

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -

The Mosaic Institute Launches its *Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka*

Toronto-September 9, 2010. Last evening, the Mosaic Institute convened a distinguished international panel of experts to discuss the prospects for achieving a meaningful and lasting peace in Sri Lanka. The event, entitled "What's Next for Sri Lanka?", was the inaugural session of the Mosaic Institute's multi-part "**Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka**" that will continue until March 2011. An audience of just under 100 young adults of diverse Sri Lankan background – including Tamils and Sinhalese - engaged the experts with great interest and enthusiasm.

The event was presented in cooperation with the Trudeau Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, and was held at the University of Toronto's Munk School for Global Affairs.

This inaugural session set the stage for the balance of the seven-month series, which has been designed to bring young Tamil and Sinhalese Canadians together to focus on their shared interest in the emergence of a strong, diverse and democratic Sri Lanka. They are being encouraged to draw from their common understanding of Canada's own commitment to the rule of law, the upholding of fundamental human rights, a free press, publicly-accountable institutions and other elements of its democratic traditions to help identify and advance specific strategies for helping the people of Sri Lanka to rebuild their country after 25 years of civil war. The large-group sessions will be interspersed with more in-depth, small-group discussion opportunities.

According to John Monahan, Executive Director of the Mosaic Institute, "By the end of the series, these young people will have issued a common statement of purpose and commitment to be shared with their own community leaders, with the media, and with government representatives both in Canada and abroad. They will also have committed to the funding and implementation of at least one, tangible peacebuilding project on the ground in Sri Lanka."

The speakers last night all agreed that democratic institutions, open dialogue, and greater transparency and accountability are essential, though so far largely missing, elements, in the rebuilding of Sri Lanka. The establishment of a lasting, meaningful peace and a thriving democracy will require the government to commit to a more inclusive approach that takes seriously the importance of including civil society actors, grassroots organizations and minority groups in building Sri Lanka's future. The panelists encouraged members of the Tamil and Sinhala diaspora communities in Canada to examine the lessons provided by Canada's own approach to diversity, and, in particular, to consider how it is that they, as diasporic Canadians with family or community-based connections to the conflict in Sri Lanka, have been able to peacefully coexist in Canada.

The panelists leading Wednesday evening's discussion and responding to questions were:

Dr. Alan Keenan, the Senior Analyst and Sri Lanka Project Director for the **International Crisis Group** based in London. His work has focused on the activities of local and international NGOs in the context of Sri Lanka's ongoing civil war. He is the author of *Democracy in Question: Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure*. In addition to his academic research, he has

worked as a consultant for the Programme on Human Rights and Conflict at the Law and Society Trust in Colombo and with the International Centre for Transitional Justice in New York.

Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, the Executive Director of the **Centre for Policy Alternatives** in Colombo. His main area of expertise and interest is the Sri Lankan constitution building process. In addition to various publications on this issue, he is also the co-author of *The Sri Lankan Peace Process at Crossroads: Lessons, Opportunities and Ideas for Principled Negotiations & Conflict Transformation*. He has served as a Lecturer in International Relations at the Universities of Colombo (Sri Lanka) and South Hampton (UK), and worked as a consultant for various international and regional bodies.

Dr. Jehan Perera, the Executive Director of the **National Peace Council of Sri Lanka**. He is also a columnist for the Daily Mirror and the Lanka Monthly Digest in Colombo and the author of *From War to Peace: a collection of articles*. His main area of focus has been the analysis of the prevailing political situation in Sri Lanka, utilizing mass media for advocacy and awareness creation purposes. Dr. Perera also works with civil society organizations to strengthen the role of civic groups in putting pressure on conflicting parties, identifying possible constitutional power sharing models to resolve the ethnic conflict through negotiation. Dr. Perera received the Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti National Award for Peace, Tolerance and Harmony from the Interfaith Harmony Foundation of India in 2007.

The discussion was expertly **moderated by Carol Off**, the host of “As It Happens” on CBC Radio.

The Young Canadians’ Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka is part of the Mosaic Institute’s larger **South Asian-Canadian Global Citizenship Project**. This two year project is focused on the promotion, integration and civic participation of Canadian youth of South Asian descent ages 15 to 24. Through a variety of methods, including school-based modules, inter-community dialogues, guest speakers and workshops, youth will be encouraged to define what it means to be a South Asian Canadian, to resolve inter-personal and inter-community conflicts constructively, and to become more engaged global citizens. By engaging in a variety of community service projects, youth will be encouraged to make tangible contributions to global peace and development. This Project is jointly funded by Canada’s Department of Citizenship, Immigration & Multiculturalism and by the RBC Foundation.

The next large-group event in the Young Canadians’ Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka, “**The Media and the Future of Sri Lanka: Roles, Responsibilities & Challenges**”, will take place at the Munk School on Monday, October 25.

For more information, please contact:

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