened in Sierra Leone, where more than 40% of all women were raped, and what goes on still today in the Republic of Congo and elsewhere. Against this background, the United Nations Security Council recognized that international peace and security can only advance when women are included in decision making at all levels, and when they contribute to peace building. On 31 October 2000, the first UN Security Council resolution on women and peace and security, was passed unanimously. Resolution 1325 emerged from leadership of supportive governments, the advocacy of coalitions of NGOs, and with technical assistance from UNIFEM.

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom that I represent here today, is very active in this process. It has in fact since 1915, been advocating for the recognition and understanding of women’s role in war and conflict. Resolution 1325 is a breakthrough in the work for equal representation and participation of women in peace processes at all levels. It is an international instrument and a watershed political framework that makes women in a gender perspective relevant to the planning of refugee camps, food distribution and mother and child care, but also in the planning of peacekeeping operations and the reconstruction of war-torn societies.

It makes the perspective of gender equality relevant to every single council action, ranging from mine clearance to elections of security sector reforms. 1325 is circulated, referred to and used by organizations and single individuals all over the world. It is however, formulated in a very general way and needs to be made more concrete so it can be implemented both by national and international authorities.

We are now eight years down the road when it comes to the implementation of resolution 1325 in each country. It has become clear to me that we still have, unfortunately, a long way to go. Seemingly, many governments keep this resolution out of sight and in the bottom drawer. I realized this last summer during a conversation with a minister of women’s affairs in Congo, one of the most war stricken countries in the world. She discovered that even she had never heard about resolution 1325. However, I am sure that with the help of all of you, we will be able to move forward faster, and especially in your part of the world. Our aim today is to ensure that we must get women to the table, to all tables and to all parts of the tables. We must strengthen the capacity of women’s organizations, both in civil society and politically. We must ensure gender issues are present in every part of this substantive agenda.

Finally, our actions will always ensure that women’s voices are heard. We will continue to exert pressure and challenge governments and international institutions, to promote and protect women’s human rights and peace building, and provide tools for sustainable development. I would like to thank His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar – I know that one of his largest programs is to promote women in India.
H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder, International Association for Human Values

I would like to share with you an experience we had in India, in Jehanabad, Bihar. Any Indian knows this place – for several years, this district made headlines in newspapers as there were continuous massacres happening between rival groups – not a year had passed without several such massacres. I went there in 2000 – for the first time, around 100,000 people gathered in one place. There is some advantage of being in the spiritual and religious field! There is a deep sense of religiosity or spiritual awakening there – just out of curiosity to see me, so many people came.

There is a tradition in India – when a guest comes to your town, you are supposed to give them a gift. So I made use of this ancient tradition, and said, “I am a guest in your city, I have come to your town, I want you to give me a gift. I want you to give all the hatred you have for other communities, and go home, celebrate, and distribute sweets with those people whom you utterly dislike and whom you are holding anger and hatred towards. Will you please do it for me?” All the women raised their hands. I said, “When the women have raised their hands, what about you men?” In five minutes, the men followed.

The shops in Jehanabad were known for closing at 4pm. Since 2000, the very next month, the shops were open until 9pm, and not a single massacre has been reported since then in that particular district. The police were astonished by this, and the State Assembly of Bihar invited me to address all the Assembly Members to tell them how this magic happened.

India got freedom not because Mahatma Gandhi was a great intellectual or a political leader. He was a very simple person, but he was a deeply spiritual person. Mahatma Gandhi travelled the length and breadth of the country with one message – of uniting people in spirituality.

It does not matter what your religious faiths are – everyone can come together in spirituality. In Hinduism, there are many divisions – it is not one religion as such, but an amalgamation of many streams of thought. In Buddhism and Christianity, there are many schools of thought as well. In Islam, there are four different kinds of Islam.

So either there is interreligious conflict, or intra-religious conflict, or it is a conflict between communist ideology or capitalist ideology – it all starts in the minds of people, in the hearts of people. When such conflict begins, they shut themselves for reasoning, prejudice overtakes and communication goes haywire. I think it is here that we need to build the trust among the communities, among the people. People from the same community can be fighting. It is just a matter of building trust, and I think spiritual leaders, religious leaders, can play a bigger role in this.

When I visited Iraq with the same mission, a nation where we have a lot of service projects, the Prime Minister of Iraq told me the same thing. He said that there are big powers in the world, but they cannot bring unity between the minds and hearts of people – only spirituality can do this. I totally agreed. I met several religious leaders and tribal heads, with one message – to please give non-violence a chance, give it a chance for six months, and if it does not work, you can revert back to your old ways. I think in this short period of time, non-violence can bring more unity in the community and among the people.

Most of the clerics agreed with me, except one gentleman – the vice-chancellor of a particular university. He said, “Please don’t take away the anger of our people. You can teach them computer skills, but don’t teach them yoga or meditation. I want them to hold onto their anger until they can finish every enemy on the planet.” I said, “You cannot breed anger and hatred to breed peace in the world. Elimination is not the way to existence. If you want to exist, you need to let others exist. The world is full of differences and we have to coexist with differences – live and let live, in a peaceful manner.”

I strongly feel all the NGOs, governments and the international community should join hands with one goal – a violence-free and stress-free society. We all may have different ideas, skills and methodologies, but we have seen too much violence now. In fact, we have become almost insensitive to violence. That’s how in schools, children have taken up guns. We have heard of this happening in America, and now it has come to Asia too, where studying in school was always revered as very sacred. Last month, children below the age of ten took a gun and shot their pals. We cannot afford to have such situations in the world.

When we keep reading about all the violence in the paper every day, people tend to get depressed. We have an entire section of society that is so depressed – they have stopped reading the newspapers and become inactive. A person who is depressed does not take any action at all – they stay away from everything or resort to suicide. The increasing number of suicides on this planet is again a war on one’s self, on humanity. We have to check this. Another is the domestic and societal violence, which is the other extreme on the spectrum of the same problem of violence.

We cannot afford to keep this message within this room – we have to take it to our communities, our organizations, our nations, and spread this voice of non-violence, make it sound loud and clear to the world. Mahatma Gandhi could do it with that one spiritual strength or force, uniting people across religion, across the continent, across different ideologies. Every morning and evening he would make people sit together and sing hymns from all religions. It was a multicultural, multi-religious education. Those values are now being overlooked, even in his own country. This is very sad. We must again raise the voice of non-violence.
Prof. Sturla J. Stålsett, General Secretary, Church City Mission Oslo, Norway

Seeing vulnerability as a human value: A common challenge for civil sector and governments in the work towards peace and reconciliation

The concept and reality of vulnerability have become very much important in today’s discussions on peace and reconciliation. But in my view, vulnerability has often been understood in a way that is too one-dimensional. I would like to suggest to you that vulnerability has at least two important ethical and anthropological aspects.

The first aspect is quite straightforward – it is the fact of being exposed to danger, of being possibly wounded. This is why, of course, there are negative connotations to the word vulnerability. Vulnerability is often seen as opposite to security. I would like to suggest, however, that it is not. To the contrary, recognizing vulnerability as a human value is one of the most important tasks towards constructing common security. It has become a common language within political science and development research to see ‘the vulnerable groups’ as a new word for poor people, or particularly exposed people to natural catastrophes, wars or other situations of crisis. There is nothing wrong about that. Yet I think it is very important to overcome a focus on vulnerability that only sees vulnerability as something that should be removed. This is because the second dimension, the second aspect of vulnerability, is that it is basically an inescapable human phenomenon for all human beings, not just some groups, are vulnerable. And, more importantly, it is also a constituent factor of being human. In fact, if it were possible for any human being to be invulnerable, I would say that very same person would at that very same moment become inhuman.

That simple basic recognition carries important anthropological and ethical consequences. Why do I say that? I say that because it is in fact not just something inescapable about human nature, that we are vulnerable species or beings. It is furthermore an ethical precondition. It is an ethical precondition, because it is only by recognizing my own vulnerability that I will be capable of recognizing the vulnerability of the other person. That makes it possible for me to heed the ethical demand, issuing from the pictures of suffering fellow human beings that we have just seen, and from the knowledge we have of the conflicts of South Asia for instance. Seeing vulnerability of the other person as an ethical demand that requires something from me is something that I come to awareness about through recognizing my own vulnerability.

In that way, it is not just an ethical precondition but it becomes also an ethical resource; because how can I know in what way to address the vulnerability of the other person? I can know something about that through my own experience of how it is to be exposed, to be vulnerable, to be dependent.

This is an insight that draws on religious resources, spiritual resources, resources from the women’s movement, and resources from indigenous people. Very much they would know from their own history and experience that it is only through recognizing the position, and the inescapability and even the value of vulnerability, that we can come forward and make progress in situations of conflict.

It is not my intention to romanticize the dimension of vulnerability, but it is rather my proposal to criticize certain concepts of security and of power, that are linked to the illusion, the very dangerous illusion, of invulnerability. So many powers, so many political leaders, so many persons, have nurtured that illusion, that false and dangerous dream of invulnerability. We know that it only creates more insecurity for other people when people try to build their security through becoming invulnerable to others. We know that through super-power politics and we know that from our own experience in small communities of conflict.

So what would be then the role of the governments, of the NGOs, of the religious communities, in this? I think any process of peace and reconciliation needs moments of reflection, moments of dialogue, focusing on these common values that we share. It would be very interesting for me to hear from religious leaders, people of the great faith traditions of Asia, how they would reflect on the common vulnerability of all human beings from their own faith traditions. And I would gladly respond from my own Christian tradition, what resources we would have to develop that topic in a way that would build and nurture human peace and reconciliation.

I think we need to look for moments, it may be conferences like this, it may be workshops, and it may be working together to overcome social ills, poverty and discrimination. I have been working in conflict ridden societies like Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and Brazil. I know from my own experience the very great value of trying to take time to reflect on these deep issues, even when it may not seem to be very central to the policy of the day.

So I would strongly recommend that we look for how we can recognize human vulnerability, not as a weakness, but as a value, and accordingly, to see that it is the role and the responsibility of governments to protect vulnerability, not to remove it. And furthermore that it is a particular role for the religious communities and for the NGOs to nurture that dialogue, and to walk beside all the vulnerable people of this world, saying that being vulnerable is the basic human condition and we can build peace from recognizing that also as a human value.
I intend to bring to the forum here the importance of the root causes of conflict. The root causes of course boil down to poverty and inequality, in a big way. What I will try to do is focus a little on the persisting poverty and inequality issue, the growing population and their distribution and movements issue, the whole issue of the limits to growth (the warning that was given to the world in 1972 and was not followed), the deteriorating environment which has happened, the lack of health, particularly for women, and how all of these add up to confuse the world and bring a lack of peace to the world, and to South Asia in this particular case.

As we have repeatedly seen yesterday, the popular theory that was brought to the table often is that civil conflict derives primarily from ethnic, religious and cultural divisions. Prior research on this has emphasized these facts – political and cultural grievances, the grievance theory, that can lead to widespread discontent and spark rebellions. This is a la Samuel Huntington – The Clash of Civilizations. This theory needs to be reconsidered and it is being reconsidered. The grievance hypothesis and its applicability to brutal conflicts was looked at in Sierra Leone, Azerbaijan, Cambodia and Afghanistan. They questioned this notion and came to the conclusion that ethnicity etc., while very important, is not the whole reasoning for the conflicts; it lies more on the issues of poverty and inequality.

Let us look very briefly at the conflict growth nexus (if we can call it that). A fifth of humanity lives in abject poverty; that is a fact, let’s face it. The fifth I told you about is a finding of the economic and social survey that was done in 2006 by the United Nations. What it does is it affronts our sense of common humanity, because we still have such persistent inequality and poverty. It also undermines international security in many ways. If we look at the link between conflict and poverty, growth is a necessary condition for poverty reduction. Despite our concern with poverty reduction, we cannot ignore the consequences of inequality.

All of the things that are happening with globalization – unfortunately, we have globalized goods better than human beings. One of the things that has come out of globalization is of course the freedom of individuals, entrepreneurship etc. However, the issue that is coming up repeatedly is that if we do not have in countries, particularly in developing countries and all of South Asia for that matter, ways of ensuring that the products of global development, the products of globalization, are accessed with equality, then we have problems, because the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (if not poorer, the inequality persists). So the redistribution of income, without having a bigger cake to share, is a very important issue and it needs to be addressed, otherwise it creates grievances, leads to conflict.

As we see it, most of the wars that take place these days are civil wars. I am not talking about Iraq now, but most wars we are talking about here in this room are civil wars and they are caused, very summarily put, as at least one set of theories would like to show the data, by discrimination in public spending. Discrimination in taxation, examples: Burundi and Bangladesh. Regarding Bangladesh, although one could say there is an outer hand and there are outer hands in many of these conflicts as the conflicts develop, the discrimination in public spending and taxation was a huge issue in the civil war in Pakistan, which led to the creation of Bangladesh, my country. High asset inequality, basically coming from feudalism – El Salvador, Guatemala, Nepal and the Philippines are all examples of high asset inequality which has led to conflicts.

A huge issue again is economic management, or the lack of it, the lack of governance – the coming of recession because of all of those. Again, if I can give an example of my own country, most of our leaders of the past two decades, big leaders, happen to be in jail right now. The issue there (and it’s not proven, they are innocent until proven guilty) was that despite democracy, the governance went haywire, there was corruption at random. Corruption creates grievances, corruption leads to conflict.

Population growth, limits to growth: In 1972, there was a book that came out, which the Club of Rome, a famous group of entrepreneurs, commissioned to study. The study was done by very able scholars from MIT, and they said that basically there are limits – you cannot just continue to grow your population – you cannot continue to rape the nature, the environment, and continue to grow. We did not take that into our consideration – we said they are talking rubbish. We said – there is enough technology to be able to go self sufficient, India is self sufficient in food etc. Look at where we are now. In forty years, we have squandered those years by not taking the well researched cautions that were given to us. Today, India is worrying about rice. The whole world – Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan – rice growers like Pakistan and India are worried that there will not be enough rice to feed their own people.

I want to touch upon the issue of maternal deaths. Women die at the time of child birth, which should be a time of rejoicing. They die unnecessarily for simple delays of not making the decision at the right time, not having the transport and not having the service when they reach the service location. Every minute, one woman dies needlessly of pregnancy related causes in developing countries – in South Asia, a huge number. South and West Asia account for 40 percent of maternal deaths, unnecessary deaths. This causes disruption, this causes pain, and pain accumulated results in conflict.

If you look at what is happening in migration, both internal and between countries, it’s a sad story. It’s a sad story because we do not have policies. Europe’s fertility rate has gone down, many of the countries now have negative growth, so there is not enough population in the countries. You have migration of the people from South Asia in a big way – in Oslo for instance, there are many South Asians. And yet we have poor policies in place. I am not blaming Europe; I am blaming ourselves, humanity, for not having policies in place to deal with the issues of migration.

The point I am trying to make is that we cannot simply go back and say it is caused by language, ethnicity...
is much more than that. It is injustice, it is unfairness. And I commend H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, on behalf of the United Nations, for the work he is doing. The UN commends any single move towards peace, towards dialogue.

South Asia is the birth place, as we repeatedly said, of Gautama Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi. We quote them often, but do we really take it forward? Now I do not speak as a UN official, I speak as a South Asian who has some pain. I think we have gotten too used to making these talks about Mahatma Gandhi and not following Mahatma Gandhi. I just quote my own daughter – she actually quoted the famous song by Simon and Garfunkel, which says, ‘People hearing without listening’. She said, ‘You all just don’t listen!’ I think it is time for us to listen, because if we don’t, we will leave a heritage which we will not be proud of. Nobody in their right mind wants to live an inheritance of loss. We do not want to leave a boulevard of broken dreams. We want to leave something that our next generation can be proud of.

(Reproduced from the transcript of Dr. Wasim Zaman’s presentation)
Ms. Kathrine Aspaas, Journalist, Aftenposten, Norway

I am here to tell you about how the press works, and why you peace-makers never get attention. I am sure you have that experience, that you are never really heard.

You have to know the hierarchy of the press. I have worked in the press for 17 years, and I have found that the highest in the hierarchy, the most prestigious, are war and finance. It’s expensive, and it’s cool. In the middle are culture and sport. This can go both ways. If it’s the new opera house in Norway, it’s up the hierarchy, it’s expensive. The Olympic Games, also it’s up. If it has to do with children, it’s down in the hierarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy, you find peace, children and church choirs. That is the lowest of the lowest in this hierarchy.

Why do we choose this way? Every sane human being would know that we should turn this upside down, because very often life is at the bottom, and death is at the top. So why don’t we just turn it upside down? That is a very good question. I think it has to do with human nature – we, deep inside, are thrilled with death, because it makes us feel alive (as long as it is not in our backyard). The other aspect is that the media still has, and will have for a very long time, a certain old-fashioned culture of cowboys.

Words like tenderness and consideration have very low prestige. The prestigious words in the media are ‘hard’ and ‘decisive’ – not so prestigious, are ‘soft’ and ‘seeking’. The word ‘action’ is on the top, and ‘reflection’ on the bottom. I see tiny bits of change, but I do not think it will change in our time. So what you peace workers need to do in order to be heard, is you have to be like Mahatma Gandhi, a ‘bad guy’. You need to take the bad guy out in you when confronting the press.

His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says a lot of wonderful things about the ego. He says that you don’t really need the ego because it kills love – but you need the ego to fight, and believe me, you need the ego when you meet the press. So please, when you meet the press next time to talk about peace, take your ego with you and use it – be bad guys.

You need to know this hierarchy because you can’t change it. And you need to know how to work it, you have to work it in every single way that you can. And to get attention, you have to do as Mahatma Gandhi did – you need to be always provocative, but never violent. To be provocative, you have to be honest with yourself, about who you are. And you have to know that even though you are working for peace, you are exactly the same as everyone else. You are not nicer, you are not kinder – you are greedy, you have personal ambitions – you have to know yourself. You have to be honest about who you are and what you want.

I think the only way for the press to grow is to gain knowledge about themselves. And the same goes for ambitions – you have to know yourself. You have to be honest about who you are and what you want.

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I think the only way for the press to grow is to gain knowledge about themselves. And the same goes for ambitions – you have to know yourself. You have to be honest about who you are and what you want.
More significantly, southern Asia represents a potent mix of ethnicity, culture and religion. It is thus no surprise that this region is riven by a number of interstate and intrastate conflicts. Like the rest of Asia, southern Asia is very diverse. It has from mountainous states like Nepal and Bhutan to the low-lying Maldives, the world’s flattest state. It has sparsely populated Bhutan to heavily populated Bangladesh which, if you exclude city-states and island-nations, is the world’s most densely populated country. It has energy-rich Burma, sitting on large quantities of natural gas, to very energy-poor states like Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

Against this background, it is not easy to make generalized statements on the role of the media in this region. The media’s importance and role varies from country to country in the region. Where civil society is well developed, the media plays a critical role as the eyes and ears of society. But in autocratic or quasi-autocratic states, the media’s role, naturally, is limited. As shown by the World Press Freedom Index by the Paris-based international rights group, Reporters Without Borders, several southern Asian countries are among the worst suppressors of freedom. In the 167-nation list, Burma ranked 163rd, China 159th, Bangladesh 151st and Pakistan 150th.

Divergent political systems in southern Asia also make the development of common political standards not possible. That, in turn, makes the task of community building in southern Asia more onerous. That is one reason why SAARC hasn’t taken off. Indeed, SAARC’s development is likely to remain stunted. Because of the advance of information and communications technologies, it is not possible for states to suppress news. Yet some authoritarian states are becoming increasingly sophisticated in controlling and managing news. Let’s compare two recent examples of unrest — Burma and Tibet. Both Burma and Tibet are strategically located, endowed with rich natural resources, suffering under long-standing repressive rule, resisting hard power with soft power, and facing an influx of Han settlers. In fact, Burma’s majority citizens — the ethnic Burmans — are of Tibetan stock.

It is significant that the resistance against repressive rule in both Tibet and Burma is led by iconic Nobel laureates, one living in exile in India and the other under house detention for long in Rangoon. Each, a symbol of soft power, has built such moral authority as to command wide international respect and influence.

Yet another parallel is that heavy repression has failed to break the resistance to autocratic rule in both Tibet and Burma. If anything, growing authoritarianism has begun to backfire, as the popular revolts in Tibet and Burma have highlighted. More than half a century after Tibet’s annexation, the Tibetan struggle stands out as one of the longest and most-powerful resistance movements in modern world history. The March 2008 Tibetan revolt, significantly, coincided with the Chinese legislature re-electing as president Hu Jintao, who as Tibet’s martial-law administrator suppressed the last major Tibetan uprising in 1989. The key difference between Tibet and Burma is that the repression in the former is by an occupying power.

When the Burmese generals cracked down on monks and their pro-democracy supporters in September 2007, the outside world watched vivid images of brutality, thanks to citizen reporters using the Internet. The picture of a Japanese videographer fatally shot on a Rangoon street was flashed across the world. But China employs tens of thousands of cyberpolice to censor Web sites, patrol cybercafes, monitor text and video messages from cellular phones, and hunt down Internet activists. As a result, despite China’s actions in Tibet in March-April 2008 being more repressive and wide-ranging than what Burma witnessed some six months earlier, the outside world did not see a single haunting image of the Chinese use of brute force against Tibetans. The only images released by Beijing were those that sought to show Tibetans in bad light, as engaged in arson and other attacks.

The blunt fact is that the powerful Internet poses a bigger threat to repressive governments than pro-democracy protests on the streets, if they are allowed at all. Seeking to fight fire with fire, some authoritarian regimes have, however, clamped down on the Internet, closing blogger sites and employing sophisticated filtering software to block Web sites that carry references to ‘subversive’ words.

In an effort to control what people read and write on the Web, authoritarian regimes in Asia employ a bureaucracy of censors and, in the case of China, one of the world’s most technologically sophisticated systems of filters. Yet the Web poses difficult challenges to the efforts of autocrats to control news and shape public opinion. When newspapers, magazines and television stations are under tight state control, cyberspace — tougher for the state to effectively censor — becomes a more attractive terrain for the dissemination of dissenting messages. The Web allows citizens with shared concerns to meet, exchange ideas and plan activities without their autocratic regime’s knowledge or approval, despite governmental use of filtering systems to scan e-mail and text messages for banned words. Podcasting and other newer technologies are making it more difficult for official censors to effectively carry out their tasks.

At the same time, the Internet has not served as a harbinger of democracy in authoritarian states. If anything, some states in southern Asia and elsewhere have proven that a country can blend control, coercion and patronage to stymie the politically liberalizing elements of market forces, especially when the state still has a hold over large parts of the economy. A marketplace of goods and services will not necessarily allow a marketplace of political ideas in a country suffering under a dictatorial yoke. Vested interests, with a stake in not altering a system rich in economic spoils, are ever ready to invest even more in the instruments of popular control and coercion.

Democracy is certainly not the cure-all for political problems, but it does aid stability, instill moderation and promote equity in society. Democratic states are more likely to govern responsibly and less likely to go to
war with one another. After all, democracies are predisposed to cooperation and conciliation. Southern Asia, however, can boast of only robust democracy. Sri Lanka, for example, remains a weak democracy buffeted by a 25-year civil war. Bangladesh has slid from democratic rule to de facto military rule since January 2007. In fact, southern Asia is a reminder that democracy means far more than the holding of free and fair elections. Elections might help empower citizens but they do not necessarily translate into able governance. Good governance remains a challenge even in India.

As we find in southern Asia, a key challenge where a state grants press freedom is to balance Constitutional freedoms with counter-insurgency obligations. At the core of this challenge is the issue of how to protect press freedom and yet ensure the media is not used by extremist/terrorist/disaffected groups to further their cause.

In a non-democratic state, we have had instances in southern Asia of the regime in power itself seeking to draw legitimacy through close ties with extremists, including militants that practice violence as a sanctified tool of religion and a path to redemption. In such cases, the media can be used to provide acceptability or even respectability to radical ideologies and also rationalize discrimination against or persecution of minorities.

In understanding the media’s potential role in conflict resolution in southern Asia, one has to bear in mind four broad trends:

- The growing incidence of unclaimed/anonymus terrorism. In the 1970s and 1980s, those carrying out attacks would rush to the media with claims of responsibility. Now, in an interesting reversal, most terrorist/extremist acts remain unclaimed by those committing them. Such stealth terrorism or extremism is intended to confound law enforcement by the state. Now, more than 70 per cent of attacks remain unclaimed. If this trend persists, it will seriously impact on counter-terror policies and strategies because law enforcement demands a clear identification of those behind an act of violence.

- There is a noticeable rise in militant/extremist/terrorist elements targeting media personnel in southern Asia and elsewhere. This is evident from the annual World Press Freedom Review published by the International Press Institute, Vienna, and the data on the website of the New York-based group, the Committee to Protect Journalists.

- Another trend is the growing sophistication of militant/extremist/terrorist groups in tactics and attacks. Such groups are less constrained in carrying out attacks on civilians. With the ‘hardening’ of state targets, these groups have increasingly focused on soft targets.

- Then there is the rise of micro actors at the local level who mastermind and perpetrate acts of violence independently of the network or group they may be associated with. Whether it is jihadist or Maoist groups in southern Asia, the rise of micro actors is showing that these groups no longer function with central command and authority. The mushrooming of micro actors complicates conflict-resolution efforts because the state and its organs have to reach out to multiple players.

In southern Asia, better understanding between government and the media on the dynamics of violence has to be part of the state’s efforts to tackle extremism and resolve conflict. To develop better understanding between authorities and media organizations, there has to be better appreciation of the interests of extremist groups, the media and the government.

Terrorists. As Margaret Thatcher once said, publicity is the oxygen of terrorism. For terrorists, the role of the media is critical for:

- publicizing their cause;
- gaining popular support and new recruits;
- seeking legitimacy for their front organizations that serve as a cover for fund raising, etc.;
- in hostage situations, get to know the identity and value of hostages they hold; and
- upping the ante against the state.

Media. The media’s interests are:

- serve the society’s right to know;
- do journalistic job freely and accurately;
- to be the first out with the story – a competitive dynamics that, in the absence of peer norms on coverage, leads to terrorism-related stories that over dramatize the situation, creating undue pressure on policy makers.

Governments. Every government wants:

- the media to further not the agenda of the militants/terrorists but the state’s interests;
- to try and deny disaffected and extremist groups the media as a platform;
- get the media to portray anti-state elements as criminals;
- in hostage situations or terrorist killings, keep the public calm through the media, because television portrayal of weeping/protesting relatives can complicate rescue/counter-terror efforts and bring the government under public pressure; and
- employ the media as a key tool of public diplomacy, including to help mobilize public opinion in support of a mission or issue.

All in all, governments and media organizations have a common interest in ensuring the media is not manipulated into promoting the interests of militants and terrorists. If extremism were to gain ascendancy, press freedom would be the first casualty. Given the common interest, two things need to be done: First, governments need to involve journalists in some joint training exercises with state officials on conflict handling and management. Second, media organizations should be encouraged to build voluntary, peer-drawn guidelines on coverage of conflict situations. For example, in the United States, major news organizations have drawn such voluntary guidelines that require, for example, that no television network telecast live, unedited remarks of a terrorist figure.
To conclude, sound democratic traditions, a liberal and secular ethos, a free media, a developed civil society and checks on insularity and nationalism are essential elements for any regional community building, and for the media to play a useful role in conflict prevention and resolution. An authoritarian state that denies its citizens fundamental rights and disdains transparent, accountable governance can hardly help build a rules-based regional community.

Mr. Sigurd Falkenberg Mikkelsen, NRK, Norway

Dealing with war is a very serious issue, and it is also sometimes, very painful. I think I was drawn into this because it is a huge paradox. Humanity has evolved in such a way in all manners of being, whether it be arts, whether it be science. However, when it comes to the art of governing ourselves, we are still very much stuck with the Greeks. We have not taken a huge leap into civilization since then.

War has always been part of humankind, and probably always will be to a certain extent. The question is then, how do we deal with this as reporters? I report as a foreign news reporter – I was born in a peaceful country and live in a peaceful country, but I go to war-zones and report back on them to my community here in Norway.

So what is my role here? Is it my role to work for reconciliation and peace? The short answer is ‘no’. My job is to inform, inform and inform, and by doing that, hopefully I can, as a journalist and through my work, form a bridge between a society at war, people at war, and the community here in Norway. This is a very noble way of putting things, but I honestly believe this is the core of the matter.

I also believe we have a task of not letting go. By always being there, by always staying put, we show the people who are there – the victims of war, the people that are being dehumanized (because that is what war does to people, it dehumanizes them) – that they are not only victims but human beings with the right to exist. They are empires over their own, just like me, just like you. I believe my job as a war reporter is to ‘re-humanize’ people, and this is the philosophical fundamentals of my work.

I also believe we have a very important task in contextualising violence, explaining what it is all about – not excusing it on any moral or political grounds, but explaining, putting things into history, into a political perspective. This is difficult, because there is no such thing as a definitive way of explaining the world. History can be poisonous as well as a way of explaining things. I try to do this as impartially as possible, but impartiality and objectivity is a tricky discussion. The Swiss film-maker, Jean Luc Godard once said – objectivity, that is five minutes for the Jews, and five minutes for Hitler. He has a point. However, I do believe we have an important job to cover all sides of the story. Why? If you leave one side uncovered, as I said, if the other side becomes something inhuman, the only end to the war is annihilation. All human societies, in any war, have to coexist afterwards. If you do not try to put things into perspective all along during the war or conflict, you have a huge problem afterwards, or a bigger problem than you might have had.

Of course, it is a lot easier for me as a third party, as a Norwegian, to come into Israel and Lebanon and try to cover the situation as impartially as possible, than it would be for an Israeli or Palestinian. As a third party, as someone reporting back home, I come from a very solid and robust society. We are used to having conflicts out in the open, and we are a very peaceful country. What happens when people like me, and foreign media
in general, come into a society at war? Of course, we inform, we can build the bridges, but we also contribute to the tensions I believe.

Take Iraq as an example. What happened after Baghdad fell? There was a huge number of people coming into Iraq, all with a set of knowledge, more or less accurate – but it was a general set that Iraq is a divided country – Arabs and Kurds, Sunni and Shia. And when we went to enquire about these issues, we very often in the beginning were met with angry reactions. “We are all Iraqis,” they said – “I am not Sunni, I am not Shia.” It was a little different with the Kurds and the Arabs because the conflict was out in the open. Yet what were we supposed to do, because the facts were there? The Americans were implementing a political system based on ethnicity and religion. All the major political parties were either religious or ethnic – big parties were the Shia parties and the Kurdish parties.

So what were we supposed to do as media, as reporters? Were we supposed to say, there is no conflict here? Or, by doing that, also pushing it, making it seem inevitable that Iraq is a divided country? It is a difficult question. I believe we have to report on the conflicts, the separations and the problems as accurately as possible, and also try to take into account the different parts of the problem – and this is difficult in news media.

There is another point. The distinction I made between us coming into a war zone as foreign news reporters, and reporting back home, is very much reduced. It used to be a wide gap. In the globalized world the gap is a lot smaller. First of all, there is the global flow of information. Secondly, in most western countries, we have quite a lot of immigration, so it is an exchange that was not there before. I was thinking about this when I was taking the Metro the other day, and I was reading in the newspaper about a Norwegian film from Sri Lanka that is fueling a lot of controversy right now, about terrorism and the LTTE, and with interviews with female suicide bombers. I have not seen the film so I should walk carefully here. For me, it highlights in a direct way, that is fuelling a lot of controversy right now, about terrorism and the LTTE, and with interviews with female suicide bombers. I have not seen the film so I should walk carefully here. For me, it highlights in a direct way,

A peace journalist knows this out of experience. As a professional journalist, he or she does not report uncritically when a source claims that the other threw the first stone. He or she has already studied the historical background and knows that sources from the other side have similar claims of stone-throwing. As Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick put it in their excellent book Peace Journalism, a peace journalist has no illusion that she or he is above the conflict – she or he acknowledges that journalists play a role, regardless of their subjective ambitions to be neutral. This is the case because the parties involved in a conflict have already ’infected’ the conflict with propaganda, hate speech, enemy images and prejudices before the journalists arrive (Ottosen 1999, Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2001).

Only when you accept that fact can you deal with the problem and cope with it in a professional manner. And who knows? Journalists might even make a difference and promote peace through their reporting by highlighting some issues that the victory-oriented parties want to hide. I teach journalism students how they can make a potential peaceful solution available for the public in a situation where the involved parties claim there is only one solution – more violence. I would rather point in the direction of not so visible suggestions for conflict resolution than to be partly responsible for escalation of a conflict (and potentially create more violence) by consciously or unconsciously repeating accusations, hate speech, lies, enemy images etc., in the form of unchecked claims by one of the parties involved. Unfortunately, there is a lot of the latter in main stream conflict and war reporting.

Galtung’s Model
Johan Galtung’s model of peace journalism builds on a model where the field of conflict reporting is divided into two parts – what he calls the ‘war journalism’ approach and the ‘peace journalism’ approach. The model includes four main points where he contrasts the two approaches. War journalism is violence-oriented,
propaganda-oriented, elite-oriented and victory-oriented. This approach is often linked to a zero-sum game where the winner (like in sports journalism) takes all. This is a prototype of what one could call traditional mainstream war coverage, without the journalists reflecting on the fact that the media itself is playing a role in the conflict, often escalating conflicts by reproducing propaganda developed as part of psychological operations (PSYOPS), media-strategies and PR-campaigns by the parties involved (Ottosen 2007).

On the other hand, the peace journalism approach has a moral and ethical point of departure, acknowledging the fact that the media itself plays a role in the propaganda war. Thus, the peace journalism approach takes the conscious choice of identifying alternative options for the readers/viewers by offering a solution-oriented, people-oriented and truth-oriented approach. This also means a focus on possible peace plans which the conflicting parties might have an interest in hiding. Peace journalism is people-oriented in the sense that it focuses on the victims (often civilian casualties) and thus gives a voice to the voiceless. It is also truth-oriented in the sense that it reveals untruth on all sides and focuses on how propaganda is used as a means to continue the war (Galtung 2002: 261-270). A potential problem is that the word ‘truth’ is difficult to use as it is so much misused in propaganda. I prefer to use the word ‘accurate’.

The Peace Journalism Discourse

The peace journalism option is a much debated concept and is regarded by many mainstream journalists as a controversial suggestion. The BBC reporter, David Loyn is the most known journalist who is openly opposing the peace journalism approach. In a special issue of Conflict and Communication Online, the opponents and defenders of peace journalism debated the issue. Loyn prefers to use the terms ‘truthfulness’ and ‘objectivity’ as journalistic guidelines, even though he acknowledges the limitations of those terms: “On this analysis, if we accept that objectivity is at least a worthy aspiration, even though not a tool to achieve the ‘whole truth’, then peace journalism fails a key test by imposing other expectations onto journalists” (Loyn 2007:5).

Loyn is disturbed by Galtung’s original model for war and peace journalism. According to him, the categories in the model are too dualistic. He claims that journalism, as it is practiced in ‘every day’ news journalism, seldom fits into ‘war journalism’ or ‘peace journalism’ categories. He seems almost offended to be placed in such categories by Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick in their book Peace Journalism: “They tend to lump such categories by Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick in their book Peace Journalism: “They tend to lump such categories by” Lynch’s position and would perhaps put even more emphasis on the impact of Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) on media reporting (Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2008). In retrospect, many of the misleading stories arguing for the war in Iraq had their origin in disinformation caused by PSYOPS and propaganda. The best example is the non-existing weapons of mass destruction and the toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue when the U.S. troops invaded Baghdad. This was an organized PSYOPS, but was portrayed by mainstream media as a spontaneous act of joy by Iraqi citizens (Eide and Ottosen 2008).

In our mind, David Loyn’s position in the debate has a far too naive point of departure which presupposes that the media start their war reporting with ‘blank sheets’. We think that the peace journalism model may serve as a useful checklist and guideline for both journalists and media researchers in a propaganda-infected landscape. However, at the same time, we discuss whether it would be wise to find another term instead of ‘peace journalism’, as the phrase itself causes some negative reaction among many reporters (Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2008).

References


At the very end of his article, Loyn ends the discussion where, in my mind, it should begin – on the limitations of phrases like objectivity. I think the weakness in Loyn’s argument is the lack of context. I agree with Jake Lynch’s position that if you do not put in factors like ‘propaganda’ by the parties in the conflict, you will not be able to see the serious challenges journalism in the battlefield is confronted with. Lynch, in his answer to the critics, claims that they underestimate the willingness and abilities of leaders in the Western world to manipulate the media – especially in the phase where there is a mobilisation to go to war rhetoric in favour of ‘humanitarian intervention’, as in the building up to the war against Yugoslavia in 1999, and prior to the war in Iraq in 2003. Lynch argues that propaganda must be contextualized by the media, and it is vital that the media is not seduced by propaganda rhetoric itself by adapting the vocabulary and arguments of spin doctors in favour of war. Lynch stresses that the basic aim of peace journalists is to “create opportunities for society at large to consider non-violent responses.” He criticizes Loyn for not taking into consideration powerful forces like propaganda.
I think it has become increasingly clear that the media, at least with regards to Sri Lanka, has often contributed to the heightening of conflict, and it is timely to consider how this can be reduced. I say this in terms of the ideas of this Conference, and perhaps some of the things we heard yesterday. The Conference talks about reconciliation, and that is what we desire. But we also saw yesterday what might be termed some bitterness, emotional perhaps and in some senses understandable, but not conducive to the healing that His Holiness is trying to encourage. Bitterness, I should admit, is understandable, in the context of the treatment of Tamils in Sri Lanka in particular in the early eighties. But continuing bitterness, as religious leaders of all sorts have taught us, can only create further suffering. And when bitterness privileges terrorism, when it condones through silence the killing of moderate Tamils who have sought political compromises, when it degenerates into what one might call a game of “atrocity snap”, then it needs to be dealt with firmly, although with kindness and with sympathy.

Unfortunately, such bitterness is often exacerbated by the media, which understandably, for the reasons my peers outlined, prefers the sensational sound-byte to accurate analysis. Many years ago, when I was trying to introduce some sense into the media policy of the Jayawardene government, parts of which launched attacks on Tamils in 1977, 1981 and 1983, I noted that the old adage, ‘Facts are sacred, opinion is free’, had been totally perverted. Facts were not what happened, they were what someone said had happened. Opinion was not based on reason, it was simply what someone felt, without any need to supply objectively assessable justification. Sadly, those practices appear in our media in Sri Lanka today, a media which is no longer Government controlled, but which is largely private-sector controlled, six times as much, unlike in the eighties when it was totally Government controlled.

More worryingly, they are reproduced in the international media which sometimes blindly follows assertions that are never checked. Thus, if I might refer to one of the incidents highlighted yesterday – the deaths of several young girls at Sencholai – when it occurred, the LTTE claimed that it was an orphanage. With more efficiency than generally it manages, the Government of Sri Lanka revealed that the orphanage had been moved from there several years previously. The LTTE then claimed that it was a training centre where girls had been taken for a first aid course. It did not explain why girls had been taken so far away for such a course. The air-force claim was that it had bombed a training camp, and it produced films of girls training in military fatigues at the place. This was shown to journalists, but this proof did not receive publicity. Obviously not, for sensationalistic claims of an orphanage being bombed – children plus war – are much more exciting than the truth.

In fact, three of the girls survived. They were cared for by the Government in Kandy. Then it was claimed that their parents wanted them. They were taken back to the North under ICRC supervision, and then one of them, the most healthy, was reported to have died. Again, the Government acted more swiftly than it usually
does – it reached the other two, rescued them and kept them safe in a secret location. They have now testified before the Commission of Enquiry, and it is clear that the centre was one to which young girls were taken forcibly to be trained in the militarism that has now become endemic under LTTE domination.

Sadly, just as bad money drives out good, so too does sensational falsehood that settle deep in the minds of the world at large – fuelled by the propensity to believe of many Tamils who were so badly treated in the eighties, left Sri Lanka, came abroad, and therefore are naturally inclined to believe that the situation is as bad as it was then. Unfortunately, the cry is taken up by politicians, who naturally enough listen to their constituents. Sadly, given the relative unimportance of Sri Lanka, there is little study of the facts, and a Government that has to use all available resources not only to combat terrorism, but to provide unparalleled social services to all its citizens, including those in areas still controlled by the LTTE, where it still provides free education and health services, it cannot combat the relentless propaganda churned out by bitter opponents of reconciliation.

To find another example, yesterday we were told Sri Lanka unilaterally abrogated the cease-fire, but we were not told that after the cease-fire was signed, the LTTE violated it nearly 4,000 times according to the Scandinavian mission, the Government less than a tenth of that amount. We were not told about all those incidents, we are told of indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

We were told yesterday about how the elections in the Eastern province were unfortunate, but we have to realize that ultimately the people must be given a chance to decide. Sadly, the LTTE has not wanted elections. We have now held them, and the independent observers have given a clean bill of health. The provincial council elections to be held next May have now attracted opposition parties which did not contest the first. Unfortunately, these things are just not recorded in public, because the media naturally prefers the sensational.

To conclude, this is nothing new. Thirty years ago, there was much concern about the plight of Tamil estate workers immediately after British plantations were nationalized. This hit the British press in the early seventies. It was idealistic reporters who went to town on this, but they had not had their attention directed there during the hundred years and more during which foreign owners had imposed much worse conditions. I have recently edited the memoirs of one of the planters of those days who talks about his efforts to secure improvements for the Tamil estate workers who were appallingly treated from a hundred years back, and about the steady response of his Directors in London, who said they were responsible to their shareholders, and they could not sanction such expenses to improve such accommodation. But after the plantations were nationalized, the British papers discovered that these people were badly treated.

I have no quarrel with the reporters who pounced on Sri Lanka – they had no idea they were being used. Many reporters have no idea of the facts behind the allegations they publicise, but I can only hope that careful study of facts, and judgments based on analysis of background and context, will replace some of the gung-ho journalism that now exacerbates conflicts instead of resolving them.
Background on Naxalism:

The moderator of the workshop, Mr. Nirj Deva, began with a background to Naxalism: "The Naxalite movement gets its name from Naxalbari in West Bengal, where an uprising took place in May 1967 against the landlords. Although this uprising was crushed by the police within two months, the Naxalite movement gained rapid support in other parts of West Bengal and India. Later, it spread to Andhra Pradesh and Kerala in the south, and to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the east.

In Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, the Naxalites found their main support in Aboriginal tribal communities which have been the most oppressed and marginalized in Indian society, like the Girijans in Andhra Pradesh and the Santals in West Bengal.

In the early eighties, different Naxalite factions and their leaders went to chart out a new path of action. Although committed to the initial strategy of eliminating the feudal order in rural India, they parted ways on the question of tactics, with one group deciding to lay stress on the parliamentary path of elections, which is the CPI-ML; the other groups such as the People’s War Group (PWG) in Andhra Pradesh, and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), preferred to follow the path of guerrilla warfare. These armed groups also expanded their areas of operation to Orissa, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

They also managed to build a network of similar revolutionary organizations in neighboring states in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal, under the banner of Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia, otherwise known as CCOMPOSA.

The representatives met in a guerrilla zone in India in 2003; however they have not been able to coordinate much action together. These South Asian Maoist parties are also members of a large international organization called the Revolutionary International Movement.

We have heard yesterday that the Naxalites are now in 312 of the 650 districts of India; that one Indian in six lives in an area that is under Naxalite control and agitation. And we have also heard yesterday about the number of people killed, the number of villages and schools destroyed, and the amount of suffering that has taken place in these areas. We have also heard about what the Art of Living Foundation is doing to help the affected communities come together, live together, get rid of the trauma and have sustainable peace.’’

Workshop Resolutions:

After the presentations, a series of lively discussions commenced with a highly informed audience, which resulted in a resolution of the workshop.

The workshop found that the root cause of the Naxalite movement emanates from poverty, injustice and deprivation of the most neglected and disadvantaged people of India. The Naxalite movement feeds on this deprivation to grow and recruit. They may resist, even with force, attempts to improve the living standards of these people with basic health, hygiene, education and employment opportunities.

In order for the authorities, NGOs, foundations and the civil society to reach out and help these people, the following is required:

- In the short term (between one and two years), the rule of law and order – where the law enforcers work within the community, winning the hearts and minds of the local people. The forces of law and order should be the first to accept that no-one is above the law.
- Sustainable development projects that protect the ecosystem, agriculture, the indigenous culture and traditional values.
- A true dialogue with Naxalites is needed. There should always be an open door for dialogue, whatever the circumstances. People from the Naxal movement should also be represented in these kinds of workshops in the future. An example of what can result from dialogue is seen in Nepal, where the Maoists gave up their arms under United Nations supervision and came to the ballot box in transition to a wide base democracy.
- Devolution of power to villages and local communities to enable the most deprived classes of people to take part in the decision making process, to take democracy right down to the grassroots level, so those who are the most disadvantaged in these jungle villages have a say in how their area is going to be developed.
- In the long term, the more inhospitable jungle settlements to be delineated, and people living in these areas given a choice of living closer to the more developed villages in those areas, and empowered with financial and other resources for them to live away from the jungle in those regions where there are problems, to the more settled areas.
- In the long term, a complete land reform and land distribution programme to be made a priority.
- Establishment of an urgent economic package to be started immediately, which includes, not exclusively, microeconomic support including micro-finance projects, with especially the women to be empowered with those micro-finance projects.
- And again in the short-term, the Art of Living Foundation model of youth training to be expanded, right across the region, so that not only the Art of Living, which is a large international NGO, but also other NGOs are encouraged and brought in to train young people in self-help programmes, and in order to help those people who have been Naxalites to give up their guns and violence and live in peace.

Summary of Workshop Presentations:

After a brief overview of the Naxal movement, Mr. Giridhari Nayak described a movement that started against the landlord. “One initiative in Chhattisgarh started, the Salwa Judum, as the tribal people started their resistance against Naxalites in this area. I will further depict the Salwa Judum and why it started. In order to conduct the democratic elections, forces came. The Naxalites destroyed all the water pumps in the area. They stopped all the markets. Since these areas are very remote, forested areas, the people did not get water to drink, and for four days in the middle of summer they did not get food, at a time when the temperature was reaching 49 degrees celsius. The Naxalites victimized the villagers and as a result, the
villagers were punished. The Naxalites told the villagers not to engage in any construction work, in the process ruining their economic life. During this time, about 200 schools and hospitals were destroyed in that area. If any voice of resistance was raised, the Naxalites selectively started killing."

Mr. Nayak explained that as a result, the villagers decided it was high time they should take a stand, do something about the strangulation of their villages, and thus the community initiatives started such as the Salwa Judum. There were some comments on this from the audience, however, as it was suggested that the Government provided arms to Salwa Judum, and that not only the Naxalites, but also the Salwa Judum, resorted to violence.

Mr. Nayak also went on to say that economic development has been overlooked in the area: "In South Asia, you will find that those areas which are forested are more vulnerable to Naxalism. In the forested areas, development is not sustainable because human settlements are not sustainable. This aspect needs to be taken into account. In these parts of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, you will find that there is up to one or two kilometers distance between one house and its neighbor, and to each of these houses you cannot take power stations, schools, and all the facilities of development.” He said, "When we go and see the local society there, we find people without medicines, they don’t get any education. Should we deprive them of the benefits of civilization? They come to our relief centres, many of them are homeless. Cultural identity and economic development have to be balanced together. Water supply, medicines and education are primary indicators of economic development in India."

On the point of development, there were several reminders from participants that it is important to define what development means, and that any kind of meaningful development must include the people on the ground. It was also pointed out that it is not necessarily a matter of bringing the tribal people into the mainstream (means bringing them to the more settled areas), but about helping them to function in the areas where they feel at home.

Dr. Wazim Zaman from the United Nations Population Fund said: "How much does poverty contribute to this? Outside hands may play a role, but it seems to me that it starts with poverty. It is serious poverty that allows people to be recruited. And while India is moving towards this fantastic double-digit growth rate, there is also very serious poverty. The most recent survey of living standards in India showed a very interesting thing: 300 million people do not get enough calories…"

Mr. Nayak spoke of the role of security forces in Naxalite affected areas, stating that perception is very important: "Whenever we deploy security forces, we ask them, 'Who are you going to fight?' Somebody would answer 'Naxalites', but it is not – it is against the anti-social elements. You have to be friendly with the people. Suppose you take a population of 25 million people, out of those only 25,000 will be criminal. So, it is important to get the right attitude into the minds of the security forces. If you don’t see the problem from the angle of the local population, then it is very difficult to address the problems."

Mr. Kalpaturu Das, after reviewing the history of the Naxalite issue with respect to changes in leadership and the course of action in the last few decades, made some observations about the current situation: “In the present scenario, the Left Wing Extremist (LWE) movement is characterized by growing spatial spread, high intensity violence (especially against the police and its информer network), targeting of economic infrastructure and activities and determined efforts by the LWE groups at mass mobilisation on the issue of displacement arising out of land acquisition in the process of industrialization. Taking advantage of modern technology, the militants have upgraded their military structures and methodology and carried out simultaneous and multi-pronged attacks on security apparatus, with military type precision."

Mr. Das also looked at the root cause of militancy and offered some suggestions for solving the Naxalism issue: "The social background which provides a setting for the growth of militancy includes: (1) Developmental related issues, which is widening the gap between the rich and the poor, in which a section of the society is feeling alienated and let down; (2) Governance and administrative related issues; (3) Ethnicity; and (4) Growth of technology in these areas. My suggestions are:

1. The development strategy should be inclusive, with a thrust on the growth in market economy reaching the common man and the deprived sections.
2. Devolution of power to the local community taking their socio-ethnic situation into account with a focus on greater participation of the deprived and alienated classes of people in the decision making process.
3. A proper legal system to deal with lawless activity in all its forms.
4. Greater involvement of civil society in the process of decision making, planning and execution of various people-centric schemes."

Mr. Francois Gautier shared his views on the root causes of conflict and how this relates to Naxalism. He observed that Naxalism, or any armed revolution, will flourish when there is social inequality, of which there is plenty in India. He observed, "Today, Naxalism is still flourishing in India, and as a human being it is easy to think when you see inequality and social injustice that force and weapons are the only solution to such problems. I have learned through contact with Sri Sri Ravi Shankar that violence is not the solution, that there are peaceful avenues that can be pursued and this conference is here to address those alternatives.”

He continued, "We know from what is happening now in Tibet, that even if you produce great results by enforcement policies, unless you have freedom and democracy, these things prove counterproductive. In India, there is great democracy and also great chaos. I believe that this liberal attitude, democratic freedom and the economic liberalization that is taking place will explode also – although these reforms benefit mostly the rich people, in the long run it will filter down to the poorer sections of society. I am a great believer that this democratic base, and more than that, the spiritual base that is the foundation of India, will ultimately have the last word and that Naxalism will not survive. It is not meant for India. At the moment, it does attract recruits because of inequalities, but in the long run, I believe the spirituality of India will triumph.”
WORKSHOP
BURMA

Moderators
Mr. Johannes Heimrath, Executive Director, Club of Budapest Worldshift Network, Germany
Ms. Hilde Salvesen, Special Advisor, The Oslo Center for Peace & Human Rights, Norway

Discussion with
Mr. Colin Archer, Secretary General, International Peace Bureau, Switzerland
Mr. Charles Mendies, India/Nepal
Mr. Harn Yawnghwe, Director, Euro-Burma Office, Belgium
The workshop began with an interesting presentation from Mr. Harn Yawngwhe, who spoke about the tendency to oversimplify the struggle in Burma:

"Whenever we talk about Burma, people today will either remember the images of peaceful monks being brutally suppressed, or know something about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

This shows two things. First, that the media images are very important in today’s world. Secondly, if you want an issue to be picked up by the media, you have to personalize the message.

These two points are excellent if you want to target the Burmese military regime, or to use the media as part of your political strategy against them. However, if we are really interested in peace and reconciliation in Burma, these two points may work against us. Why?

Once you personalize an issue, it is very hard to compromise. It becomes a battle between Senior-General Than Shwe and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. One of them has to win. You cannot have both. The images of the monks are also not helpful for peace and reconciliation for a different reason. The images portray the monks as being in the right and the military in the wrong. If it is so clear as to who is right and who is wrong, how can you compromise? Another reason is that, if you take the case of Poland – the Polish generals and the Solidarity labour movement had domestic mediators. The mediators were the Catholic bishops. Given what happened in Burma in September 2007, it is now hard to imagine Buddhist monks becoming mediators. We may have lost a good opportunity.

Another reason why the images of the monks and having an iconic charismatic leader may not help in the reconciliation process is that they tend to simplify the message – of democracy versus military. Today, most people believe that all you have to do to solve the problems in Burma, is to bring democracy. Unfortunately, democracy alone will not solve Burma’s problems.

Burma is made up of a very diverse, ethnic mix, and we actually have seven ethnic states. The problem we have today with the ethnic nationalities, who make up 40% of the population in 60% of the territory, started in 1949, during the democratic period. We have had a civil war for almost 60 years now. The military seized power in 1962 to prevent the ethnic nationalities from legally amending the constitution to make Burma into a federal union of equal states. Therefore, if we want to solve Burma’s problems, we have to go deeper – we must also look at the constitutional question and work out how the different states will relate to each other.

Another critical problem the people of Burma face is economic. The problems that sparked the demonstrations in August 2007 have not been addressed. Any government of Burma – military or democratic – must be able to solve these economic problems, or there will be instability.
Ms. Hilde Salvesen, the moderator for the workshop, guided the discussions to the May 10th referendum and the new constitution. By way of background, it was pointed out that it took 14 years to draft a constitution, which was published only in April, that too in Burmese (which is not the native language for 40% of the population). Further, it was outlined that the constitution concentrates all power in the hands of the president, who must have military experience, and there is no independent judiciary, no independent legislature and no independent media. Nevertheless, the importance of the referendum was highlighted, as one speaker pointed out, “Most of the Burmese groups have decided they are going to contest the referendum, based on the idea that we want to emphasize the people have a role to play.”

Speaking of the upcoming elections in 2010, Mr. Archer suggested that perhaps it is an indication that the demonstrations of last year, and the international condemnation, have had some effect: “I don’t think they would have hastened this process had there not been a real sense that something was beginning to unravel inside the country.”

Mr. Charles Mendies raised the importance of perception in any debate: “When we look at the situation in Burma, the question I ask is – have we, in the process of looking at that and making our perceptions, taken the time to actually look at things from their point of view?” He went on to give an example of brides wearing white in the Christian tradition, when in the cultural context of India and Nepal, only a widow wears white. He asked: “How would that be perceived?”

He continued: “How do we get to peace, in the cultural context, in the spiritual context, in the physical context, of Burma? To be able to reach that point of peace, there needs to be reconciliation. What does reconciliation mean if there is no forgiveness, if there is no willingness to own up?... For us to have peace and reconciliation, the question for me is how do we get there? And I think there are three things we really need to focus on. We need to:

1. Think clearly, without confusion, and focus on what we are trying to accomplish.
2. Love our fellow men, sincerely, irrespective of caste, creed, religion.
3. And most importantly, we need to act from an honest motive, purely.”

Looking at possible solutions and ways forward, Ms. Salvesen commented that part of the challenge is that there has not been a coherent international approach towards Burma, with there tending to be a split between Europe/US on one side, going for sanctions against Burma, and then ASEAN and the Asian community, in that interim, which may prolong the situation.

There was strong criticism leveled by one participant against the different standards being applied by the international community with respect to sanctions. Taking the particular case of China’s rule over Tibet: “Today, when we are seeing the suppression in Tibet, we are not talking about sanctions. Nobody in the world has even talked about the mildest penal action against China. All we are talking about is the boycott of the Olympic ceremony. But imagine with Burma, we are applying all the screws. I think the contradictions are so obvious in the different principles we are applying to the region. The message we are sending home to everyone in the world is – if you are strong, you get away with murder, if you are weak, you get bullied. This is not an example we want to set in international relations.”

Speaking about the sanctions on tourism, Prof. Chellaney said: “How do you create leverage vis-à-vis Burma and its military if you ban all contact with Burma? The only way you can bring down a dictatorship is by building a robust civil society. International pressure will work, if you allow engagement and also pursue sanctions which are targeted against the regime. If it’s only sanctions, and engagement is shut out, what happens, like in the case of Burma – the only institution functioning today in Burma is the military. So, far from weakening the military, we have strengthened the military.”

All participants reiterated the importance of strengthening civil society. Mr. Yawngwe further stressed that we must find a way to strengthen the civil administration in Burma, pointing out that if there were a sudden transition to democracy, Burma may face serious problems, like in Sudan and Somalia, as there would be nothing to sustain it – there would be no way to provide services to the people. In response to how this change could be effected, he said: “All we can do is encourage the people inside to actually set the agenda, because we can’t control it.”

Looking to the future, one participant observed that the usual way of approaching the issues is to see them from a political viewpoint, taking a secular approach. He raised the possibility of reviving a more spiritual approach to the issues: “Do we agree that there is violence in that society? Do we agree that there is stress?
And, if so, what can we do using a spiritual approach? The definition of a spiritual approach is anything that reduces the stress on the part of the ordinary people, or on the part of the leaders for that matter, or anything that reduces violence. So I think that is something we could elaborate on as a body. In the context of Burma, so much international attention has been given to it, sanctions here and there, but did it change anything? Did it reduce the level of stress?"

In closing, Ms. Salvesen raised the possibility of an increasing role for India with respect to Burma.

Concluding Remarks from Mr. Johannes Heimrath (excerpts)

“All participants agreed that it would be most important to reach out to civil society, and strengthen civil society. Of course, this is a matter of education, and education needs some type of democratic structure, freedom to be educated and to let other people in.

In the end, there was the idea about how to reach the youth, and this is something that might be considered in the next Conference. We learnt that there are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of young Burmese people in camps around the borders of the nation, and these people of course can be addressed and trained, and they will once again go back into the country and bring new spirit, new methods, and new ways of communicating and dealing with the conflict.

So what should be done in the meanwhile? There was a debate whether sanctions are right or wrong. And of course we can debate whether the sanctions are affecting only the government or the people – especially in the case of tourism, it hits the people. Also, it was clear, that tourism might be a conveyer belt where new ideas, new projects are brought into the country – but there was strong advice – don’t do it in an official way, and ask for permission from the junta, but go in as tourists and help from person to person. And this brings a level that was new in the discussion. How can we communicate from heart to heart? As long as we always deal with politics and economics, strategies and military power, and sanctions and so on, it is all punishment and restriction. And I think the language from heart to heart is of richness, and of giving, and of inviting.”

WORKSHOP
SRI LANKA

Moderator
Ms. Erika Mann, Member of European Parliament

Discussion with:
Dr. Jayalath Jayawardene, Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka

Rt. Rev. Dr. Brahmanawatte Seevali Nayaka Thero, Deputy Secretary General, Sri Lanka
Amarapura Mahanikaya

Rt. Rev. Dr. Maduluvave Sobitha Nayaka Thero, Chief Incumbent of Nagavihara Kotte, Sri Lanka

Prof. Indra de Soysa, NTNU / International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), Norway

Mr. Arumugam Thondaman, Minister for Youth Empowerment & Socio-Economic Development, Sri Lanka

Mr. Vaiko, General Secretary, The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Tamil Nadu, India
He then presented his views on the constitutional issues: “The All Party Conference led by Mahinda Rajapakse’s Government has come up with an interim solution to see that the Government is willing to implement the 13th amendment of the constitution of Sri Lanka fully. The National United Party, of which I am a representative, is fully supportive of the 13th amendment because we were the architects of bringing the 13th amendment to the constitution. However, we have very categorically represented that not only the 13th amendment, but also the 17th amendment, which was introduced into the constitution later, has to be implemented, thereby creating a peaceful environment for a negotiated peaceful settlement. I think it is very important to create an environment for the people to find their own solution, without fear and intimidation.”

Dr. Maduluwave Sobitha Nayaka Thero, highlighting that the problems of Sri Lanka have become an international issue, said: “To find a solution to the problem of Sri Lanka, India got involved. India had discussions with the LTTE as well as with the Government of Sri Lanka, and brought the 13th amendment to our constitution. Initiatives were taken to implement the 13th amendment, which unfortunately stopped half-way. Now, again there has been a proposal to go ahead with the 13th amendment as a foundation for a long journey. I think it’s very important for international conferences like this to bring pressure on the Government of Sri Lanka as well as on the LTTE. I think with this pressure there can be some kind of agreement for consensus. I think that between these two parties there is so much distrust and lack of confidence. That is why you need a third party in between. Therefore, the appeal to all the nations of the world is to devote power in Sri Lanka, to live together as a united Sri Lanka, as brothers and sisters.”

Next spoke Dr. Brahmanawatte Seevali Nayaka Thero. He said: “I think the problem in my country cannot be solved by killing, assault, war or conflict. If you look at world history, you will not find a country where the solution has been founded on war alone. There is interaction and amity among all communities in Sri Lanka. Tamils are marrying Sinhalese and Sinhalese are marrying Tamils. In this wisdom of Buddhism and Hinduism, it is possible for us to live in amity, together as human beings. The demand for a separate country is a dream, it is not realistic. We have lived in amity for such a long time and it is possible for us to live like this in the future also.”

Stressing the importance of the engagement of the international community, Mr. Arumugam Thondaman said, “Without the regional superpower India getting involved, this issue cannot be solved. We have to find a way (for India and the Norwegian Government) to get the two parties together to discuss the issues, otherwise we will meet again next year at this conference and we will say the same things.”

Mr. Vaiko spoke next, saying that since two of the Tamil members of the Sri Lankan Parliament that were invited could not attend this conference, he would represent their side. He went on to say, “Here, our speakers express confidence that something is going to be achieved (by supporting the 13th amendment), as if the 13th amendment is the panacea of all the problems. The basic thing is that the 13th amendment has been totally rejected by the Tamils. The LTTE never endorsed the 13th amendment with India. The cardinal principle of the 1987 agreement – the North and East, the places where the Tamils, the original inhabitants, have been living, should be treated as one unit. And a referendum was assured on this, but did not take place.”

He said that the Norwegian Government took all the initiatives after the cease-fire was unilaterally declared by the LTTE and subsequently endorsed by the Government, but after three rounds of peace talks, everything broke down. He pointed out that the Tamils are living in extreme poverty and under harsh conditions without proper medical care. As a step forward, he asked that the aerial bombings against innocent people should be stopped. He appealed to the international community, especially the EU, to take a positive role in bringing the two sides to the negotiating table, and stop the military offensive. He advocated the creation of a separate Tamil State as being what the Tamils want. By way of example, he raised some precedents of this being successful, such as the separation of Norway from Sweden.

Ms. Erika Mann drew a comparison with the same debate they were having in the European Union regarding the discussions in Belgium between the Flemish and the Walloons. She posed the question – shall we each break down. He pointed out that the Tamils are living in extreme poverty and under harsh conditions without proper medical care. As a step forward, he asked that the aerial bombings against innocent people should be stopped. He appealed to the international community, especially the EU, to take a positive role in bringing the two sides to the negotiating table, and stop the military offensive. He advocated the creation of a separate Tamil State as being what the Tamils want. By way of example, he raised some precedents of this being successful, such as the separation of Norway from Sweden.

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In the next presentation, Prof. Indra de Soysa pointed to the latest research which suggests that ethnicity does not explain conflict as much as other factors. He explained that it is not that ethnicity does not matter, but rather that there are other factors that simply outweigh any effects that ethnicity represents. He gave the examples of Botswana and Tanzania, which have much less conflict than relatively ethnically homogeneous countries in the same region with the same kind of risk factors. And the reasons are to be found in matters of political economy, rather than issues of cultural identity.

He summarized: “Let me reiterate that proper, effective, international, particularly regional, cooperation
can come about if we dispel the mentality of ‘ethnic conflict’, which presupposes a universal desire for a homeland (a racist concept), and see the narrowness of violent organization – this will allow true cooperation around affecting the real bases on which violence is carried out – large finances! International cooperation around fighting terrorism by narrowly organized groups should now stretch across the globe (not just where the West is affected). Large social differences – multiethnicty – make countries safer – not more problematic. We need to inoculate public discourse against the ‘false’ discourses of violent actors and address the real problems of people and the causes of true suffering. Let me end by playing a small mind game with you – suppose that conflict had only just broken out in Sri Lanka, and the challengers of the state were Muslims with outside support and assistance, and not Tamil – how might the international community be responding to the issue right now?"

There were then several exchanges regarding the historical facts on Sri Lanka. Dr. Maduluvave Sobitha Nayaka Thero spoke again: “Again and again we are talking about the past, and now we are talking about the Tamil traditional homeland. 50% of the Tamil population of Sri Lanka are not living in the north and east, they are living in harmony in the rest of the country. If you demand a Tamil homeland, Sinhalese people will also demand a traditional homeland. Then the Muslim people may also say that they want a traditional homeland. Even the Tamil people of Indian origin might demand a separate Tamil conditional homeland. What we need is to live in one country in harmony. All the people who are born in Sri Lanka belong to Sri Lanka and that is our traditional homeland. My suggestion is that all the communities should recognise Sri Lanka as their traditional homeland. The power and all the resources need to be divided equally among the communities, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or politics. There cannot be a majority community or a minority community in Sri Lanka, all of us are Sri Lankans. If we cannot change the thinking in our mind, we won’t be able to find a solution. We are singing the old song. Why don’t we think of a new song, to be united? The 17th amendment has to be incorporated in the Constitution. The 17th amendment has paved a way to correct all our faults which have occurred since 1948. The various commissions will be required to eradicate all these inequalities. We try to devolve the power to the provincial councils.”

Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha expressed that ultimately it helps to establish what is true, that there is a historical record, and that it is important that we look at facts. He also mentioned some of the things the Sri Lankan Government is trying to do: “We recognise there are problems, but how do we move forward? One of the biggest problems has been the language problem. I have often told many people who give aid that if they gave all their aid to teaching Sinhalese policemen to speak Tamil, and recruiting Tamil policemen, a lot of problems would be solved. This is because one of our biggest problems is a sense of alienation. The vast majority of our children were trapped due to nationalistic forces, both Sinhala and Tamil, which insisted on education in Sinhala or Tamil, compulsorily, I think one of the most significant achievements of the Kumaratunge government is that it insisted all children learn the second official language, and this is happening in schools. So, one thing, on language policy we are moving; not fast enough, but at least this government is moving.”

Prof. Wijesinha then spoke about the reasons for the lack of Tamils in the public sector, stating the answer to this lies in positive discrimination, explaining: “It is a system of recruitment that privileges minorities. This must be done for the security forces, for the administrative forces. And we should recognise that this present government is the first in 60 years to institute a policy of recruitment of Tamils to the police force. 175 officers passed out last year. We hope this will happen in the central province very soon, and elsewhere too. But I have to tell you one problem: the Sinhalese government isn’t publicizing it.”

There were many discussions on different issues. Language was seen as a contentious issue. A participant had with him a divorce document dated 28th April 2006, for a Tamil client from a Tamil area, written in pure Sinhalese. Mr. Thondaman said this is being addressed in that there is a programme for all Tamil officials to learn Sinhalese and vice versa. This dual language code should be expanded, however it was suggested that English is now becoming the official language in Sri Lanka.

There were additional impassioned arguments on behalf of both partition and devolution of power. One participant drew an analogy with marriage – if two parties simply cannot get along, then the best solution for both may be separation and divorce – then they can get on independently with their own lives. Similarly there should be division on the island with the formation of an independent Tamil state. However, it was also very strongly argued that there are a large number of Tamils who are settled in and lead harmonious lives throughout the island, similar to the Sinhalese and other ethnic minorities. The granting of one national homeland for one group could escalate to similar demands for all and fragmentation would follow. It was argued that the solution lies in the devolution of government and administration to the different areas, whilst they remain part of a united Sri Lanka.

It was also pointed out that the conference was not truly representative of all the interested parties in Sri Lanka. Many were not present. We should remain realistic, therefore, as to the extent of the general acceptability of the findings and conclusions reached.

Concluding Remarks from Ms. Erika Mann (excerpts)

The moderator of the workshop, Ms. Erika Mann, pointed out that it is always difficult to summarize a discussion and debate that touches on so many sensitive and complicated issues. She highlighted the key role of the Government in paving the way forward, stating it is the Government that must bring all the communities together, and which must be helpful in the healing process. She also said, “One would love to see the Norwegians come back and negotiate, and be the broker between the parties. This was clearly expressed many times.”
She continued: “We went back and forth between two images – the first was one country in harmony, and the second was more connected with the idea and philosophy that at the same time, one needs something like a traditional homeland. One of the revered monks reminded us that we will only find the solution in one single country in harmony, and that the traditional homeland concept is perhaps not the right one. But we never found the solution to this, and I think it is probably something the people of Sri Lanka will need to work out between themselves. One person rightly said that maybe we need to find time to experience, to reflect. I was laughing a little to myself because something we do in the European Parliament, more and more, is that we have a kind of review period for our legislation; we review if we have done it right after five years. It is difficult of course in practice, because reality will always take over, but to have some kind of a time for reflection may be helpful.”

Drawing from the comments of the revered monks, she commented: “We need to sing a new song – to never go back to this hard play of history, which comes back again and again into our memories. It makes things more complicated if we get stuck only in the history, yet there is the wish to clarify historical facts.” She continued: “We saw that the clarification of historical facts is of course important – they are very important – but they cannot be found at the very same time when one is looking for the solution. Many historians will have to work on this, and I can tell you, being a German, we still are working on the past and I am sure it will remain for many generations to come, something that needs to be worked out. So there is not a single answer, but historical facts are important. At the same time, it is important for the government to find solutions. Now there were some solutions offered that are already under way, and which might pave the way to the future.”

She also reiterated that despite all efforts and due to limitations, the conference was not truly representative of all the interested parties in the peace process in Sri Lanka; many were not present. Accordingly, we should remain realistic as to the extent of the general acceptability of the findings and conclusions reached. Nevertheless, the workshop was concluded with a feeling of hope, with some useful dialogue having taken place between the opposing parties which may pave the way for further and more substantive interactions.
H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder, International Association for Human Values

It is a humongous task to find harmony among diversity. Often, diversities remain, or lead into more conflicts, contradictions and chaos. It needs such a skill to turn this whole thing into celebration, into something that supports life rather than destroys life. As cultured, educated and civilised people of this 21st century, this responsibility falls on each one of us to share this burden of war and conflicts that we have unfortunately inherited. With patience and perseverance we have to move forward, and this is just a new beginning. Conflicts are bound to come. We cannot just chew on the conflicts or allow conflicts to stagger our progress towards peace – we will make it as a stepping stone.

The next time we meet, we will include all those others whom we could not include now. Possibly, all those who are responsible for the conflicts – let’s sit and talk and see life from a broader vision.

You would all agree with me that the success of this conference is that we all agree on one thing – that we continue to pursue the path of peace. And come what may, we will continue to encourage people to come to terms with one another, to talk over the table, to leave the bullets and come to the ballot, and have a ball! We appeal for peace and restraint, and coming to the table for more understanding.

To end with, we can all just internalize and have a couple of minutes of meditation, relaxation. That will just centre us back. As Lord Buddha has always said, before the work, or after the work, you always go back to the silent shunya, or the nothingness in your heart. The heart sutra says, this is all of nothing – which is very close to the scientific philosophy of today. With all the mediation, the meditation will be very essential.

We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to all the speakers and participants, especially to those speakers who had to travel all the way from South Asia to attend the conference. We would also like to thank our sponsors and collaborators for their support in organizing this conference:

• Institusjonen Fritt Ord (The Freedom of Expression Foundation), Oslo;
• Club of Budapest Worldshift Network; and
• Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Norway.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank our dedicated team of volunteers, without whose support and hard work this conference could not have happened.

Organizing this conference has been a very rewarding experience for us, and based on the feedback we have received so far, it has been a positive move in the right direction. We certainly would have liked to have additional representatives from all sides, as well as outside experts, to join us for a more complete discussion and dialogue on these most sensitive issues; however, we are confident that this will happen in the future.

We are firmly committed to continue our ongoing grassroots projects, such as the education projects for underprivileged children, Youth Leadership Training Program (which IAHV has been conducting in Sri Lanka and Naxal affected areas in India for many years, in addition to other locations around the world) and women’s empowerment initiatives. Furthermore, we feel that facilitating meaningful dialogue between opposing parties to the conflicts in South Asia, as well as in other parts of the world, is an important part of our mission and will continue to be on our agenda. Consistently, preparations for the next dialogue event for South Asia, to be held in the United States, are already in progress. We hope to bring all those parties, who could not come to this conference, to take part in future deliberations. Once again, we would like to warmly thank all the speakers, sponsors, collaborators and volunteers for their support.

Conference Organizing Committee

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