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The Mosaic Institute's Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka Focuses on
"Making Peace Personal"

Toronto – February 18, 2011. Last evening, the Mosaic Institute brought together a distinguished international panel of experts to discuss the role that both individuals and non-governmental organizations can play in the promotion of meaningful and sustainable peace in Sri Lanka. The event, entitled "Making Peace Personal," was the fourth session of the Mosaic Institute's multi-part "**Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka**" that will continue until March 2011. An audience of young Canadians representing the ethnocultural diversity of Sri Lanka – including Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims – engaged the panel on a wide range of topics, such as participatory democracy, humanitarian assistance vs. sustainable development, and political reconciliation.

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.

The evening's discussions challenged audience members to consider the essential role that individuals and "grassroots" movements can and must play to respond to large-scale humanitarian crises, promote development, and help to create the conditions necessary for peace and prosperity to flourish. More than one panelist emphasized that the achievement of meaningful and sustainable peace in a post-conflict context must begin with the individual as a personal quest that builds to a progressively larger and more widespread commitment to peace at the community, and eventually the state, level.

According to Mosaic Institute Executive Director John Monahan, the evening was intended to inspire its young audience members to consider their personal role in advancing the cause of peace in Sri Lanka or elsewhere:

It is so easy to sit as an "armchair quarterback" and blame governments and politicians for the approaches they are taking – or not taking – to bring about positive change in the world. We wanted to emphasize to the young person sitting in the back row that there is a prospective role for every individual to play in fostering a climate of peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. Even the largest changes begin with one person taking the first, small step.

Panelists viewed the fulfillment of people's basic physical needs and empowering them with the tools to participate actively in the civic life of their communities as integral to the process of fostering true reconciliation in Sri Lanka. It was also suggested that community-level capacity building must also incorporate the training of civilians in methods of non-violent civilian peacekeeping. This includes fostering open and inclusive spaces for dialogue and reconciliation, and creating programming targeted at helping high-risk and oft-excluded groups, including women, children, and the elderly.

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

Shanthi Sachithanandam, the Founder and Chair of Viluthu. She has been involved in the community development field for over twenty years, working mainly in the war torn districts of the North and East of Sri Lanka as a programmer, trainer and a gender expert. She has helped establish more than a dozen community based membership organizations and women's networks in those areas. Viluthu started the first monthly journal for teachers in Sri Lanka, publishes a popular bi-monthly magazine, and formed study circles to promote civic education. Ms. Sachithanandam recently founded the People's Rights Party in Sri Lanka.

Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, the General Secretary of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka, the largest non-governmental voluntary people's development organization in the country. He is the author of the "Sarvodaya Peace Action Plan" (2001) and serves in the faculty of the European University Center for Peace Studies (EPU), Austria. He is also a Board Certified Specialist in Community Medicine. Dr. Ariyaratne has been extensively involved in designing and delivering health programmes for civilians affected by war and natural disasters in Sri Lanka, including those addressing the psycho-social needs of war-affected children, and others providing help to internally-displaced persons (IDPs).

Zahra Ismail, the former Program Manager for Nonviolent Peaceforce Sri Lanka. She is a skilled trainer in conflict resolution, with extensive experience in designing and facilitating training programs for a variety of audiences both here in Canada and abroad. Ms. Ismail holds a BA (Honours) in Human Rights and Political Science with a concentration in International Relations from Carleton University in Ottawa, and an MA in Peace and Conflict Studies from the European University for Peace in Austria.

The discussion was moderated by **Marina Jimenez**, an accomplished journalist and member of the Globe and Mail's editorial board.

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 concluding large-group event of the Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka, "**Building the Future Together**," will be held at the Munk School on Monday, March 14.

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