

The Mosaic Institute's

“Sri Lanka Tour 2012”:

A Report by Trip Delegates



**THE
MOSAIC
INSTITUTE**

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Background:

Shortly after the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009, the Mosaic Institute brought together young Canadians of Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim Sri Lankan descent to engage in a constructive conversation regarding several post-war issues in Sri Lanka. Drawing on the shared Canadian values of participants, the dialogue series aimed to increase the levels of trust between these communities that have been historically divided. At the end of the dialogue series, a group of participants committed to advance their vision for a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka by building water wells for families who are directly affected by the war. This group, known as "Build Change", worked with the Canadian Rotarian Water Foundation to raise \$25,000 to support the Rotary Club of Colombo South and the UN Habitat agency to build residential water wells.

After the fundraising goal was met, with the funding support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) and the Eagle Down Foundation, the Mosaic Institute created an opportunity for the team to visit potential sites where the wells were to be built as well as learn about the current social, political and economic situation in Sri Lanka. The "Sri Lanka Tour 2012" took place from July 15-28, 2012.

During their visit, the team – comprised of six young adults of Tamil, Sinhalese or Muslim Sri Lankan background, along with Mosaic's Executive Director, John Monahan - was not only able to visit water well sites organized by UN Habitat and Rotary Club of Colombo South, but were also able to learn more about the opportunities and challenges facing the country from local organizations, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), university students, and civil society leaders and organizations. Team members gained rich impressions of the realities on the ground from local organizations, and new perspectives of the actual and prospective roles of the relevant diaspora communities here in Canada.

The Trip Itinerary:

The formal Tour took place from July 15th to 27th, inclusive. The Mosaic Institute constructed the trip to provide our group an opportunity to understand the realities of present-day Sri Lanka by engaging with various sectors of society. With the exception of John Monahan, Mosaic's Executive Director, we all had strong family and community-based connections to Sri Lanka, and identified as members of the Muslim, Tamil and Sinhalese Sri Lanka diasporas in Canada. With the exception of a couple of days taken for sightseeing, we spent our time meeting with over 16 organizations as well conversing with over 150 people. The following is a snapshot with whom we met with during our tour:

- We began our tour with an introductory dinner on July 15th in Colombo
On July 16th, we were hosted by the Canadian High Commission to Sri Lanka for an introductory session. [REDACTED]



- We then flew to Jaffna on July 17th, where we met with [REDACTED] Jaffna University.
- On July 18th, we met with [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We then visited a local inter-religious council affiliated with the [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Later the same day, we visited a local NGO named [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We then met with [REDACTED]
- On the 19th and 20th of July, hosted by the UN Habitat and Rotary Club of Colombo South, our team travelled to Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu where we visited various water well sites and met war-affected families. Following this, we had a debrief session with senior regional staff of UN Habitat at their headquarters.
- Later on July 20th, we visited a project run by [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We travelled to a remote village 12 km from [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We were then hosted at [REDACTED] headquarters for dinner.
- On July 21st, we travelled to Puttalam, on Sri Lanka's west coast, to visit [REDACTED]
- In Kandy, on July 23rd, we visited a CIDA-funded WUSC project site. After an initial meeting at WUSC's headquarters, we drove up the hills of Kandy to visit tea plantation workers.
- Later on the 24th, in Colombo, we discussed our experiences in the North with the Executive Committee of Rotary Club of Colombo South, our partner for the Build Change Project.
- Before heading to Galle, a city in the southern region of Sri Lanka, on July 25th, we met with [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- The following day, we had a meeting with [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We later met with the senior staff of [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Due to the nation-wide university strike, our scheduled meeting with [REDACTED] cancelled.
- On our last formal day of the Tour, July 27th, we met with young parliamentarians [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



Key Themes:

Although the reality on the ground in Sri Lanka is hard to ascertain in such a short period of time, we noted many positive developments, from construction of new roads to post-war rebuilding and expansion. There remain, however, significant disparities between stated development agendas and the reality on the ground. Specifically, a significant portion of the Sri Lankan war-affected population in the North and North East continue to be in dire need of basic assistance. Their stories underscored for us some of the tremendous challenges that remain to post-war reconstruction and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Below is a summary of several of the key themes and component issues we identified or observed during our trip.

Theme #1: Security of Persons

Violence against Women & Children

Across different ethno-linguistic and religious communities, almost all civil society groups, grassroots activists, and locals with whom we came in contact noted that women and children in the North and Eastern provinces are at greater risk of being subject to violence since the end of the war in 2009. Some local NGOs believe that there are approximately 90,000 widows residing in the Northern and Eastern provinces, the majority of whose husbands were killed in the last phase of the war. Some of these local leaders stated that war widows are at greater risk of being victims of sexual abuse at the hands of the soldiers stationed in the North. One group of women we met disclosed some of the tremendous challenges they encounter in trying to meet their basic needs. Some of local women engaged in multiple sexual relationships in exchange for payment in order to support their children.

Young girls were also reported to be victims of these crimes. For instance, when speaking to a group of local girls in Pungudutivu, we noticed that they divided themselves into two groups during our meeting. We were later informed that one group of girls had been victims of sexual assaults at the hands of soldiers stationed nearby. Due to the highly stigmatized environment, this group of girls kept to themselves. We also heard that domestic violence is viewed as almost “normal” in family structures, and that married women often face abuse from their husbands. Some of those that we met expressed the view that although the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were brutal in many ways, many women felt more secure pre-2009 as the Tigers meted out strict punishment against alleged sexual abusers. The societal and cultural stigma attached to sexual violence often prevents women from seeking legal actions against perpetrators.

Before our day-trip to [REDACTED] the director of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] informed us during a meeting that there has been a spike in



unwanted teenage pregnancies in the city. Though some cases were attributed to unprotected consensual sex between teenagers, most were a result of sexual assaults against young women, either when they were returning home from school or when they were already in their homes. This women's organization, which had set up legal aid clinics and informal support groups around the northern region, had gathered information over the course of three years on personal accounts of these incidents. They reported that the vast majority of the young women told of having been victimized at the hands of the military.

Furthermore, in several incidents, the young women reported that they had been sexually abused while at internment camps prior to being resettled. It was also reported that the increase in suicides of young women in the region suggested a definite correlation between suicide rates and the increase in teenage pregnancies. Several women's groups expressed the need for rights-based education in the school system and the promotion of gender equality as two essential steps in addressing the plight of women in Sri Lanka's remote regions in the North and East.

A perceived increase in the rates of sexual violence against children was cited by a variety of individuals and organisations from different ethno-linguistic, regional, political, class and religious groups. The rate of violence against children was seen as a country-wide pandemic with these concerns reflected in the media.¹

There were several explanations given by the people that we met as to the rise in child sexual abuse in the post-war period. Several groups indicated that there was a stricter adherence and enforcement of laws by both the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL)² before the war ended. These individuals suggested that the end of the war has brought a relaxation in social mores that has included increased access to alcohol, drugs, and pornography. Some local individuals see these three "vices" as the catalyst for increased sexual violence. Others suggested that sexual violence was being brought to light through increased reporting by victims, their families, and the media.

Many suggested that it was commonly known that local politicians or influential members of the community were linked to sexual crimes.³ Several individuals we spoke to indicated at least two reasons why prosecutions were low: some crimes were committed by male members of the family and thus there was a high social barrier to prosecution; and other crimes were committed by persons of authority and thus able to stymie or stop investigations.

We were also advised that an increase in sexual violence against children could also be attributed to the emigration of many Sri Lankan mothers to the Middle East to obtain work in order to sustain and support their families back home. In doing so,

¹ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/07/child-rape-on-the-rise-in-sri-lanka/>

² Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in this report will refer to the Central government as opposed to the Provincial government

³ <http://www.ft.lk/2012/08/13/shackling-corrupt-politicians/>



these women left their children in the care of family and friends, some of whom had committed acts of violence and sexual violence against the children left in their charge.

Despite the increase in the reporting of sexual violence, victims of sexual violence still face substantial stigma, and are often not able to secure the support and counselling programs necessary to address their well-being. For example, a group we met [REDACTED] informed us that the majority of sexual violence cases still go unreported. Moreover, when cases are reported, the court system does not offer protections for vulnerable witnesses and victims within the court system. On this score, some “best practices” from the Canadian judicial system could be extremely helpful to people on the ground in Sri Lanka. Such practices include such simple steps as having child witnesses testify behind a screen or on closed-circuit television in order to reduce anxiety. Such ideas were well received by the group, which had a deep desire to mobilize communities across Sri Lanka around their shared concern for abused children.

Given Canada’s advanced experience and the variety of mechanisms it uses for dealing with issues of child abuse and sexual violence against children, there seems to be an enormous opportunity for Canadian experts to share their “best practices” with Sri Lankan officials, media and civil society organizations. Such an effort could be a strategic way for Canada to engage in meaningful public diplomacy in Sri Lanka.

Health

While there are many barometers to measure the health of communities in post-war societies, medical and psychological attention required by both war-wounded civilians and soldiers must be an immediate priority. The semblance of normalcy when we first met with war-affected individuals during our visit made it easy to minimize the urgency with which such critical care is needed. However, even a few minutes of conversation with those people confirmed that they continue to suffer health-related consequences of the war. Though the war ended three years ago, people still carry physical reminders of what they lost, and according to them, their inability to access treatment is preventing them from becoming fully-functioning members of society.

For instance, in [REDACTED] we listened to the concerns of many locals, including several who had just recently been re-settled. These locals mentioned that due to the prohibitive costs of surgery, many with shrapnel wounds had not received medical attention. A young man in the gathering, whose physical wounds were severe enough that it affected his mobility and speech, stated that he had no hope of acquiring services for physiotherapy or access to assistive devices. While a single mother with crutches did not bring her own physical disability or health issues to the forefront, she spoke in length about her financial



struggle to keep her three daughters in school, as a result of her not being able to work.

Those that we met on our trip advised that while there are free public health care services in Jaffna, there are still instances where critical care is only accessible if one can travel to Colombo for physical assessments and related care using modern equipment. The travel costs are prohibitive due to the long distance between the capital and Jaffna; the costs of travel sometimes exceed the cost of the medical procedures. We met a mother whose child had a congenital urinary tract issue that was treated at a Jaffna hospital, but the child needed to travel to Colombo for annual check-ups. Apart from the onerous financial implications for this mother, the fact that she is Tamil-speaking creates another challenge for her because the health services in Colombo are predominantly offered in Sinhala only.

Furthermore, locals in a village [REDACTED] mentioned that the paucity of medical doctors and prescription drugs in the local hospital routinely led to preventable deaths among infants and children. This community also complained about poor roads and burdensome travel costs for those attempting to travel between rural areas and larger centres within the north. Several children had died when traveling from [REDACTED] to access emergency medical care over virtually unpassable dirt roads. While mobile clinics organized by local and international medical NGOs and local hospitals do visit this village, such clinics are of little use during emergencies or for the critically ill, as they are not equipped to treat critical cases and are only available on a weekly basis.

Bringing more publicly operated medical services to the North may not only address such immediate concerns, it might also – in the long term – provide opportunities for Tamil-speaking medical professionals to serve their own communities. In the Vanni region, it is clear that if proper facilities and infrastructure can be made available, many critical-care issues can be dealt with in the hospitals in Jaffna Town, reducing the cost and related hardships of seeking medical attention in Colombo. While it is important to equip the hospitals in larger cities with the facilities necessary to address the immediate health concerns arising in the post-war setting, it is equally important to extend such services to the rural villages whose remoteness make it difficult for residents to access basic medical services.

Theme #2: Militarization

The Sri Lankan military forces employ hundreds of thousands of men and women, a majority of whom come from middle to low income families from Sinhala-dominant parts of the country. The vast majority of them are law-abiding service men and women who are invested in creating a better future for their fellow citizens. However, it is necessary that the role of the military be considered on a broader, institutional basis. While there are differing opinions in the news and popular literature on whether the presence of the military has increased or decreased in the North since 2009, traveling through the region confirmed their widespread and constant



presence, and many locals in the North revealed that they perceived the military presence as having increased in the post-war period.

The presence of the military was far more evident in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu than in Colombo or even Jaffna. On the main highway between Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, there were small military outposts holding two or three soldiers every few kilometers along the road. These soldiers often seemed very young, and it dawned on us how incredibly wearisome it must be for them to be cooped up in small barracks for days on end, in an unfamiliar place with few outlets and recreational activities, since many of these posts are outside of major towns and commercial activities.

One economist mentioned that he knows of soldiers who were frustrated by being forced to do menial activities, such as cleaning the floors of offices. It seems that there is an over-supply of armed forces now that the war has ended, with no real counter-balancing demand for their military-related services.

The ubiquitous presence of the military infiltrates many facets of civilian life in the North. For instance, we were told that military officials insisted on being “invited” to attend children’s birthday parties because any large gathering is looked upon with suspicion. We were also told by local UN Habitat officials that the military has become involved in numerous local business activities, to the detriment of the local private sector. For instance, the town of Nandikadal – a place bearing significant symbolic value for Tamils due to the sheer number of lives lost in the area during the last phase of the war – has been opened for visits from civilians and tourists, who have been flocking to see the memorial erected for the military as well as former LTTE bases. We were told that the military operates a juice bar for these visitors.

Despite the positive work that is being done by the military, such as helping with the building of roads and bridges, the involvement of the army in local commercial activities is deeply disconcerting for the locals who live in the area and who are trying to earn a living. It is clearly a concern to many that military ventures into private enterprise will seemingly entrench and increase the military presence in the North despite the war being over. In the meantime, swaths of public and abandoned private lands continue to be managed by the navy or the military.

It is also important to note that the military oversees the affairs of the work done by all civil society organizations in the region. In fact, NGOs across the country must register with the NGO Secretariat, which now comes under the supervision of the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development instead of the Ministry of Social Services as it used to. One of the [REDACTED] with whom we traveled the North extensively said that it is now common practice for military officers and civil society organizers to meet formally and informally in order to keep their organizations’ projects operational. Furthermore, we were also advised separately by a journalist and a lawyer that the military is now involved in delivering “boot camp” training to first-year university students under the guise of “leadership development”. One



parliamentarian told us that the military presence in all these sectors and regions of the North was necessary to prevent another LTTE-like uprising.

We were advised by the Canadian High Commission in Colombo that the official tally of soldiers stationed in greater Jaffna has reportedly now decreased to 15,000. This number was disputed by members of an inter-religious group we met with, who stated that many of the soldiers now simply wear civilian clothing in the region instead of army fatigues. This same group noted a disturbing trend in the war-affected region, where widowed mothers are forced into sex work to feed their children and dependent family members. With the increase in the number of lodges and rest houses in the region, and the military's involvement in business affairs, we were told it is easy for prostitution rings to become operational. The largely silent plight of the war-widows forced into such labor due to desperate financial constraints is an issue that must be addressed. These spaces may allow for human trafficking, child sexual abuse and forced sexual slavery, making it all the more relevant for the authorities to crack down on such activities. Adding insult to injury, in the socially conservative climate of the North, victims of sexual violence suffer severe stigmatization.

People in [REDACTED] expressed concerns over the fact that the unrelenting presence of the military in their daily activities fosters a climate of fear where women from their communities are exposed to a heightened risk of sexual assault by soldiers. In [REDACTED] we were told that there are checkpoints nearly every 500 meters along the road that connected the village to the main town, and that the villagers' children walk nearly 5km everyday past these checkpoints to get to school. Similarly in Jaffna, we visited families living within the perimeter of a military base and were told that the presence of the military makes the lack of access to clean water a security issue for many civilians - especially for single mothers. The trek they make to fetch water in the early mornings to prepare their children for school and complete daily tasks becomes daunting and, at times, dangerous.

One of the pleasant surprises during our trip was the limited number of times we were stopped at the military checkpoints. We were able to travel throughout nearly the entire northern region without interruption, most like because we were accompanied by a UN Habitat vehicle most of the time. We were able to travel throughout Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu without being stopped once by the military. However, a [REDACTED] explained to us that he had [REDACTED] [REDACTED] responsible for the area in order to obtain permission for us to attend at the well-sites that we were planning to visit. After both a telephone conversation and an in-person meeting [REDACTED], the senior officer and some of his staff had visited the households attached to the various well sites that we were to see in order to ensure that none of them was a "nest" for terrorists. In contrast to the ease with which we traveled while guided by UN Habitat vehicles, during the part of the trip when we were accompanied only by a local NGO, we were stopped three times. At one of the major checkpoints between [REDACTED] we had



to get out of our vehicle, present copies of our passports for the military's keeping and answer questions about our travel. This was a sobering experience, and presented a stark contrast to the way in which we were able to travel unencumbered in other parts of the country, such as Kandy and Colombo.

Theme #3: Development:

Water

Great regional disparities are evident when evaluating the ways in which people on the island access water. Through the process of raising funds to build water wells in war-affected areas, our group already understood the importance of providing clean drinking water to those living in a post-war environment. However, it was only by traveling through the region and speaking to beneficiaries that it became evident how neglected some areas are. Under the guidance of UN Habitat managers and Rotary Club of Colombo South partners, we traveled through the Vanni region to learn more about the water well options as well as the nature of post-war development work in Sri Lanka. We were told that the GoSL provides international development agencies, including UN Habitat, with a list of resettled families; this list is then used to select beneficiaries. One manager noted that NGOs operating in this region try to distribute resources equitably to resettled families to avoid one family receiving more resources than another. As noted above, the need for a secure water supply becomes a security issue for women that have to trek past military checkpoints.

Many of the water well sites we visited belonged to war-affected families, many of whom had returned home in late 2010. A majority of them were headed by single women, more commonly known as "war widows". These women relayed how difficult it is to obtain clean drinking water, as they would have to walk a couple of kilometers to the community well to obtain clean drinking water. Those with water wells typically had to boil the water before it was potable. Many homes had the remnants of a water well, but those needed to be refurbished to be usable. Unfortunately, the costs of fixing and building new water wells have sky rocketed since the beginning of 2011 due to increases in the cost of equipment and labour. What surprised us most was the number of families that mentioned the need for a good water well not only for drinking and household purposes, but also for irrigation. It became evident that war-affected communities wanted an opportunity to rebuild their livelihoods through access to water.

Housing & Resettlement

In the North, housing continues to be a major concern for those directly affected by the war. War-affected families revealed that after being displaced multiple times in the last stages of the war, they returned home with little assistance from the GoSL. Interestingly, many of the families we met benefited from the housing schemes



provided by international aid agencies from India, Switzerland and Australia, CARITAS, and UN Habitat. A development worker in the region noted that, across the North, approximately 100,000 persons continue to live with relatives or in temporary camps outside their own houses. Thousands of “resettled” persons live in the midst of jungles, and in some cases, in areas that are not completely de-mined. Many conveyed that there are virtually no social or economic infrastructure, training, or income-generating opportunities to provide them with livelihoods. In the vast majority of the cases, since government aid has been minimal, many war-affected people are expected to obtain their economic, education and other livelihood support from local NGOs and international aid agencies.

After mounting criticism by the international community and human rights activists against its operation of the Menik Farm internment camp in Chettikulam, the GoSL has repeatedly stated that the camp would be closed in 2012 and that the problem of resettlement is now effectively resolved. However, the people living and working on the ground dispute this assertion. We were also told that there are currently 6000 families in Menik Farm that have not been resettled back in their homes in the Northern Province. (**EDITOR:** As of September 2012, the GoSL has announced the closure of Menik Farm, though witnesses on the ground dispute that the last residents of the camp have been properly resettled.)

On separate occasions, several civil society leaders expressed their concern about the state of land division in the country. Division of land is a significant concern as there are many people who were landless before the massive displacement who continue to be without permanent homes. Many of these are in “limbo”, living with relatives while they await information or instructions from the state. Only 15 percent of the homes being built are allocated for the landless, many of which are tiny, 400 square foot “cluster homes” built by the Indian government that are densely grouped together by the dozen. Some people continue to wait to be placed in such housing, while others have already abandoned these new dwellings because they did not meet their daily needs. In some cases, landless families are forced to share such housing with other families. Development workers advised that those with land deeds or some existing housing are benefiting more from the current housing projects than those without, leaving many with few if any viable housing options. Finally, a significant amount of land is being allocated by local authorities to both private sector and military stakeholders to be used for business purposes. Average citizens are not being consulted in any of these decisions.

With the notable exception of its commitment to help promote bilingualism in Sri Lanka, CIDA is reducing its development agenda in Sri Lanka, as the country is now deemed a middle-income one. However, it is important to note that war-affected areas in the country continue to face exceedingly difficult challenges, and humanitarian aid, resources, and technical support are needed. Though some parts of the country are wealthier than others, the war-affected regions continue to face harsh challenges that require international attention.



Education

Education was one of the greatest priorities for all families we met regardless of ethnicity, as it was perceived as a way to help achieve a better standard of living for the entire family. However, despite the free public school system, there are several challenges that students face in acquiring a good education. For instance, tutorial lessons (“tuition classes”) offered after formal schooling, often by retired or practising teachers, are generally seen as a prerequisite for success in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, these tuition classes are extremely costly. Those who cannot enroll in these after-school classes are left behind in day school, and as a result, young people and their parents report that they routinely under-perform when compared to their peers. Though the cost of formal education is provided by the state, the cost of tuition classes and school supplies often overwhelms parents that already struggle to meet their basic needs.

In addition to this, when we visited a village [REDACTED], villagers told us that their children had to walk several kilometers to get to school every day to be taught by teachers driven in from Jaffna. These Jaffna teachers then return home on the weekends. This speaks to the lack of resources and funding devoted to these remote, isolated areas.

Across the country, we were told the study of social sciences is not highly valued and the pursuit of higher education in this field is not encouraged. One reason for this dismissal of social sciences and humanities is the perceived lack of future employment prospects. One professional noted that the lack of social scientists and intellectuals in Sri Lanka is detrimental to the country's present and future, as social policy decisions are being made and implemented by people who lack the necessary background and skills to do so in the best interests of society.

Academics and professionals working in Jaffna noted that there is a severe lack of funding and personnel available to provide proper training to the next generation of young professionals. A law professor expressed that he teaches most of the classes at his law college and stressed how difficult it is to provide a consistently high quality of legal education to his students.

We also learned that entrenched cultural practises can inhibit positive change in the education system. For instance, [REDACTED] tried to introduce a public school curriculum on human sexuality that would recognize the importance of preventing unwanted pregnancies and reducing sexual activity among young people. Teachers and school administrators were reticent to implement the programming.

During our time in Sri Lanka, all university classes nation-wide had been suspended as a result of a strike led by faculty and staff. A few people reported that the



universities were on strike as a direct protest against GoSL intervention into their affairs. Fears are that this strike will have a devastating impact on students.

Livelihood

Finding employment remains very difficult for a large majority of the population in the North and East, even three years after the end of the war. While the official unemployment rate of the country was said to be approximately 5%, many of the people we encountered cited tremendous barriers to obtaining employment, particularly amongst younger people and in rural communities. One economist advised that more than 15% of youth between 18 and 30 were unemployed. In particular, the dearth of economic opportunities is acutely felt in rural communities, where families, primarily consisting of women-headed households, have great difficulty in earning the income necessary to meet their basic needs (such as water, children's meals and medical supplies) on a daily basis. Those that we met explained that the lack of education, lack of business mentorship for women, and lack of access to start-up capital that they would need to start micro-businesses compound their problems. As a result, some women reported that their peers resorted to exchanging sexual services for money in order to feed their children.

The lack of economic opportunities has a number of consequences. Similar to other areas of the country, a large portion of the population migrate to countries with better working opportunities to better provide for their families. In fact, the Sri Lankan economy is significantly supported by overseas remittances, which locals saw as having an adverse impact on their communities. Some who receive remittances from absentee parents have turned to drugs. In addition, as noted before, [REDACTED] participants relayed the story of how children were placed at a higher risk of sexual abuse due to the fact that their parents were abroad. Meanwhile, in a classic "Catch-22", families who have no access to overseas remittances are not able to meet their daily needs due to the lack of domestic economic opportunities.

Opportunities to develop economic livelihoods for families in rural areas are being led by local community organizations. For instance, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] group helped families to earn money by using Palmyra tree leaves to create handicrafts and household items to be sold in the local community. Another local organization helps women in Jaffna to develop skills in cooking and baking to make sesame snacks that are then sold in the local villages. Another national NGO helped advocate to the provincial and central governments to bring jobs to benefit rural villagers in [REDACTED] we met a local farmer who harvests more than 10 different types of vegetable because he has a water well and hand pump for irrigation, which was provided by a national NGO. He explained that he is able to sell his produce for a reasonable price at a nearby market place, allowing him to support his family of five.



In Kandy, we visited a Canadian development project run by WUSC that is directed at empowering tea pluckers and plantation workers, most of them of Indian-Tamil origin. This community, known as Hill Country Tamils, is often ignored in public policy discussions both in Sri Lanka and abroad as they do not have representatives in the Diaspora and cannot vote in Sri Lankan elections. Development workers and plantation workers themselves reported that Hill Country Tamils are stuck in a cycle of poverty given the limited educational opportunities for young people and the absence of employment opportunities in other sectors. Moreover, since many of them do not possess proper documents and are disenfranchised, they rarely access opportunities to work outside of tea plantations. In essence, their lives are governed by regulations set by tea corporations as their broader aspirations are rarely addressed by politicians.

We heard significant praise for WUSC, which has helped hundreds of young people receive vocational training. We recall one young man standing up to profusely thank the Manager of WUSC Sri Lanka for all his organization's hard work. We also heard that some women have been promoted to supervisory positions by a few tea plantations due to the NGO's women-specific training program. This suggests that with the presence of NGOs such as Canada's WUSC, Hill Country people are able to gain access to economic opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable.

Having heard the stories about the effects of unemployment as well as having seen families benefit from livelihood assistance provided by national NGOs, it was a surprise when we saw non-Sri Lankans working on road construction in certain parts of the country. When possible, public development projects that build infrastructure in the North and North East should emphasize employing individuals from the local community.

Theme #4: Governance and Democracy:

Corruption

Although corruption has long been present in the Sri Lankan economy, many business owners told us that it now represents an unbearable cost of doing business.

For instance, a Sinhalese hotel-owner [REDACTED] described her difficulties in having repairs expedited or done at all as government officials required bribes in order to issue the requisite licenses. A foreign business owner from the UK working in the textile industry stated that while it was once expected that the cost of bribes would be 15% of the total project cost in Sri Lanka, that figure had now doubled to 30%. This was affirmed in a separate conversation by an economist, who told us that historically the amount to be paid for bribes was between 5-10% of any total project cost, but had now ballooned to 25-30%.



Neither is corruption limited to the realm of business and economic affairs. Those with privilege by virtue of their close connections to government actors in Sri Lanka were viewed by many with whom we spoke as flouting the laws and regulations of the country. They also attributed the perceived breakdown of morality and order in Sri Lankan society to the absence of role models in positions of authority. They pointed to a number of cases that had gained public renown. For instance, the Minister of Public Relations, Mervyn Silva, famously threatened to break the limbs of journalists in the country.⁴ Gotabaya Rajapakse, the Defence Secretary and brother of the President of Sri Lanka, threatened to kill a senior newspaper editor.⁵ Several people that we met related the story of a 13-year-old girl in Tangalle who was allegedly gang-raped by at least four men, one of whom she identified as being a local politician. There were also the allegations against another local politician is accused of killing a British tourist and raping his Russian partner.⁶

A perceived lack of consistency in the enforcement of existing laws has led to an increase in sexual abuse, along with trafficking of drugs and pornographic materials. Persons in authority are often complicit in such acts, and are seen as being only rarely prosecuted, thus helping to create a “culture of impunity” and reinforcing a sense of widespread lawlessness in the country. As one community leader in ██████ said, “People feel like they can do anything they want without consequence”. Although protections do exist in law to curb such actions, enforcement is necessary for such laws to be effective.

Decentralization

Decentralization takes on several meanings within the Sri Lankan context. Internally, it is often viewed suspiciously as code for separatism. However, the issue of the GoSL directly managing the development agenda in individual Provinces was flagged as a problem by several of the NGOs we met.

While the country is divided into Provinces, the elected Provincial Chief Minister is essentially an advisor to the GoSL-appointed Provincial Governor, who is often a retired military general. Local decisions with respect to development must go through the Governors’ office, and the local government has little influence over the decisions made by the GoSL. Despite this power dynamic, local NGOs we met continued to work with local authorities in order to make community-specific changes.

In order for domestic and international NGOs to work in the Northern Province, they must first receive permission from the President-appointed 19-member Presidential Task Force (PTF). As mentioned previously, the management of NGOs by the NGO Secretariat falls under the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development in the post-war context, as opposed to the Ministry of Social Services.

⁴<http://dailymirror.lk/news/17607-mervyn-threatens-to-break-limbs-of-journos.html>

⁵<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2012/07/08/gota-goes-berserk/>

⁶http://sundaytimes.lk/120101/News/nws_22.html



The PTF has advised NGOs that their development projects must be limited to shelter, water and sanitation projects, and livelihood. They will deny access to NGOs or shut them down if they attempt development projects outside the scope of those three areas. One of the motivating factors for this practice, as explained by several individuals we met, was based on the GoSL's fear that NGOs provided cover for LTTE activities during the war. Further, the suggestion was made that the GoSL is suspicious that the NGOs operating in the North are collecting information regarding the last stages of the war to report back to the international community. As a result NGOs face significant oversight from the GoSL.

The increasingly limited space for NGOs to carry out their work and the lack of trust between government ministries and civil society hampers efforts to rebuild the country. In addition, the mistrust the GoSL has towards the international community seems to be driven largely by a fear of accountability regarding the end of the war and the resettlement camps. The GoSL is seen locally as tying up the development process and limiting the types of projects NGOs can participate in; they are also determining the needs of the local populations seemingly without any meaningful input from those beneficiaries they purportedly seek to help.

Media Freedom

Sri Lanka continues to place controls on media freedom, and journalists continue to be at risk of abuse, killing and abduction. While the country has seen some reduction in all-out violence against media personnel, journalists continue to work in a climate of threats and fear. Regardless of ethnicity, journalists who take stances that are critical of the government regularly receive threats of bodily harm and are vilified publicly. For instance, the Editor in Chief of the Sunday Leader, Lasantha Wickramatunga was shot dead in January 2009. Prageeth Eknelygoda, a political reporter for the Sri Lankan news Web site, disappeared in January 2010. In contrast, the GoSL owns a majority of the shares of Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited, which publishes three daily, three weekend, five weekly, two monthly and three annual publications in the Sinhala, English and Tamil languages. This includes the English-language daily newspaper, the Daily News. On reading the Daily News during our trip, very few if any articles were critical of the government.

The media outlets cater to audiences in three different languages and often the same news story is reported from differing vantage points, which effectively creates and maintains three different views among these communities. For instance, the news from Tamil language news outlets consumed by the majority of the Tamil community living outside Sri Lanka differs from the same news from Sinhala language news outlets consumed by Sinhala readers; they differ again from the news read by English-speaking audiences in Sri Lanka. The propagation of such differing "truths" makes reconciliation an arduous task, as three communities are fed disparate realities which they each hold to be true.



According to one well-known journalist, the authorities continue to take measures to censor the media. Internet media freedom is reported to be curbed with new regulations including the GoSL trying to place a “registration fee” of Rs. 100,000 (~\$750 CDN) on every Sri Lankan web portal that reports on content related to political news. The steep fee is meant to deter journalists from writing critical articles. Such actions inevitably call into question the willingness of the GoSL to face the scrutiny of a genuinely critical free press. It also creates a chilling effect on media outlets throughout the country.

Despite the constant threat faced by them and their colleagues across the country, most of the journalists that we met during the course of the trip were optimistic that better days lie ahead for journalists and for media freedom in Sri Lanka.

Lack of Media Literacy

Sri Lankans have many reasons to take pride in the high level of literacy in the country. However, a striking observation we made during the trip was the contrast in how the North was perceived by the people we spoke to in Colombo, and the actual realities of those who lived in the Northern regions. One of the prominent journalists that we met with emphasized that the citizens in Colombo lived in an “information bubble”, with the majority of people lacking the tools and frameworks to critically analyse the stream of news they consume. Such uncritical absorption of information has helped in many ways to maintain the current “status quo”. The way in which media outlets project the conditions in the North allow many in the rest of the country to believe that development goals are met when, in reality, this is not the case. Many civil society leaders noted that there is a disconnect between the reality on the ground and the news that is reported.

According to the head of a national peace organization, the lack of media education has not always been a problem. Traditionally, communication studies and media literacy was part of the school curriculum, until education reforms made by previous governments dismantled this model. Since such programs have existed in the past, it would be ideal if those media literacy classes were reintroduced into the school curriculum in order to strengthen one of the most important pillars of democratic governance in the country: a well-informed public.

Theme #5: Reconciliation:

Psycho-Social Programming & Counselling

Despite the recommendations by the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee (LLRC) to implement various psycho-social counselling initiatives in the North and East to allow families to mourn, reflect and find closure, the GoSL has failed to facilitate this process. Instead, it has forbidden international and national NGOs and religious organizations to plan and carry out psycho-social counselling programs



throughout these areas. In the more than 100 conversations we had with locals in the Northern Province, virtually everyone recounted stories about survival, loss and death and conveyed to us the dire consequences these deaths have had on their health and well-being. We were left with the impression that it is of utmost importance to address war-related trauma as part of a larger national focus on development and reconciliation.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been left reeling from permanent disabilities, mental images of the last stages of the war, destroyed homes, and an inability to find out what happened to their loved one – all of which affects their general well-being and their ability to contribute to society. For instance, in [REDACTED] we met young men and women with shrapnel pieces in their bodies. Others continue to be subjected to trauma and psychological stress on a daily basis, often, according to them, as a result of the disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture or imprisonment of family members by either government forces or by those of the LTTE during the war.

During the war, disappearances took place in large numbers, and although at the present time the magnitude of disappeared persons has declined, it continues to take place in the North and throughout the country. We were told by reputable sources that the number of unaccounted people in Sri Lanka is now over 100,000. Despite complaints by family members to the National Human Rights Commission, the LLRC, the police and direct appeals to government, families often do not receive updates regarding the whereabouts of their loved ones. This adds to the challenge of living in a hostile and dangerous post-war environment, and results in additional stress, trauma and illness for the family members of the disappeared persons.

As suggested by a [REDACTED] medical practitioner [REDACTED] in the country, there are four critical components to a stable reconciliation process: psychological trauma counselling, humanitarian aid to allow people to meet their basic needs, good governance, and finally, justice for families by investigating accusations of war crimes. They said that there has been a lack of political will on the part of all the major political parties to implement those recommendations of the LLRC dealing specifically with reconciliation and peace building. Though many praised the LLRC report as a great step forward, they feared that it was being mainly used to appease the international community. It should be noted that subsequent to our tour ending, the GoSL released a timetable for implementing some – though not all - of the recommendations of the LLRC report.

A number of inter-faith community leaders and local women's organization expressed a willingness to assist in the process of developing psycho-social counselling programs throughout the North and East. However, they pointed to the challenges in developing initiatives that will not get approval from the PTF. Consequently, NGOs, religious institutions, and local women's groups are forced to only provide small-scale counselling services often under the banner of other



development programs. These under-funded programs run by local agencies face threats, intimidation and scrutiny from the military should they be found to be delivering such services to the community. A strict “zero tolerance” policy has been implemented by the PTF against groups that attempt to provide counselling to war-affected persons.

Almost the entire population in the North has witnessed and experienced the agony of war and many continue to suffer from psycho-social trauma, or even severe depression. In this regard, the reluctance by the GoSL to meet the needs of traumatized populations is particularly alarming. A number of human rights activists and inter-faith religious leaders were of the opinion that the lack of political will to implement large scale counselling programs to communities in the North and East speaks to the GoSL’s fear of the potential to collect information about evidence or narratives of war crimes. Though many NGOs noted that while the GoSL is afraid of the potential downfall of running such projects, they also noted that the GoSL does not possess the internal expertise to engage in rehabilitation and counselling work. If there is indeed a sincere desire to promote reconciliation, there should be more willingness on the part of the GoSL to collaborate with national and international NGOs and foreign governments, who are able to provide them technical assistance and the resources to deliver necessary programming and counselling services.

We were struck by the openness with which most people conveyed their stories and thoughts about the current state of affairs on the island. One development professional revealed to us that he enjoyed speaking with us, as he could not share his thoughts so openly with everyone. It was evident that even those who work tirelessly in development work need mental health support.

To deny the necessity of psycho-social programming and counselling for those affected by three decades of war will only exacerbate people's collective trauma. Efforts by the Government of Sri Lanka to foster reconciliation through infrastructure development alone does little to heal or empower people, and could unintentionally pave the way for future inter-community violence or separatist impulses in the future.

Language

Language, a significant reason for the rise of ethnic-based grievances in Sri Lanka, continues to be an issue today. During our travels in the North, the necessity of knowing Tamil became very clear, as most civilians speak only Tamil. Since a few of our group were fluent in that language, we were able to gather personal stories and insights from the locals. Some mentioned that their access to government services was impeded due to language barriers. For instance, some Tamil speakers noted that they do not have the same access to police services because when they report a complaint, documents are in Sinhala and the interviewer must translate Tamil into Sinhala, which routinely leads to gross errors.



The GoSL's commitment to language integration and reconciliation in general rings a bit hollow considering that the LLRC report was initially only written and disseminated in English, rather than in the two national languages. One MP from the ruling party defended this by arguing that the LLRC was an "arms-length commission", and therefore it was not within the purview of the GoSL to require the report's publication in all three languages. This argument is weakened when one considers that all the members of the LLRC were Government appointees. It also fails to recognize both the substantive and the symbolic importance of ensuring that a report seeking to promote national reconciliation was made accessible to the estimated 92% of Sri Lankans who are literate in at least one official language.

We saw that local, grassroots efforts to integrate the two different linguistic communities are seeing some success. For instance, [REDACTED] signs on the buses used to be only in Sinhalese despite that population speaking mainly Tamil. Women would miss their bus stops because they could not read the signs in Sinhala. One NGO worked with local women leaders to successfully petition the local government for trilingual signage.

Coincidentally, an NGO informed us that our first week in Sri Lanka happened to be "Social Integration Week", in which 25 districts on the island pledged to work towards social integration. They hope to do so by teaching and learning English, Tamil and Sinhala. By 2016, the hope is that Sri Lankans will speak all three languages. However, the GoSL is investing in these projects in predominately Tamil-speaking areas, rather than in areas where all three languages are typically spoken. The Canadian High Commission, as well as national NGOs, informed us that CIDA is investing \$5 million in a language project which aims to assist GoSL with making government services more accessible to all Sri Lankans, by providing language training to both Sinhala and Tamil government officials. This project mirrors Canada's own language policies and hopes to make Sri Lankan government services readily available and accessible to all Sri Lankans. At the time of our visit, however, we were told that CIDA's on the ground partners would be selected by the GoSL.

Considering Canada's experience in language integration, the Canadian Government should make an effort to fund or collaborate with grassroots organizations' efforts in linguistically mixed areas to implement progressive language policies and programs to ensure that language training benefits areas that need it the most.

Theme #6: Diaspora

As Canadians of Sri Lankan descent, comprised of various ethno-linguistic communities, involved in the affairs of Sri Lanka, we gained insight into the ways various communities in Sri Lanka perceive our role, or the role of (as they refer to us) "the Diaspora". We discovered that communities held varying views of the Diaspora.



We repeatedly heard from local people that the Sri Lankan Government and Sinhala majority harbour great mistrust regarding the intentions of the (largely Tamil) Diaspora. The Diaspora is seen as extremist, which, according to various locals, provides the GofSL with a justification for the ongoing militarization of the North. This viewpoint is propagated by the local media who perceive the Diaspora as a single unified Tamil entity that is trying to divide the country. Members of the Diaspora, who, alongside international human rights organizations, insist on holding the GoSL accountable for alleged war crimes are seen as trying to oust the ruling party and trying to advance a separatist agenda.

These fears of the Diaspora colluding with the international community on issues of accountability are in part reinforced by the urging of the U.N. Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka that allegations of war crimes in the last stages of the war be addressed.⁷ Further, amongst the majority of Sinhalese citizens in Sri Lanka, the possibility of senior GofSL or military officials ever being impeached or extradited is quite unpopular. It is widely agreed that whatever atrocities that happened during the war were necessary to get rid of the LTTE. They view the Diaspora's insistence on accountability as coming at the expense at continued peace on the island.

One incident described to us perhaps paints a helpful example of the degree of mistrust of the Diaspora on the part of the Sri Lankan government, in particular. Two members of our team traveled to Sri Lanka in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to partake in a conference centred on [REDACTED]. Representatives from Norway, Australia and UK were also present. As was described to us over dinner with a prominent journalist in Sri Lanka, after the conclusion of the conference, men in police uniform raided the hotel where [REDACTED] were staying – a few hours after our two members had checked out. These [REDACTED] were strip searched and questioned. No prior notification was provided to either the British High Commission or to the young people, who had planned to spend a few more days in Sri Lanka to conduct research [REDACTED] on the possible delivery of a “peace dialogue” for Diaspora members back in the UK.

This incident had taken place [REDACTED] Channel 4's documentary “Sri Lanka's Killing Fields”, which increased tension between the GoSL and diasporic communities around the globe. The Sri Lankan authorities supposedly believed that these youth [REDACTED] were actually doing field research on human rights abuses in Sri Lanka for a future sequel to the Channel 4 documentary.

⁷ United Nations, *Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka* (New York, NY: 2011), 120.



Yet even while the GoSL and many prominent voices in the Sinhala community retain this suspicion of the Diaspora, many members of the minority communities in Sri Lanka were appreciative of the Diaspora's vigilant monitoring of perceived military excesses in the last stages of the war. One prominent activist noted that the situation at the end of the war would have been worse were it not for the vigilance of the Diaspora and the presence of representatives of the international community on the island. Nevertheless, many civil society leaders urged the Diaspora to be more tactful in its advocacy work. One prominent Tamil-speaking woman working in Colombo noted that the Diaspora's actions make it difficult to work with fellow Sinhala-speaking co-workers and dangerous generally for Tamils living in Colombo. For instance, those who wave the LTTE flag in Canada, or who fail to acknowledge the violent excesses and alleged commission by the LTTE of their own war crimes during the war, perpetuate stereotypes that all Tamils seek violent resolution and separatism. This, according to many, provides the GoSL's justification for the continued militarization of the North.

The current direction of advocacy amongst the Diaspora does not appeal to dominant voices in the GoSL or the Sinhala majority. There are segments of the GoSL and Sinhala majority that are progressive and have the potential to be driving forces in the efforts to ensure that people are held accountable for their actions. The Diaspora needs to be more innovative in the ways they advocate for justice. It is essential that members of the Diaspora recognize these progressives need to be lobbied as well. Therefore, the Diaspora needs to reach out and build trust with the progressive citizens that have all Sri Lankan communities' best interest in mind.

As a result of thirty years of war, the island is divided under a complex social phenomenon that inverts prejudice and fear about the "other" from North to South. Diaspora advocacy against corruption in general, as it affects all ethnic groups, could be a catalyst for a message that resonates with all stakeholders. It was clear from our various meetings there are progressive members of the GoSL and Sinhala citizens who recognize corruption as an urgent issue on the Island. Finally, the overwhelming consensus from all that we visited was that members of the Sri Lankan community outside the country should visit the island prior to engaging in advocacy. We received an open invitation from a variety of groups that we met to engage with civil society and see the complexity first-hand, and to hear directly from the local population. The nuances in Sri Lanka are not readily appreciated in a two week trip, but it is evident that the situation is neither black nor white; instead, it is complicated and multifaceted. A multi-pronged approach to development and engagement can help break down these complexities into more manageable tasks for the Diaspora and Canadians at large, in order to actively participate in the rebuilding of Sri Lanka.



Personal Impressions:

The experience of participating in the Tour was extremely emotional and enlightening for everyone who participated. The following are some of our personal impressions of our visit to Sri Lanka.

█ *The opportunity to be part of the Mosaic Institute's Sri Lanka Tour 2012 was a particularly unique and personal journey. I was born in Colombo and fled Sri Lanka at the midst of its civil war in the 1990s to settle in Toronto. I was six years old at the time. As a Tamil, minority and a member of the expatriate community, it was not always an easy or safe task to return back to Sri Lanka during its peak periods of political turmoil. The last time I had visited Sri Lanka was in 2002 during the ceasefire period when the country was relatively stable but I was unable to visit the northern part of the region- my ancestral homeland. After a ten year lull, I returned to the island this past summer as a member of the Mosaic Institute's delegation to Sri Lanka.*

The trip provided me with a rare opportunity to meet with Senior Canadian government officials, Sri Lankan Parliamentarians from some of the major political parties, a number of NGOs working on capacity building initiatives amongst widows in the northern and eastern province, policy institutes advocating for better governance and accountability in the country, inter-faith leaders engaging in dialogue across ethnic and religious lines, and men, women, children, and the elderly deeply affected both physically and psychologically over the course of two decades of conflict. They shared with us their experiences of survival, loss, trauma, uncertainty, fear and hope for a better future for their children.

The most pivotal component of the trip was meeting and engaging with women and children internally displaced (IDPs) for over three years. Last year we had organized a fundraising campaign (BuildChange) to assist IDPs by providing them with access to clean water. We had collaborated with the UN Habitat agency and the Rotary Club of Colombo South to build residential water wells for families returning home from internment camps. During our trip we visited several of the well sites and other areas of the country such as █ which comprise the northern region of Sri Lanka and the Delft area. All of this would not have been feasible without the generous donation of the Eagle Down Foundation and Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs to the Mosaic Institute's Sri Lanka 2012 Tour. I'm grateful to the foundation for its commitment to engage and inspire youth, facilitate constructive dialogues and promote peacebuilding initiatives around the world.

█ *The Sri Lanka 2012 trip was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. I wanted to see and hear what life post-war was like in the North. Beyond that, I needed to take away some tangible goals to help the people living there. The contrasts between downtown Colombo and downtown Jaffna were stark. Then the rural villages of █ were incomparable to either, both in poverty and in the resilience of the inhabitants.*



The needs on the ground are too numerous to count and I left Sri Lanka realizing how much the Canadian diaspora needs to continue to engage with the homes they left behind: politically, personally, and as a community.

The ability to travel with a group allowed for frequent discussions and debates about what we saw. This allowed me to be critical observer of what I saw, and to be cognizant of my own biases and preconceived notions.

I came back to Canada with some concrete goals that tie into my skill set as a professional and I look forward to pursuing those, as well as discussing larger systemic issues. I believe that a multi-pronged approach to diaspora engagement needs to be fostered in Canada and that the message to the diaspora from the North was to return to Sri Lanka and help build the local capacity.

██████ *Travel puts your life in perspective. Especially when you find yourself on a small Island off of the Jaffna peninsula, amidst barren land, skinny cows, and destructed homes in a small women's center with war affected peoples, you begin to count your blessings.*

Wherever we went in the North, whenever locals were present to greet us, many stood one by one to tell their stories in Tamil. They told us of their need for basic essentials. They told us of how they'd lost everything to the War. But, what was clear is that they hadn't lost hope. They were determined to better themselves regardless of the hardships they faced.

What I will take away, are the quick smiles that remain, the trusting eyes that looked straight into mine and the pleas for assistance. I hold them deep in my heart to be shared with those who can make and be the difference these people seek.

██████ *Words cannot describe how excited I was to visit Sri Lanka. In a span of two weeks, I was able to explore more of the island than my parents, who were both born and raised in Sri Lanka, ever did. I also learned more about the post-war development than I ever could in text books. Many war-affected communities in the North are still trying to find ways to create and rebuild stable lives after losing everything at the end of the war. People were very eager to speak to us about their lack of access to water, not only for drinking purposes but also for irrigation. Along with accessing basic resources, people wanted livelihoods, ways to sustain themselves.*

Similarly, every community emphasized the importance of providing education for their children. It was perceived as the only concrete way to break the cycle of poverty and to ensure that their children do not live in the same conditions as themselves. Many families struggle to send their children to "tuition classes", which are after school tutorial classes that are almost mandatory to succeed in the Sri Lankan school system.

My overall impression is that despite the invariable post-war challenges that various communities in Sri Lanka face, people are demonstrating tremendous strength and resiliency by focusing on ways to create normalcy and stable lives. This focus provides Canadians, especially of Sri Lankan descent, a great opportunity to give



back in concrete ways. Aside from simply contributing financially, Canadians can help meaningfully by building capacity and transferring knowledge.

██████████ I have always believed that the Sri Lankan Diaspora has a key role to play in the recovery of Sri Lanka after the civil war; a belief that has only strengthened after visiting the areas most severely affected during the conflict. In particular, while many people in the North and North East are glad the war is over and seek to rebuild their lives, they continue to face tremendous challenges resulting from amongst other things, the lack of trust from various organs of the Sri Lankan government and the (failure of the) nascent private sector to generate sustainable sources of income for the local community.

Moreover, women-headed households struggle to meet their daily necessities, particularly in rural communities. In one rural community we visited for instance, I counted at least 5 military guardposts and garrison units on an unlit road approximately 2 kilometres long that was used by women to collect water and other essentials. While unlit roads are certainly common in the country, the presence of military personnel with weapons clearly heightens the risk that women undergo. In another setting, women discussed the difficulties they have in advocating for their own interests to the provincial councils and the lack of enforcement of local laws and legislation.

These examples are only cited to demonstrate the importance that the Diaspora has in constructively engaging with the government of Sri Lanka to ensure the daily needs of its people are met, regardless of where they live.

██████████ I spent my entire childhood in Sri Lanka, but I had never experienced life in the country in the way I did during this trip. It was nothing short of transformative. The stark contradiction in life across the various social strata was especially eye-opening.

Moving from the central city of Colombo off to the northern outposts, the topographical scenery correspondingly changes, like you're suddenly seeing the world around you with a color saturated pair of lenses. There was enough in the environment to exhaust our senses, yet the human stories of loss and triumph could not be more moving. We were sometimes surrounded by shelled out homes dotting the inland roads, trunks of burnt trees and families living in shacks made of Palmyra trees. We heard stories of broken men, lost girls and devastated homes. Yet, there were also new enterprises, thriving education institutions and we saw, on numerous occasions, groups of girls in diligently ironed white uniforms heading to school.

It is not enough for those of us who see the contradictions in life in Sri Lanka find moral solace in simply acknowledging it as true. Working for a better future requires that we not only take ownership of our privileges and acknowledge them, but also work to extend them to those who have been less fortunate. While it is easy to feel helpless by the daunting tasks ahead, the resiliency that I saw in the people who were deeply affected by the war gives me hope that the human spirit will triumph.



Next Steps:

Now that we have returned from the Tour, we hope to use the insights we learned to continue to promoting greater understanding between the various communities and emphasize the importance of democratic values in Sri Lanka. It is important for us to share that despite the many post-war challenges that various communities in Sri Lanka face, the people we met demonstrated tremendous strength and resiliency by focusing on ways to create normalcy and stability in their lives. By creating strategic, meaningful partnerships with groups working on the ground, Canadians, especially those of Sri Lankan descent, can contribute concretely to the betterment of people's lives in Sri Lanka. We are eager to share our experiences with not only our own communities in Canada, but also with our fellow Canadians and the Government of Canada. Our deepest gratitude and thanks goes out to the Mosaic Institute for organizing the trip, and to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Eagle Down Foundation for their generous financial support.

Respectfully submitted,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Toronto, Ontario
September 2012

NOTE: This report has been prepared at the request of and in collaboration with **The Mosaic Institute**, per John Monahan, Executive Director. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone. Any errors or omissions in this report are unintentional.

APPENDIX A: A MAP OF SRI LANKA

Map of Sri Lanka

Scale 1 : 1,650,000

LEGEND

- Highways
- Main Roads
- Towns
- Towns which detail maps are included

Indian Ocean

